

INSTITUTE OF



COACHING

at McLean Hospital, a Harvard Medical School Affiliate

Positive Psychology: Science at the Heart of Coaching



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Agenda for Today



- **Introduction to Positive Psychology**
- **Coaching as Applied Positive Psychology**
- **2 Steps to put Positive Psychology into action**
 1. **Reverse the Focus**

from negative to positive and back
 2. **Develop Positivity**

what generates positivity and positive health, coaching strategies for positivity

Positive Psychology vs Traditional Psychology



- **Positive psychology is the study of what makes us flourish and what makes life worth living**
- **Traditional psychology explored pathology and treatment, but not optimal performance and ways to enhance the lives of ordinary and extraordinary people.**
- **Are we pulled by the future or driven by the past?**

Positive Psychology vs Traditional Psychology



Positive Psychology is not:

- **The belief that everyone is a paragon of mental health**
- **The idea that happiness is the be all and end all**
- **A replacement for current psychotherapy theory and practice**

Positive Psychology: Evidence-based Exploration



Three Pillars

- Positive Subjective States and Experiences
- Positive Traits
- Positive Institutions

New areas (2009)

- Positive Development
- Positive Relationships
- Positive Health
- Positive Neuropsychology

Another definition of positive psychology



- **Examination of the conditions and processes that contribute to flourishing and optimal performance - *Gable & Haidt, 2005***
- **Think of this definition in light of coaching (*or therapy*)**
- **The key = how can we create conditions and processes to contribute to our client's flourishing and optimal performance?**

Two ways to create conditions for flourishing



- **Reverse the Focus**

- Evidence of benefits of positive focus

- Why negative is “natural”

- The ideal ratio of positive to negative

- **Develop Positivity**

- What are sources of positivity

- What makes you thrive

- Positivity leads to positive health and vice versa

- How coaching increases positivity

Reverse the Focus



**What is the impact of what you pay attention to?
What does it buy you?**



What does focus on negative buy you?



- **If life & death situation – survival!**
 - It helps you at certain narrow focused tasks
 - Great for lawyers and accountants
- **Unfortunately – narrow thinking can lead to more stress, depression, can lower performance, and reduce connectedness with others**

What does focus on positive buy you?



- **Momentary states of joy? Feeling good?**
- **Research shows it is much more**
 - it is a lasting resource – a reservoir that impacts well-being and performance, even longevity.
- **The Nuns & Famous Dead Psychologists**
- **Benefits of Frequent Positive affect:**
Lyubomirsky, King & Diener (2005)
 - meta-analysis - 250 studies, 275,000 subjects, cross-sectional, longitudinal and experimental studies

**Positivity buys you broader thinking
and builds resources for thriving**



BROADEN THINKING

Open-minded

Flexible

Creative

Adaptable

Peripheral vision

Big picture

BUILDS RESOURCES

Mental

Psychological

Social

Physical

Then why are we negative?



- **Neurotic? Culture? Possibly**
 - We have Good Brains!
- **The Zeigarnik Effect and Baumeister research:**
 - Unresolved (the negative) = VELCRO, it sticks
 - Resolved (the positive) = TEFLON it slides away
- **Example of Waking Beethoven using the 5th...**

We can learn to reverse the focus: Learn to switch to a positive headset



- **Negative headsets may be entrenched from natural evolution, habit, or life experience**
- **How can we switch headsets and reverse the focus, to turn the *Teflon* of positive experience into *Velcro*?**
- **To increase happiness, you don't just increase how much you have – you harvest what is good in your life more effectively.**
- **First – you have to notice, remember, articulate and savor what is already there. Then you build more positivity.**

Positive Interventions to Reverse the Focus



- **Positive Introduction**

Tell a story of you at your best during the previous week. Have your story have a beginning, middle and end, and go out with a bang. *(Seligman, 2002)*

- **3 Good Things**

At the end of the day think of 3 good things that you are grateful for AND ask *what did you do to make that good thing happen?* *(Seligman 2005)*

Variation: Scan the day differently – just remember when you were at your best, slide over the rest (don't pretend that nothing was bad.)

Positive Interventions to Reverse the Focus



- **Find & Use your Strengths:**

Take the VIA signature strengths survey, pick one strength and use it in a new way everyday for a week. *(Peterson, 2006)*

 - *This helps us identify, articulate and use what is right with ourselves and see others in a new way.*
- **Best Future Self:**

Imagine its 5 years from now -- you have achieved all your goals. What does your life look like? What did you do to make this happen? *(Lyubormirsky, 2007)*

 - *Builds optimism and capacity to create a life vision.*

The impact of being the beneficiary of another's positivity



- **Positive Pygmalion effect**

Remember the Rosenthal Studies - how does *your focus* impact others? How can you use this in your: coaching, therapy, or management?

- **Affect priming studies**

How the subject was engaged (you'll do well at this!) influenced performance by the equivalent of one grade.

What would one grade difference in your life or work look like?

Can we be too positive?



Fredrickson and Losada (2005)

- 60 business strategy teams to explore what is the ideal ration of positivity and negativity.
- Ideal ratio 3:1 = highest profitability, customer satisfaction, and performance reviews
- High ratios of positivity above 11:1 just as rigid and poor functioning as lowest ratios
- Studies replicated with other populations show:
 - People with optimal positivity ratios are more successful in multiple life domains: relationships, finances, health

Happiness Tipping Point



- The happiness tipping point: in business, and in everyday life
- Above tipping point 3:1 ratio people have the resources to change and grow, and bounce back from adversity – they flourish and are on an upward spiral
- Below tipping point 3:1 ratio people languish and are on a downward spiral

Check your ratio at www.positivityratio.com

Why do we need coaching?



- **80% of people have a positivity ratio below 3:1**
Hence most don't have the optimal resources and resilience needed for successful change and growth, and to thrive.
- **Translating positive psychology research into practice:**
 - Learn to focus on what's going right
 - Learn to focus on strengths
 - Learn to live ideal ratio 3:1 of positive and negative emotions
 - Learn to find the gold in challenges



**Don't forget your
own strengths, and
what you do right!**



Do you want to live a full life?



- **As Thoreau reflects upon his life:**

I want to see what I can learn and not when I came to die discover I had not lived

- **That is:**

I want to go beyond articulating and experiencing what is negative and not overlook what is positive and makes life worth living

Coaching helps clients harness the half of life we tend to overlook

Step 2: Develop Positivity **Coaching is Applied Positive Psychology**



Coaching generates positivity:

- 1. Helps clients identify what makes them flourish**
- 2. Develops client capacity and resources for successful change**
- 3. Facilitates processes designed for successful change**

Positivity: A Necessity not a Luxury



- **Dictionary:**
State of mind or feeling characterized by contentment, satisfaction, pleasure, or joy; the good life
- **Albert Schweitzer:**
Happiness is nothing more than good health and a bad memory

Positivity is the Mechanism of Action



Happiness Unpacked:

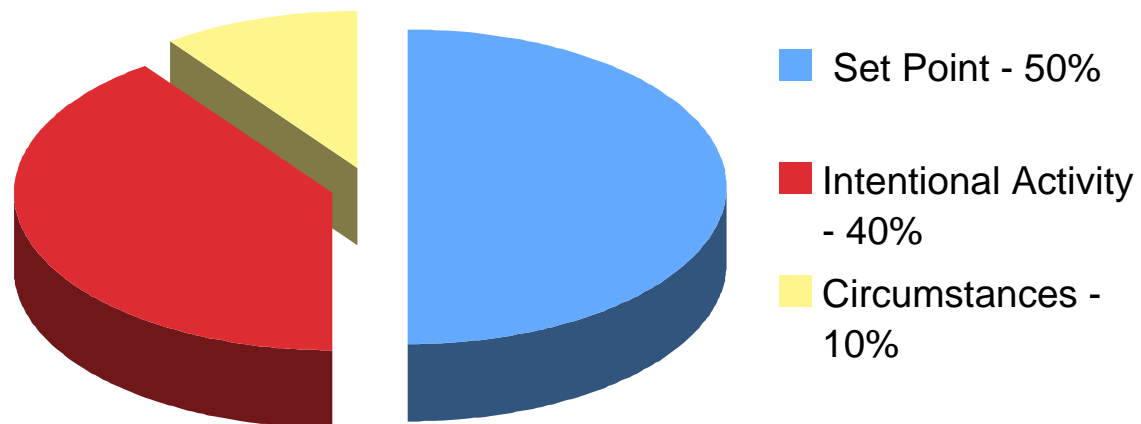
Positive Emotions Increase Life Satisfaction
by Building Resilience - *Fredrickson, 2009*

- *Sparkle of good feelings awakens motivation to change*
- *Positivity starts a psychological chain reaction that allows you to step up to the next level of existence*

Happiness – Are We in Charge?



Happiness = Set Point + Life Circumstances + Intentional Activity



Making Positivity Personal



What makes you and your clients or patients thrive?

Positive Psychologists: What generates positivity?



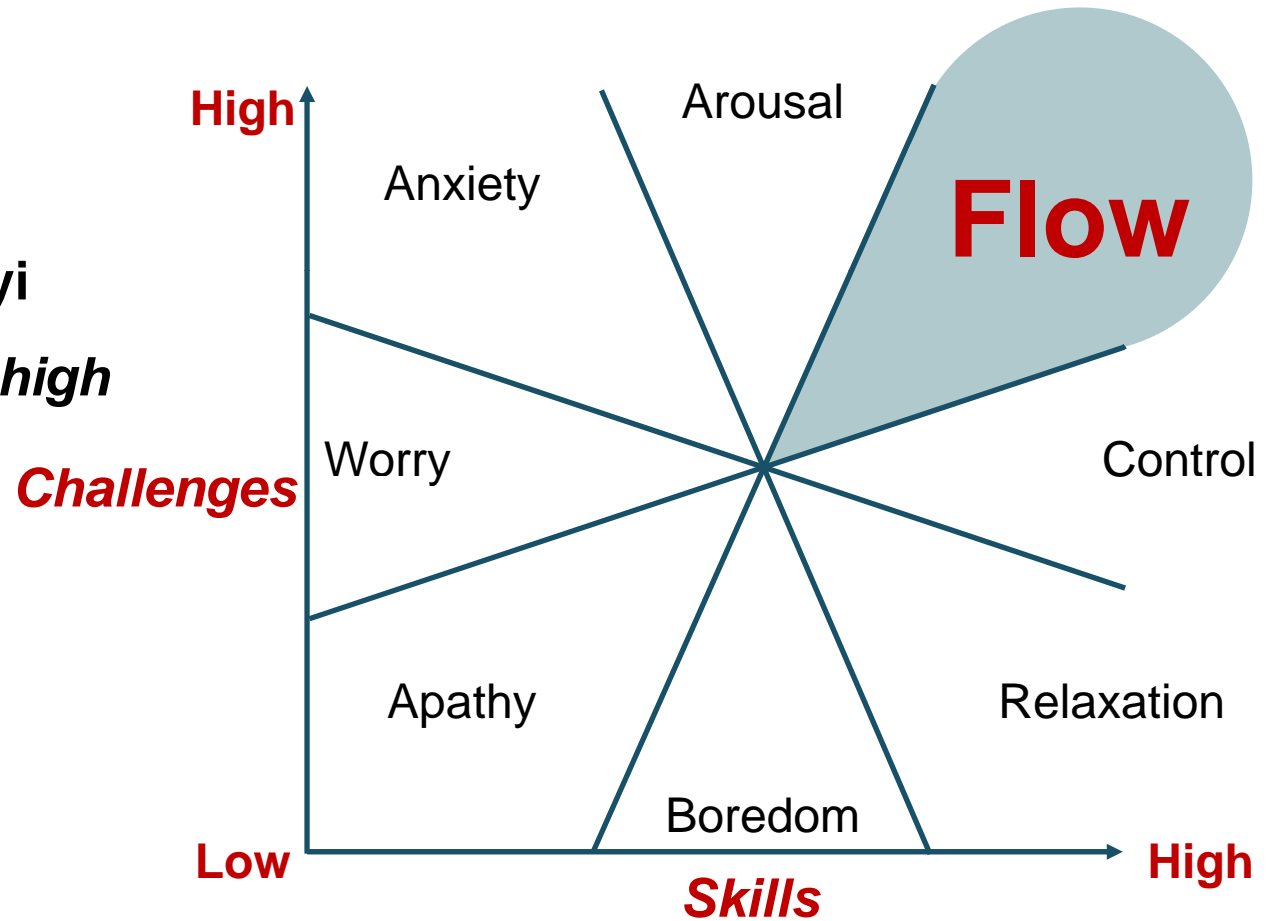
Ed Diener: *Psychological Wealth* *(process not destination)*

1. Life satisfaction and happiness
2. Meaning and spirituality
3. Positive attitudes and emotions
4. Loving social relationships
5. Engaging activities and work
6. Values and life goals to achieve them
7. Physical and mental health
8. Material sufficiency to meet needs

Flow: Psychology of Optimal Experience



Mihaly
Csikszentmihalyi
Cheek-sent-me-high



Positive Psychologists: What generates positivity?



- **Martin Seligman:** *Authentic Happiness* – pleasant life, engaged life, meaningful life
- **Chris Peterson:** *Character Strengths & Virtues, A Handbook and Classification*

Positive Health



- **Beyond absence of disease**
Definable and measurable
- **Hypothesis**
Positive health predicts aging well, decreased healthcare costs, improves prognosis when ill
- **Lesson from Positive Psychology**
Mental health (positive emotions, meaning, engagement, relationships, achievement) predicts lack of depression and improved physical health

Ed Diener: Happiness & Health **Happy people are healthier**



- **Chronic stress (negativity) damages health**
- **Long term positive emotions prevents getting ill and reduces morbidity - longevity impact comparable to not smoking – several years**
- **High positivity people have more effective immune systems**
- **Positive emotions reduce physical symptoms**
- **Happy people are more likely to engage in healthy behaviors**

Positivity and Health: Two Way Street



It works both ways creating an upward spiral:

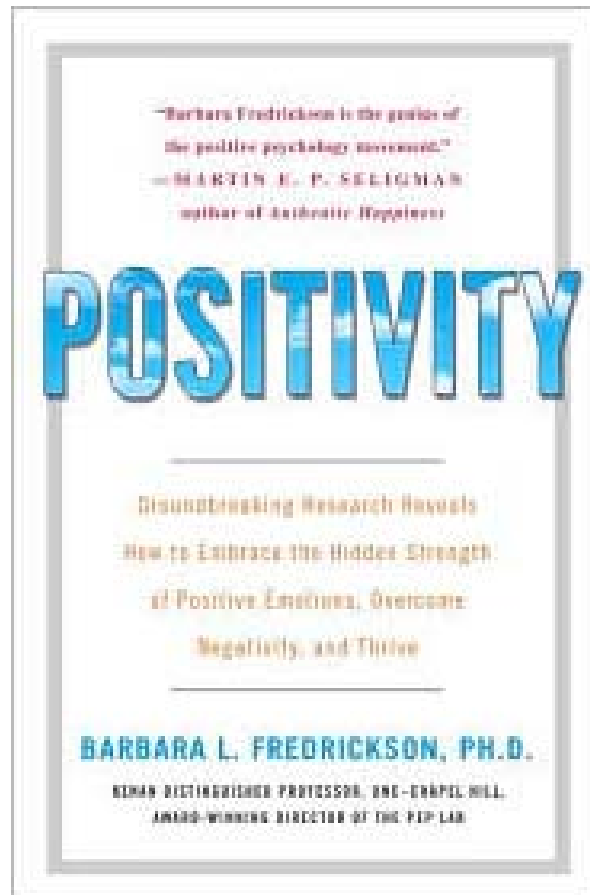
- *Positive health generates positivity*
- *Positivity generates positive health*

Healthcare Coaching Client



- **Has obesity**
- **Has pre-diabetes**
- **Positivity ratio 2:1**
- **Self-efficacy score for exercising and weight loss/management = 3 out of 10**

Top 10 Positive Emotions



Joy
Gratitude
Serenity
Interest
Hope
Pride
Amusement
Inspiration
Awe
Love

Coaching Strategies to Generate Positivity



- ***Inspiration:*** What makes me thrive?
Connect health and well-being to higher purpose and life meaning
- ***Hope:*** Create a vision of the future, small steps forward that feel doable, and a mindset of a scientist – let's experiment
- ***Pride:*** Uncover strengths and talents and realize goals and success
- ***Interest:*** Set goals that are engaging, a stretch, don't produce anxiety, and generate positivity

Coaching Strategies to Generate Positivity



- **Love:** Foster trust, rapport, and connection with coach, and harness social support
- **Awe:** Identify inspiring role models and heroes
- **Amusement:** Laugh at self and situations
- **Joy:** Improve awareness and enjoyment of thriving
- **Gratitude:** Appreciate life's gifts including challenges
- **Serenity:** Stop and savor moments of contentment

Coaching Strategies to Reduce Negativity



- **Improve mindfulness and move away from automatic pilot**
- **Build confidence with small successes**
- **Reverse the focus – dig for the gold in the negative**
- **Build more positivity - it displaces negativity**

Positive Development: Processes of Change



- **Hope psychology/therapy**
I am confident, have goals, and pathways to get there
- **Social cognitive theory – self-efficacy**
If I think I can, I can
- **Self-determination theory**
My motivation is intrinsic
- **Constructive development**
Outgrow old ways of thinking, feeling, behaving
- **Transtheoretical model**
What it takes to change for good
- **Cognitive-behavioral theories**
Change thinking and (feelings) and actions will follow



***One's own self is well hidden from one's own self:
Of all mines of treasure, one's own is the last to be
dug up.***

- Friedrich Nietzsche

Institute of Coaching



For more information on positive psychology and coaching please visit:

www.InstituteofCoaching.org

We are offering grants to study coaching and applied positive psychology - please contact

Carol@instituteofcoaching.org

Positive Psychology Books



- ***Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi**
- ***Happiness: Unlocking the Mysteries of Psychological Wealth*, Ed Diener & Robert Biswas-Diener**
- ***Positivity*, Barbara Fredrickson**
- ***Authentic Happiness*, Martin Seligman**
- ***Character Strengths & Virtues, A Handbook and Classification*, Chris Peterson, Martin Seligman**

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