

From Coach to Positive Psychology Coach

Peter Berridge

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Advisor: Daniel S. Bowling, III

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pete@shorebirdcoaching.com

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### Abstract

The success of positive psychology interventions and visual learning methods combined with the growing field of executive coaching provides rich opportunity to develop potentially transformative positive coaching methods. My hypothesis is that it is possible to become a deeper coach helping clients to achieve improved outcomes by understanding effective coaching methods and identifying a few specific vehicles of constructive engagement (positive interventions), developing depth and expertise as a coach in these areas, and applying these with supporting visuals to coaching engagements. This paper includes a literature review of pertinent positive psychology, coaching and visual learning research. Also, I gather a broad perspective of positive psychology constructs and successful coaching interventions by interviewing current positive psychology coaches, researchers, and visual practitioners. Findings: while each interviewee uses the breadth of positive psychology research and concepts, each seems to have a particular focus area that reflects that individual's particular personality or interests. Therefore, I chose to focus on three particular areas of interest to me – cognitive-behavioral coaching to influence one's internal dialogue and explanatory style, positive emotions, and visual learning. I foresee using these approaches frequently in my coaching engagements.

## Acknowledgment

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- Robert Biswas-Diener – is an author and coach who applies positive psychology research to people’s lives and work. Robert is author of *Practicing Positive Psychology Coaching: Assessment, Activities, and Strategies for Success* (Wiley, 2010) and co-author of the book *Positive Psychology Coaching: Putting the science of Happiness to Work for your Clients* (Wiley, 2007).
- Timothy Sharp - Tim is founder and Chief Happiness Officer of the Happiness Institute, which promotes the principles of positive psychology in individuals, families, and organizations. Professor Sharp is a bestselling author, public speaker and has taught at all the major universities in New South Wales, Australia.
- Carolyn Youssef – Carolyn is Associate Professor, College of Business, Bellevue University, Nebraska and researcher in the area of Psychological Capital. Carolyn has authored multiple books and articles with Fred Luthans, who first made the call for positive organizational behavior in 2001.
- Louis Alloro – 2008 MAPP graduate. Louis founded the Social-Emotional Leadership (SOMO) framework for how communities flourish. SOMO Leadership is an intentional effort at building social and emotional capacity in people and has reached over 1,000 Clevelanders in its labs.
- Eleanor Chin – 2008 MAPP graduate. Eleanor is Principal of Clarity Partners and is an experienced coach, trained at The Coaches Training Institute. She also delivers Penn Resiliency Training through the University of Pennsylvania.

- Caroline Miller – 2006 MAPP graduate. Caroline Adams Miller is an internationally known coach, author, and speaker on the topic of goal accomplishment and its connection with happiness. Her latest book is *Creating Your Best Life* (Sterling, 2009).
- Gretchen Pisano – 2010 MAPP graduate. Gretchen is the owner of Sounding Board Ink, LLC, a coaching and consulting practice founded on using the best verbal and visual techniques available to drive positive change in individuals and organizations. She has over 15 years of graphic facilitation experience and is a Master Coach trainee instructor at Martha Beck, Inc.

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## Introduction

*“Coaching is a practice in search of the backbone... scientific, evidence-based backbone and a theoretical backbone. I believe the discipline of positive psychology provides both those backbones”* (Seligman, 2007, p. 266). Currently, there is a limited but growing body of evidence of the efficacy of coaching using positive psychology methods. Further, coaching is a young field that needs continued rigor for future success and to avoid becoming a fad or pseudoscience (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007). As a graduate of the Hudson Institute of Santa Barbara, I have extensive training as a professional coach with 20 years of human resources and coaching experience. My purpose is to continue to develop my coaching presence and coaching methods in order to become a deeper, more effective coach for the benefit of my clients.

In addition, a goal of this project is to communicate such positive psychology coaching methods and concepts in an easily understood manner. In my practice, I use visual tools for coaching and facilitation. Visual learning offers the advantages of engagement, big picture thinking, and improved memory (Sibbett, 2006). Additionally, graphics help build shared meaning, help people recognize themes and trends, support linear and non-linear processing, communicate complexity and context, and create a shared visual record (Sibbett, 2006). Simple drawings and diagrams can communicate otherwise complex concepts more easily.

In this paper I provide a brief overview of coaching and positive psychology, cover more recent developments in the combined field of positive psychology coaching, offer insights from current positive psychology coaches and researchers, go into some depth in the area of cognitive-behavioral approaches to coaching, the impact of positive emotions on behavior change, and the

impact of visual learning. Next, I share how I will use some of these insights in my own coaching practice as well as my own development and identity as a positive psychology coach.

People who are adequately trained in the techniques of coaching, in the theories of positive psychology, in valid measurement of the positive states and traits, in the interventions that work, and who know when to refer a client to someone who is better trained will be, in my lights, bona fide coaches of positive psychology. (Seligman, 2007, p. 267)

### **Part I: Coaching**

Understanding the definition, competencies, processes, approaches, and effectiveness of coaching provides a starting point. There are many definitions of coaching. Both Hudson (1999) and Whitmore (1992) emphasize the coach's role as facilitating client learning through self-discovery while holding a future orientation. Silsbee (2010) (in borrowing from James Flaherty (2010)) defines coaching as, "a relationship in which one person is primarily dedicated to serving the long-term development of effectiveness and self-generation in the other" (p. 4). In essence, coaching is individualized personal and professional development. Moreover, clients seek coaching because they want to change. [Note: I appreciate Bridges (2004) distinction that *change* is situational (external) and *transition* is psychological – the inner reorientation and self-redefinition required to incorporate change into one's life. However, for the purpose of this capstone I use the terms change and transition interchangeably.] Silsbee (2010) describes change in this way:

All it requires is paying attention. More specifically, it requires bringing rigorous attention to the habits of the mind, beliefs, assumptions, and embodied behaviors that



shape who we are in the world, suspending them, and committing ourselves to new possibilities that we were previously unable to see or act on. (p. 2)

This description identifies the importance and interplay of conscious attention, cognitions, emotions, behaviors, and our physical reactions in order to see new possibilities and create change. Neenan (2008) points out that often people can struggle to make such change on their own due to self-limiting thoughts and beliefs, counterproductive behaviors, and troublesome emotions. Therefore, working with a professional coach offers the opportunity to spend concerted effort on one's own development with professional guidance or partnership.

Coaches offer competencies and skills as outlined by the International Coaching Federation. These are customized by specific coaching programs such as the Hudson Institute of Santa Barbara (2006) which teaches competencies including: ethical guidelines, establishing the coaching agreement, establishing trust, creating a coaching presence, leading from behind, managing the shadow side, active listening, asking powerful questions, direct communications, managing resistance, creating awareness, designing actions, planning and goal setting, and managing progress and accountability.

Further, there are numerous coaching process models as well as change models. For example, Egan (2002) offers the skilled helper model: clarify key issues (stories, identify blind spots, and leverage the right issue), identify desired outcomes (possibilities, realistic goals and commitment), develop strategies (possible actions, chose best-fit, craft plan), and implement. D. Peterson (2006) describes "The Development Pipeline" model of behavior change, which I routinely use with clients, as a progression through *insight, motivation, capabilities, real-world practice, and accountability*. This model highlights that change is limited by the narrowest component of the pipeline. For example, a client may have great insight into her or his current

behavior but lack deep motivation to change. While there are commonalities to coaching processes and helpful models to understand change, there are numerous approaches to assisting the client at the point of awareness, which we will examine shortly. First, however, we must ask a threshold question: is coaching even effective?

Grant, Curtayne, and Burton (2009) tested the question, “can executive coaching be effective?” Specifically, whether participation in a coaching program would be associated with increased goal attainment, increased resilience, and decreases in depression, anxiety, and stress, and increases in workplace wellbeing. The research method was a randomized controlled study of 41 health agency executives utilizing 360-degree feedback, a leadership workshop, and four individual coaching sessions. The coaching followed a cognitive-behavioral solution-focused approach. The conclusion of the study was that quantitatively, coaching resulted in higher goal attainment, lower depression, and higher workplace well-being, and qualitatively, coaching increased self-confidence and personal insight, built management skills, and helped participants with organizational change. Additionally, results show that even short-term coaching can be an effective. The study is important because it is the first published randomized controlled study with quantitative (in addition to qualitative) results on the efficacy of executive coaching.

Green, Oades, and Grant (2006) conducted studies on the affects of a 10-week cognitive-behavioral, solution-focused life coaching program to test their hypothesis that the coaching program would lead to greater goal-striving, well-being and hope. Also, that any gains attained would be maintained over time. The study utilized random assignment and a waitlist control group. They found their hypothesis strongly supported with significant increases in goal striving, positive affect, psychological well-being, and hope with results maintained over 30 weeks. Overall, the study provides evidence that a cognitive-behavioral, solution-focused coaching

approach is effective in the reported domains and that gains can be maintained over time in a non-clinical population. Further it provides a framework for future evidence-based studies.

In a broader review of the field, Grant, Cavanagh, Parker, and Passmore (2010) report that coaching literature has grown significantly in recent years with 425 papers published between 2000 and May, 2009. Only 11 of these were randomized controlled studies. Yet, the 11 randomized controlled studies do indicate that coaching leads to improved performance (Grant et al., 2010).

## **Part II: Positive Psychology**

In 1998, as incoming president of the American Psychological Association, Dr. Martin Seligman challenged the profession of psychology to broaden its focus beyond human problems and pathology to include the study of human strengths and well-being – basically, what’s going right – or, flourishing (Fowler, Seligman, & Koocher, 1999). Seligman’s (2010a) theory describes flourishing as greater well-being composed of positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement (PERMA).

It is important to understand that positive psychology is different than simple self-help techniques or even historical humanistic psychology in at least one key area. It differs in its emphasis on science. Positive psychology is dedicated to rigorous empirical study – to know what truly results in measurable outcomes and to refine those practices to create more compelling change. So, how do we achieve flourishing? In the field of positive psychology, *positive interventions* are methods for helping individuals move from languishing to flourishing. Pawelski (2003) describes positive psychology as a field dedicated to the study, development, and application of positive interventions that are aimed at increasing well-being through factors under voluntary control. Now, a little over a decade since Seligman’s challenge, researchers *have*

identified actions that lead to greater well-being. Research has grown and researchers such as Barbara Fredrickson and Ed Diener, whose work I discuss more fully below, are proving not only correlational relationships but finding causal evidence showing that increases in the components of PERMA lead to improved mental health, creativity, citizenship, relationships, health and longevity, and work performance.

### **A. Definition and Philosophy of Positive Interventions**

As a coach, understanding how to help clients achieve greater well-being through positive interventions is critical. I refer to positive interventions as, “*constructive engagement* for improving one’s level of happiness, well-being, and flourishing.” This avoids some common misunderstandings or criticisms of the field of positive psychology.

First the term *positive* is often criticized as implying that traditional psychology is *negative* or at the opposite end of a single spectrum. Keyes (2009) suggests that mental health and mental illness are on two different continuums. Mental health is more than the absence of mental illness and the mental health continuum ranges from languishing to flourishing. While there is a modest correlation between the two continuums, the data strongly supports the two-factor model (Keyes, 2009). This distinction is important because for policymakers and practitioners it is important to recognize that simply decreasing specific disease conditions will not directly increase rates of flourishing. To be a healthy nation, we cannot simply treat mental illness. We must increase the number of individuals and communities that are flourishing.

Second, the term *intervention* offers connotations such as the implication that an external agency is addressing a problem. Instead, I offer *engagement*, defined as “an active or operational state” and “to become involved” (New Oxford American Dictionary). Also, the synonyms “connect,” and “hold” fit well with my approach as coach and positive psychology practitioner.

Constructive engagement is less about defining terms and more about desired outcomes such as improving one's level of positive emotions, explanatory style (how we interpret things), level of achievement, sense of contentment, level of engagement, relationships, health, meaning, or overall well-being. In simple terms, it boils down to positive change; change which leads to greater flourishing and well-being. To achieve this change, constructive engagement methods are developed which utilize various theorized and researched constructs of positive psychology such as: conscious attention and will, habits, self-regulation, self-determination, self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, hope theory, goal-setting theory, mind-body connection, physical activity, resilience, character strengths, spirituality, appreciative inquiry, positive emotions, flow, and many others. Later, I will report which of these constructs the interviewed coaches use most frequently and ones that I incorporate into my coaching methods.

I believe that as coaches and practitioners it is essential to understand the philosophical and empirical elements of constructive engagement in order to help clients through change. By understanding the richness of the concepts, we can better understand which engagements may be most helpful in achieving clients' objectives. Also, understanding the state of positive psychology and coaching in combination is beneficial to the coach.

### **Part III: Positive Psychology & Coaching Constructs**

#### **A. Coaching and Positive Psychology**

There are challenges to positive psychology and coaching. First, as noted above, the number of empirically tested interventions is growing yet still small (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007). The fields are young and misunderstood or unfamiliar to many. To understand this more, Grant and Cavanagh (2007) evaluate the state of coaching as a platform for applied positive psychology in improving individual, organizational, and social change. They put forward a

conceptual model to understand the status of coaching and to answer the question, is coaching languishing or flourishing? Overall, Grant and Cavanagh (2007) believe that coaching is a young field that needs continued rigor for future success and to avoid becoming a fad or pseudoscience. They propose that by maintaining a tension between rigor and openness (producing creative growth) while being grounded in evidence, coaching is emerging as a protoscience moving toward normal science. They conclude that coaching is flourishing as more sophisticated coaching research is being conducted and they forewarn that an evidence-based approach is the foundation of future success. This article is important in that it evaluates the current state of coaching and lays out a method by which coaching can avoid becoming self-help, pop-psychology or pseudoscience. Similarly stated by Chris Peterson (as cited in Kauffman & Linley, 2007), “Coaching is one of the areas that I call a natural home for positive psychology. Coaching seems to be an area in need of theory and empirical grounding, and positive psychology can provide both” (p. 90). If coaching and positive psychology fit well together, it is worthwhile to gain insights from current researchers and practitioners in addition to the empirical studies to-date.

## **B. Interviews**

Even though the field is relatively young, there is a lot to be learned from past Master of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) graduates as well as positive psychology professionals in the field. The goal of this capstone is to build upon the positive psychology, coaching, and visual learning research, as well as practical experience of practitioners. To that end, I surveyed seven respected professionals in the field of positive psychology research and/or coaching, professional coaches who are past MAPP graduates, and practitioners who use visual learning tools. Each interview was one hour in length and the questions centered on methods for using positive

psychology and visuals most effectively in coaching. In essence, I asked, what are the positive psychology concepts and interventions that they find to be most effective for their clients, e.g., self-regulation, self-determination, self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, hope theory, goal-setting theory, resilience, character strengths, appreciative inquiry, positive emotions, etc. Also, reported later, how do they use visual learning tools in their practices to increase client understanding and how has positive psychology impacted their identity and depth as coaches? Responses are displayed as Q and A and additional quotes are used throughout this paper.

**Q: How do you use positive psychology in your coaching practice?**

**A: Carolyn Youssef**

As a researcher in the construct of Psychological Capital (PsyCap), I utilize PsyCap and Positivity in my teaching and training. PsyCap is comprised of efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience which combined create a higher order construct. There is added value beyond summing up the parts of PsyCap. The common theme in PsyCap is building agency in the individual.

**A: Caroline Miller**

My niche is change through goal setting and helping people who want to take risks to live fuller, more meaningful lives. I use Locke and Latham's goal setting, Bandura's self-efficacy (four ways to build self-efficacy), and mastery experiences. I help people move out of their comfort zones and, through "no pain, no gain" (recent research), see things that, at the time, were hard but at the end of the day they are most proud of ~ achievement. I also use hope theory in my work - building hopefulness and pathways thinking. I use signature strengths frequently and always look at where zest falls for the client. In children zest is abundant – often in the top 5 signature strengths but not frequently in adults. I'm fascinated in why zest is high in children but

low in adults and how you bring it back. I think we need more zest interventions such as building zest through hope theory and goal pursuit. Further I work with clients who decide to not live lives of mediocrity. Particularly, I'm interested in the drop in well-being of women in their 40's.

**A: Eleanor Chin**

There are two ways to use positive psychology in coaching. In one way, positive psychology is the foundation for the way in which I coach. The second, is to be transparent and to teach clients the concepts of positive psychology as you work together with your client. I try to get my clients to experience it rather than have me explain it. Positive psychology is the basis for a lot of the coaching I have done and now I know why the coaching concepts I've used work.

**A: Louis Alloro**

First, I use it in my own life – reframing, explanatory style, and choosing positive expectations. With my practice, I help create social emotional leaders in organizations and communities through the SOMO (social emotional) Leadership Labs – providing positive psychology tools and experiences to people to then go back to their community to become change agents – empowering them to inspire people to inspire more people.

**Q: What positive psychology constructs most inform your coaching practice?**

**A: Robert Biswas-Diener**

I believe in the tonic properties of positive affect. When you get people in a good mood (broaden and build) they relate better, persevere longer, and are more creative in their problem solving. I try to use my natural humor, keep the mood light, and even when challenging someone, keep a smile on my face. Strengths are probably the thing that has most informed my work and what I have written about most. Strengths are so critical to people's identity and goal pursuit, everyone has them, they are inner resources that you can tap for success, and this fits



well with the coaching endeavor itself. So, I'm always on the lookout for personal strengths – an intentional focus of mine – the ability to pick up on others' strengths and bring them to their attention. Also, it's important to understand that strengths are potentials that need to be developed and modified in certain situations, e.g., counterpoint or playing devil's advocate is fantastic in helping to avoid group-think. On the other hand the person can come across as contrarian and therefore needs to deploy that strength strategically to maintain good relationships. A coach can help the client to identify the right context to use particular strengths and understand how those strengths affect others in order to modulate their strengths and use them situationally.

The moment of awareness opens the door. When someone has an insight it provides a positive affect jolt that you can build on. At that point, I don't necessarily go to cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and help them to evaluate their underlying belief system as irrational or not, but instead, look at it more behaviorally – you are creative, what can you try differently next time to see if it will work better (trial and error).

**A: Carolyn Youssef**

In general, I use Psychological Capital, positivity, efficacy, hope, optimism, (both Seligman's explanatory style theory and positive expectancies), resiliency, and human capital.

**A: Timothy Sharp**

I use all of the ones you mention. My use of positive psychology is still very much influenced by my CBT background. I still use CBT but simply take the client further than from minus 10 to zero by creating optimism about the future and building upon the client's strengths. Primarily, I work with explanatory style, optimism, strengths, appreciation, gratitude, and building positive relationships and connectedness (social networks).

**A: Caroline Miller**

Zest, signature strengths, self-regulation, grit, goal theory, resilience, and risks not taken or missed opportunities are common areas.

**A: Eleanor Chin**

I use motivation, strengths, goal setting, hope, optimism, and positive emotions a lot.

**A: Gretchen Pisano**

Goal setting theory, psychological wealth, strengths and strengths-based leadership, wellbeing (PERMA), self-regulation, mindfulness, resilience, social connections/networks, realistic optimism, positive affect, savoring, and appreciative inquiry are common.

**A: Louis Alloro**

Often I work with clients on explanatory style; understanding what happens in our bodies when we perceive potential threats; mindset (Carol Dweck's work); Appreciative Inquiry; relationships and spirituality.

**Q: What are some of your favorite interventions or exercises with your clients?**

**A: Robert Biswas-Diener**

I use hope theory diagnostically. Snyder's hope theory is comprised of pathways and agency. So, I'll listen to see if the client is struggling with pathways or agency. For example if someone says, "I just can't do it." This indicates agency problem. If they say, "I've tried everything." It indicates pathways problem. You can then take a different approach for each - with pathways, brainstorming may help. If it is an agency problem, perhaps they need to be built up through acknowledgement or skill building. A second one I enjoy is metaphor. Metaphor provides a client with emotional distance from a problem and opens up more creative problem solving.

**A: Carolyn Youssef**

With PsyCap the key is to build hope (beyond willpower to include waypower). You do this by setting goals, building pathways, contingency plans, visualizing obstacles and how one will work around them. Working on explanatory style and how to respond, the resilience to bounce back when those things do happen, how you'll interpret them cognitively and what resources you'll mobilize to respond to adversity helps simultaneously build optimism, resiliency, and efficacy. If you are high on PsyCap you have more positive appraisals – when you see a situation you appraise it differently – you want to try, think you can succeed, try harder, try different ways, and feel better about it in the end. Another particular intervention is the 3 to 1 ratio – allowing yourself to have a negative appraisal but each time forcing yourself to come up with three positives to offset that negative.

**A: Timothy Sharp**

The interventions flow from the individual assessments. Certainly using strengths survey (VIA) and talking about them, keeping a gratitude journal or conducting a gratitude visit, Three Good Things, and looking at life meaning are common. I find ways to help develop optimistic thoughts, understand explanatory style, and recognize individual's strengths. Some new interests I have are applying positive psychology to health behaviors such as weight management and looking at the role of relationships and connectedness. Based on the work by Cristakis (social networks), I now ask about whom the client is interacting with and should they be developing more supportive, positive relationships because, “success and happiness can be made easier or harder depending on who we surround ourselves with.”

**A: Caroline Miller**

With clients we look at social contagion and web of influence and ways find to increase self-regulation. Also, I use resilience (ABCDE model), meditation, Best Possible Self, Lost Possible Self (from Laura King), the VIA and grit.

**A: Eleanor Chin**

Best Possible Future Self and Active Constructive Response.

**A: Gretchen Pisano**

Positive introductions, dovetailing the VIA results with a personal history map to get enduring leadership principles, i.e., how have my values consistently shown up over the course of my life? As well as a good understanding of why using our strengths contributes so much to our sense of wellbeing, using the PERMA equation as an “equation for a life well-lived,” social leadership (how ideas spread across network and how positivity plays a part in that), a future visioning exercise built on Locke’s Goal Setting Theory (Bold Future), and an approach to managing wellbeing through both time and energy management as opposed to the traditional priority setting exercises.

**A: Louis Alloro**

ABCDE and Active Constructive Response.

**Q: Of the specific concepts and tools for coaching, if you were to pick two to deepen your learning and expertise, which would you choose? What positive psychology research are you most excited about?**

**A: Robert Biswas-Diener**

Strengths and motivation.

**A: Eleanor Chin**

Emotional Intelligence and motivation.

**A: Timothy Sharp**

Strengths approach, interpretive style, optimism, and relationships.

**A: Caroline Miller**

Goal setting theory, broaden and build (positivity ratio, positive emotions, positive behavior). The research I follow is on Positive Organizational Scholarship, Appreciative Inquiry, Sonja Lyubomirsky's work on set point theory – willpower and waypower, neuroplasticity and meditation, Todd Kashdan's work on curiosity, flow, Barbara Fredrickson's positivity and genes, and Kim Cameron's work on positive energy in the workplace.

**Part IV: Constructs of Focus**

As I interviewed practitioners the following themes emerged: *breadth* and *authenticity*. First, practitioners use the breadth of positive psychology research to inform their approach with clients. Positive psychology constructs such as optimism, resilience, explanatory style, strengths, emotional intelligence, positive emotions, Appreciative Inquiry, Flow, Positive Psychological Capital (PsyCap), self-efficacy, growth mindset, goal theory, hope theory, self-regulation, mindfulness, and motivation/self-determination were interwoven in their responses. The breadth of positive psychology used by this group does not surprise me. However, my interviews led me to a second conclusion, different than my initial presumption.

My thought designing the capstone is that I would find one or two constructs that most coaches/practitioners use regularly – that would emerge as core to positive psychology coaching. Then, I would immerse myself in those particular constructs to develop greater depth to my positive psychology coaching approach. Instead, I found that practitioners use constructs that seem to resonate with them personally or reflect their individual personalities, e.g., Robert Biswas-Diener - strengths; Caroline Miller - goals/achievement; Eleanor Chin – motivation and

strengths, Carolyn Youssef - positivity and PsyCap, Timothy Sharp - explanatory style/optimism, strengths, gratitude, relationships, etc.

This led me to ask the question, what constructs resonate with me most? Which subjects are most authentic for me at this point in my life and career? “You will hear that you should be able to coach anybody on any topic however, I believe the most effective coaching comes when people believe that you have battle hardened competence – when you’ve walked in their path” (C. Miller, personal communications, June 20, 2011). What path am I on?

For me, two areas resonate most – cognitive-behavioral coaching to influence one’s internal dialogue/explanatory style, and positive emotions. Further, I am interested in how priming with positive emotions and focusing on recent successes can influence one’s explanatory style relative to upcoming challenges.

First, cognitive-behavioral approaches are of interest because I regularly ask myself – is there another way of seeing this situation? How else can I look at this to be more effective? Or simply, what would make this situation feel more positive? Explanatory style is something that I am working on personally in order to develop a habit of positive perspective. As coach, I hear clients convey stories of their current circumstances for which they have very little evidence, as well. This leads them to emotions and actions that can be counter-productive.

Second, in the interviews I noticed a pattern. Experienced coaches regularly begin their conversations with “what was a win from this past week” (Eleanor Chin, personal communications, June 20, 2011)? Or, “share something good that has happened to you this last week” (Louis Alloro, personal communications, July 1, 2011). This seeding of positive emotion or building off of what is working well made me think about my approach with clients. Right now, it is easy to jump into the client’s current challenge and begin coaching – helping them to

develop their own solution. However, what would it be like if I was more intentional about creating a positive tone or mood and/or focusing on what was going well before moving to an area of challenge? What are ways to increase positive affect in a coaching session? How might this impact my client's desire to be coached? Would increased positive emotion or positive affect help the client be more creative and expand that person's thought-action repertoire (Fredrickson, 2001) and outcomes? If I were able to create a more positive mood, would I get greater enjoyment from the sessions and be even more effective as well?

From the insights I gained during this process, I propose that a combined cognitive-behavioral coaching approach leveraging positive affect and visual learning tools may prove effective. Cognitive-behavioral approaches to changing internal dialogue and behavior have been practiced for many years. Positive emotions and positive affect have been receiving increased attention with recent studies and interventions. Finally, visual learning offers unique opportunity for engagement and comprehension. Below, I outline some of the related theory, constructs, and approaches applied to the practice of coaching in order to deepen my understanding.

### **A. Cognitive-Behavioral Models and Approaches**

*“Though we should soar into the heavens, though we should sink into the abyss, we never go out of ourselves; it is always our own thoughts that we perceive.” - Condillac*

#### **1. Theory.**

We experience the world through our own eyes. Seligman (2002) recounts that in the 1970s Aaron Beck (1979) made a break from Freudian thinking by theorizing that thoughts drive feelings, rather than feelings causing thoughts; that feelings are strongly related to and often triggered by cognitions (thoughts). This was the birth of cognitive therapy. The starting point for therapy became the examination of one's internal dialogue. Through reframing, clients learned

that by changing the way they think they could change the way they feel and thereby rise out of depression and other debilitating conditions. The counter argument is that feelings cause thoughts, e.g., a hot shower can merely “feel” good without a preceding thought (Seligman, 2002). Of course, both may be true and each offers an entry point for creating change.

Barbara Fredrickson (2010) illustrated Beck’s work by drawing a diagram showing the cause of our feelings and actions (reproduced below). The diagram shows a *circumstance* which leads to an *interpretation* (thought), which triggers *body reactions* and subjective *feelings* that lead us to *respond*. Our response, in turn, returns and influences our interpretation and our feelings again (see Figure 1).

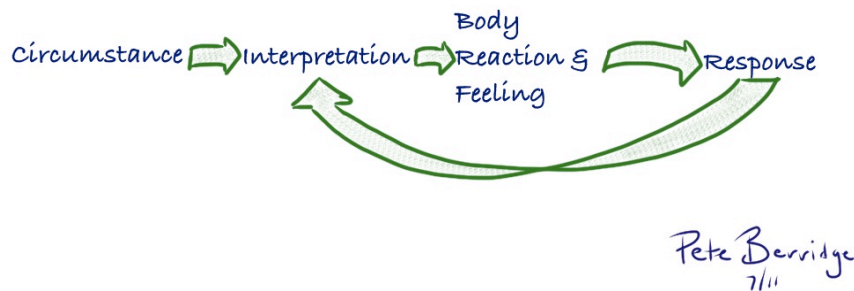


Figure 1

## 2. Constructs and approaches.

Beck’s premise is very important when we are trying to change our behavior or are helping someone change their behavior. If we can change the interpretation or story we tell ourselves, we can affect how it feels and create opportunity to adopt new behaviors. The work of Beck in identifying how cognitions lead to emotions is at the core of optimism, resilience, and the ABC method (described below) for affecting explanatory style (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). Explanatory style is the way in which we interpret our experiences – optimistic style or pessimistic style (described below) (Seligman, 2006). This comes up frequently in working with coaching clients – understanding the stories or self-talk that they use to interpret the world



around them. Often, discussions of explanatory style come up when clients are looking to change how they interact with others or find themselves stuck in repeated behaviors. By understanding explanatory style as it relates to optimism, clients can create greater self-awareness and opportunities to improve their tendencies of permanence, pervasiveness, and personalization (Seligman, 2006).

***a. Optimism.***

Research suggests that people who are more optimistic live longer, have less cardiovascular disease, have significantly better cancer outcomes, are better liked, cope better with bad events, and are less depressed than pessimists (Seligman, 2010b). Carver, Scheier, Miller, and Fulford (2009) define dispositional optimism as expecting good experiences in the future. Seligman (2006) develops a model of optimism based on explanatory style consisting of permanence, pervasiveness, and personalization of both good and bad events (see Figure 2). When evaluating a person's explanatory style, if the individual sees the cause of bad events as permanent and universal this reflects a pessimistic perspective and indicates despair (Seligman, 2006). Conversely, if the cause of bad events are seen as temporary and specific it is an optimistic explanatory style and reflects hope (Seligman, 2006). Said another way, an optimist sees good events as having permanent causes that will enhance many things they do (universal). Additionally, personalization reflects having a healthy perspective toward one's credit or blame for good and bad events.

The process of changing one’s explanatory style is facilitated through practicing the skills of disputing (seeking contrary evidence, identifying alternatives, thinking about implications, and usefulness). In the drawing, personalization is shown as having a mid-range that is healthy (PG = *personalization good*). It intersects *permanence good* (PMG) and *pervasiveness good* (PVG) suggesting healthy optimism. *Pervasiveness good* (PVG) shows how one can keep misfortune “in a box” to keep from catastrophizing when bad situations occur.

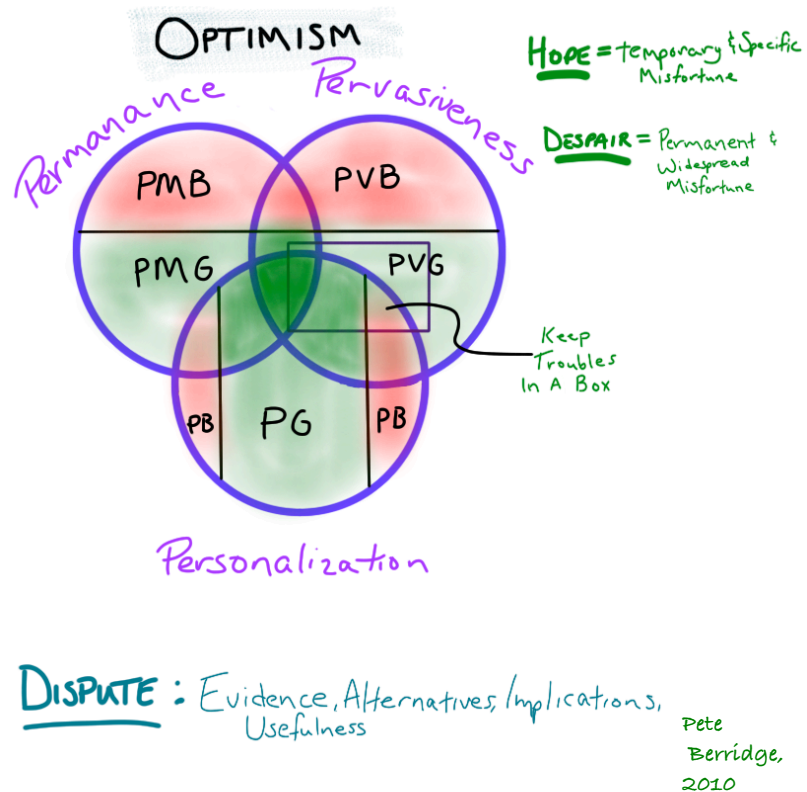


Figure 2

**b. Resilience.**

Related to explanatory style is resilience defined by Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, and Reed (2009) as positive adaptation in the context of significant adversity. Or, more simply, it is the ability to bounce back after adversity. Reivich and Shatte (2002) identify flexible and accurate thinking as key to maintaining resilience. This is important because we don’t assume that a

person's current thinking is bad, but rather, we look for supporting evidence and contrary evidence to evaluate its accuracy. Such cognitive approaches help clients to identify errors in their thinking when interpreting events and then develop more accurate and useful cognitions. Burns (1980) identifies 10 common thinking errors, called "cognitive distortions," and Reivich and Shatte (2002) describe eight similar "thinking traps." Reivich and Shatte (2002) identify: jumping to conclusions (automatic thoughts with certainty), tunnel vision (seeing information that fits current beliefs), magnifying and minimizing (overvalue some while undervalue other information), personalizing (blame oneself), externalizing (blame others), overgeneralizing (global beliefs), mind reading (assuming thoughts and intent), and emotional reasoning (feeling it makes it true). By identifying thinking patterns a client can then work to improve accuracy as well as flexibility or mental agility, the ability to see a situation from multiple perspectives.

At a deeper level, a coach can help a client identify iceberg beliefs, which they may hold (Reivich & Shatte (2002). Icebergs are deeply held beliefs that reflect our values and expectations and generally fall into the themes of achievement, acceptance, and control (Reivich & Shatte (2002). An example is, "no pain, no gain." Icebergs need not be negative, simply core beliefs that can work for or against a person in different situations.

The ABC method (Reivich & Shatte, 2002) is useful with clients to help identify their thinking patterns. Developed by Albert Ellis (1979), the ABC model progresses from our encounter of an *adversity*, to which we react by thinking or developing a *belief*, which results in a consequence (emotions and behavior). Further, there is a connection between specific beliefs and consequences, e.g., believing one's rights have been violated brings the consequence of anger (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). Understanding these specific belief-consequence connections is

useful and can be diagnostic in helping clients become aware of the specific beliefs that underlie their feelings (see Figure 3).

**Beliefs - Consequence Connections**

<b>Beliefs</b>	<b>Consequences (Feelings &amp; Actions)</b>
Trespass Violation of your rights or boundaries	Anger/Aggression
Loss Real world loss or loss of self-worth	Sadness/Depression/Withdrawal
Violation of another's rights I have caused harm	Guilt (I did a bad thing) Shame (I am a bad person) Apologizing (action)
Danger Future Threat	Anxiety/Fear/Agitation
Negative comparison (I don't measure up)	Embarrassment/Hiding
<b>Positive Beliefs</b>	<b>Consequences</b>
Positive Contribution (I contributed in a positive way)	Pride/Sharing, future planning
Appreciating what you have received (I have received a gift that I value)	Gratitude/Giving back, paying forward
Positive future (Things can change for the better)	Hope/Energy, taking action

Chart by Berridge based on materials from *The Resilience Factor* by Karen Reivich, PhD & Andrew Shatte, PhD

*Figure 3*

Slowing down and working intentionally with a client through a recent adversity and the subsequent beliefs and consequences, can be the beginning of awareness and movement toward changed behavior. Key is recognizing patterns (ABC, thinking traps, ice berg beliefs), becoming aware of what triggers those beliefs, and challenging or putting those beliefs into perspective (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). Overall, understanding that explanatory style *is changeable* through skill building activities such as the ABC's, provides a powerful platform for assisting clients. As stated by Reivich (2011), "At first a person's response is compensatory, yet over time what pops into your head actually becomes more positive." In addition to the ABC model, understanding

optimism, explanatory style and resilience, more specific positive coaching approaches have been developed.

*c. Cognitive-behavioral coaching.*

In this section, I have been discussing foundational work in cognitive-behavioral therapy. Neenan (2008) describes how cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) can be adapted to cognitive-behavioral coaching (CBC) and used effectively to help clients change self-limiting beliefs, develop new behaviors, and manage emotions. Helping clients to learn to think about their thinking (metacognition) leads to recognition of troublesome patterns and reasoning. Neenan (2008) addresses CBT misconceptions by pointing out that difficulties do happen in our lives (they are not created solely by our thinking) and that CBT does not focus only on thoughts and behaviors to the exclusion of emotions. CBC is fundamentally the same as CBT, however, its focus is clients who are not in psychological distress and who are striving for personal and professional satisfaction. CBC involves similar techniques such as using the ABCDE model, inference chaining (tease out underlying assumptions), evaluating cognitive distortions, considering thoughts as hypothesis rather than facts, and using “what”-based questions.

Auerbach (2006) adds to these techniques with a discussion of schema constructs and the ladder of inference in cognitive coaching. Schemas are broad mental guidelines or blueprints which one uses to interpret situations and respond. Schemas may be productive or not. The coach can help the client: identify unhelpful mental models and behavior patterns, see how they contribute to current difficulties, explore the benefit of changing the mental models, match new mental models that fit the client’s values, and develop accountability for the new mental models (Auerbach, 2006). The ladder of inference is a useful tool to help a client identify how they are interpreting specific situations. With the ladder of inference, at the first rung we take in images

and sensory data; second, we focus on certain data; third, we make assumptions about that data; fourth, we draw conclusions; fifth, we take actions based on those conclusions. By helping clients to broaden the data they attend to, they are able to draw new conclusions and take new actions.

***d. Cognitive-behavioral solution focused coaching.***

The cognitive-behavioral solution focused approach (Grant, 2003) concentrates on client strengths and constructing solutions rather than focusing excessively on problem analysis. For the coach, this means being skillful in helping clients tell their story in a way that emphasizes that there are potential solutions and which highlight the clients' strengths and skills. Key to this approach is the coach's skill in bringing the client's attention back to potential solutions rather than self-focused reflection. Over time, the client becomes practiced in anticipating and noticing possibilities, or the creation of a "solution-focused mindset" (Grant, 2006a, p. 157). Coaching competencies that are emphasized include: skillful use of language – reflecting and reframing the client's statements, understanding and applying goal theory including self-concordant goals, and asking "how" and "what" questions rather than "why." "Why" questions can be perceived as huge and unanswerable as well as past-focused. "How" and "what" questions focus the client on future possibilities, produce more positive affect, greater understanding, and increased goal approach measures (Grant, 2006b). Such solution-focused coaching questions include, "Think about a possible solution to the problem, and imagine it had magically come about. Describe some ways you can good start to move towards creating the solution. What are your thoughts about this solution? How do you react when you have these thoughts? What impact his thinking about this solution having on you?" (Grant, 2006b, p. 52).

Grant (2006a) emphasizes the importance of the coach understanding models of change in order to match the coaching process to the clients readiness to change. One model of change mentioned earlier is Bridges' (2004) transition model. Here, transitions consist of endings, neutral zone, and new beginnings. To move ahead one must go through an ending and process of letting go. Next, the neutral zone can be a time of uncertainty, yet also provide a chance to discover new opportunity and creativity. New beginnings bring about energy, action, and plan revision. Understanding what stage of a transition a client is in helps the coach utilize specific strategies and the client comprehend and manage change.

***e. Change your questions, change your life.***

*“Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.” – Viktor Frankl*

Building off of the importance of questions, Adams (2004) develops a cognitive-behavioral coaching technique called “QuestionThinking” (p. 1). Her method views internal dialogue as being question-based. Moreover, by shifting our questions we can impact our moods and actions. The process is to first, identify the questions we have been asking ourselves (and others) as either *learner* questions or *judger* questions and second, choose questions that may produce better results. By asking “what”-oriented questions we open ourselves to learning about the current situation and have the opportunity to choose how it will impact us. Learner questions include, “What happened? What can I learn? What assumptions am I making? How else can I think about this situation? What is the other person thinking, feeling, needing, and wanting? What is possible? What am I responsible for? What are my choices?” Conversely, judger questions reduce our options and get us stuck. Judger questions include, “Who’s to blame? What’s wrong with them? What’s wrong with me? Why am I failing?” Adams (2004) uses a

visual diagram “ChoiceMap” to illustrate the moment of self-awareness of our own thinking. At that point we have the opportunity to decide between two paths, learner path, and judger path. By switching our questions we can rather quickly switch our mood. This reflects the principle of simultaneity (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008) - the moment we ask a question, we begin to create change. This approach affects our questions of others as well. By using learner questions and seeking to understand from a place of true curiosity, we keep ourselves from forming premature judgments and are able to create more opportunities.

Like Adams (2004), there are other popular books that utilize Beck’s cognitive model applied to personal and business situations. Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, and Switzler’s (2002) *Crucial Conversations* applies the cognitive approach to conflict situations, helping the reader understand that it is what I *see, tell myself, feel*, and subsequently *do* that I am responsible for. The other party is not upsetting me, but rather it is the story that I tell myself that leads to my feelings and consequent actions. Or, as described by Stone, Patton, and Heen (1999), it is not content that causes conflict but perceived intent. With the right intent you can discuss anything.

#### ***f. Understanding cognitions.***

In addition to optimism and resilience, what do we know about the impact of cognitions on our well-being? Mindset and time perspective are two areas of awareness for a coach who is actively engaged with a client. Carol Dweck’s (2002) work brings great insights that I can use to inform my coaching practice. Her work is focused on the study of intelligence, ability, and personality and how beliefs in these areas can shape motivation, behavior, and performance. Dweck posits two theories of intelligence held by students: one, intelligence is a fixed trait; or two, intelligence is malleable and can be increased through effort. These are described as “fixed mindset” or “growth mindset” (malleable) respectively. One’s mindset about intelligence



impacts effort, risk-taking, persistence, defensiveness, and ultimately achievement (Dweck, 2002).

Individuals who believe that intelligence is fixed are concerned with appearing smart, will choose low-challenge, low-risk opportunities, see failures as a reflection on them personally (rather than as a comment on their level of effort), and are more likely to perform lower when faced with tougher challenges (Dweck, 2002). A fixed mindset can be very self-limiting. A growth mindset or malleable mindset is based in the belief that intelligence can be developed. Therefore, high challenge, high-risk opportunities, and even failure are all part of the learning experience. Growth mindset individuals will persevere and ultimately perform at a higher level (Dweck, 2002).

As coach, a key finding from Dweck's work is how feedback from others can influence the development of a fixed or growth mindset. While it may seem beneficial to offer trait/person praise such as "you're so smart" or "you're very good," it can have negative repercussions. Person-oriented praise or criticism can discourage future effort, discourage risk-taking, and promote hopelessness. Conversely, process/effort/strategy praise can have a positive effect, increasing persistence, encouraging constructive solutions and creativity, and promoting self-worth. Providing feedback on a client's effort, strategies, and development of strengths more likely will support a growth mindset and belief that change is possible.

Time perspective also provides valuable insight into cognitions. Specifically, how our thoughts about the past, present, and future impact well-being today. Remembering his-story (history) is a powerful component of an individual's current mindset. So, what stories is a client telling and retelling herself and how often? What is the tone of those stories – positive, negative? One's propensity to practice past, present and future thinking impacts well-being (Fortunato &

Furey, 2011). The researchers found that past thinking correlates positively with measures of depression, anxiety, and cynicism and negatively with scores on resiliency and optimism. However, future thinking and present thinking correlate positively with resiliency and optimism and negatively with cynicism, anxiety, and depression. From Holman & Zimbardo's (2009) Time Perspective studies, we understand the importance of past positive thinking which potentially can be increased through reflection on supportive past relationships. Therefore, enhancing past positive thinking and increasing the overall amount of time spent in present and future oriented thinking may positively impact client well-being.

The cognitive approaches to coaching, set out above, provide useful means for helping clients craft and experience new beliefs, behaviors, and emotions. Understanding optimism and resilience and utilizing approaches such as the ABC method, inference chaining, schemas, ladder of inference, cognitive-behavioral solution focused coaching, and the learner-judger approach, while being aware of research such as mindset and time perspective provides knowledge, tools, and techniques that a coach can utilize when the situation is right.

### **3. Organic stirrings – beyond cognitions.**

William James (1899/1983) writes that our actions and feelings are intertwined and contends that our actions actually help create our feelings, “our emotions are mainly due to those organic stirrings” (p. 117). Cognitive approaches offer effective ways to help clients evaluate their internal dialogue, increase optimism (and its associated benefits) and improve resilience. As referenced above, however, sometimes the indication or impetus for change is something other than a thought, perhaps a feeling or physical reaction. While in-depth discussion is outside of the scope of this paper, other methods may be helpful in conjunction with cognitive methods

including mindfulness (observing the beliefs and feelings and letting them go) or somatic awareness (noticing and modifying physical reactions).

Let's touch on somatic awareness. Often, the body is taken for granted in psychology and coaching. However, Shusterman (2006) argues that the body and mind are intertwined and that the body is integral to balance and well-being. Further, the body provides insight into the mind and acts an entry point for constructive engagement in order to bring positive change. Being in touch and aware of our bodies can lead to improved thinking, reasoning, and well-being (Shusterman, 2006). We gain by improving our somatic awareness so that we have greater perceptual sensitivity and accuracy. For example, bringing conscious awareness to our breathing, posture, or muscle tension, can help us understand the emotions behind our physical states. By being conscious of our physical sensations and understanding what our body is telling us, we can make physical adjustments, develop new habits, and subsequently change our feelings, mental state and impact on others.

A client story of mine illustrates the importance of somatic awareness. John is a director with responsibility to implement a multimillion dollar IT project over the next four years. He relies on his counterpart's team to complete critical parts of the project; however, he does not have authority over his counterpart or that team. John does not work well with his peer – they are regularly in conflict over priorities and resources and John reports that the meetings between his team and his peer's team are very tense and often unproductive. John gained insight one evening when he arrived home and was greeted by his four-year-old son. His son asked, "Daddy, why do you have on your angry face?" John was struck by this comment as he felt he really was not upset, but rather, was concentrating on his work issues. Now, he was concerned about the impact his difficulties at work were having on his family. So, together we talked about his physical

presence. We worked on simply, “relaxing your face.” At our next session, John reported some striking results. At the last team meeting a conflict had arisen in the participants had become quiet. At that point, John became aware that he was hunched over, looking down, scowl on his face, breathing shallow, and was tense through his shoulders. He remembered, “relax your face.” He then pulled his shoulders back, sat up in his chair, looked forward, breathed deeply, and relaxed his face with a slight smile. Amazing to John is that without his saying a word, the conversation in the meeting resumed and people begin to interact in a productive way.

Cognitive approaches are effective in helping us make change. When combined with additional methods (see Figure 4) that incorporate emotions and somatics, perhaps they are even more effective. Next, a look at how positive emotions can support change as well.

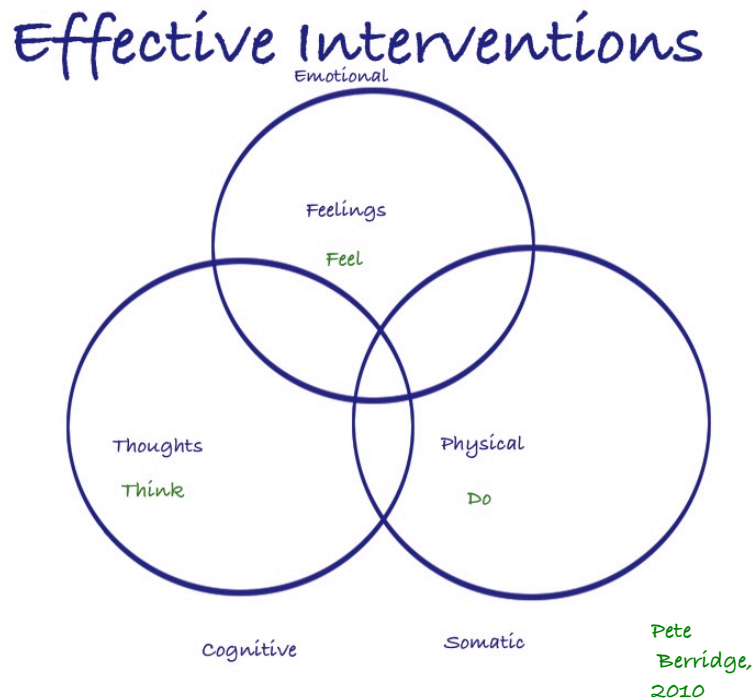


Figure 4

**B. Positive Emotions**

*“We become successful because we start from an emotionally flourishing place”* Caroline Miller (personal communications, June 20, 2011).

Now, to gain an understanding of positive affect and emotions and the role they play in facilitating change and increasing well-being. Additionally, how can positive emotions be incorporated into the coaching engagement and what impact might they have?

High positive affect is a trait including frequent cheerfulness, enthusiasm, energy, joviality, self-assurance, and attentiveness (Watson & Naragon, 2009). Further, positive affectivity is independent from negative affectivity. Each developed in response to different evolutionary needs with negative affect important for avoiding undesirable outcomes and positive affect important to attain pleasure and rewards. Positive affect is related to improved physical health (resistance to infectious disease), and relationships and job satisfaction (Watson & Naragon, 2009). While positive affect is heritable, steps can be taken which can result in higher levels of positive affect.

Fredrickson has researched positive emotions and theorizes that, “the capacity to experience positive emotions may be a fundamental human strength central to the study of human flourishing” (Fredrickson, 2001, p. 218).

Fredrickson (2009) reports that positive emotions improve functioning in: visual processing, memory for details, creativity, increased possibilities, resilience, performance, trust, and decision-making.

Fredrickson’s (2001) Broaden and Build theory, represented in Figure 5, describes how positive emotions broaden our scope of attention and thought-action repertoires for responding to situations and build our psychological and social resources. In general, we perform better under the influence of positive emotions. However, negative emotions do serve important functions,

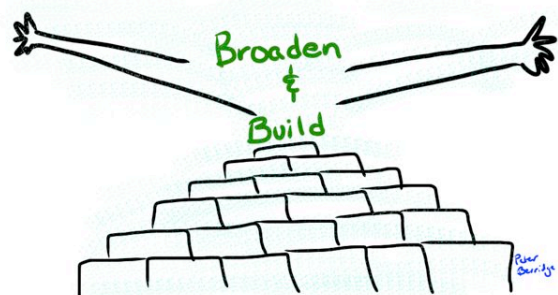


Figure 5

e.g., warning of danger. In fact, we have a negativity bias (i.e., negative emotions are stronger than positive emotions). Conversely, we have a positivity offset – in general we feel positive emotions more frequently than negative emotions. In her studies, having a ratio of three positive emotions to each negative emotion (3 to 1 ratio) is a tipping point that leads to flourishing (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005).

Fredrickson (2009) remarks, positive emotions such as hope, optimism, gratitude, and joy have been found to, “open our hearts and our minds, making us more receptive and creative,” (p. 21) and “allow us to discover and build new skills, new ties, new knowledge and new ways of being” (p. 24). In this way, positive emotions create an “upward spiral” toward optimal functioning and enhanced well-being (Fredrickson, 2002). People derive many benefits from increased positive affect including broadened scope of attention (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005), enhanced problem solving skills and creativity (Isen, Daubman & Nowicki, 1987), improved memory (Talarico, Berntsen & Rubin, 2009), resilience (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh & Larkin 2003) and enhanced trust (Grawitch, Munz, & Kramer, 2003). Positive emotions can also halt downward spirals of negative emotion (Fredrickson, 2003, as cited in Berridge, Rockind & White, 2011).

All of these skills benefit not only the individual, but his or her work as well. Someone who is better able to solve problems and trust co-workers will likely be more effective in his job. Therefore, Fredrickson (2003) suggests that positive emotions produce optimal organizational functioning. In fact, positive emotions have been linked with increases in job performance and engagement (Harter, Schmidt & Keyes, 2003; Losada & Heaphy, 2004). In addition, positive emotions enhance well-being (Fredrickson, 1998), and well-being has been found to increase engagement and work performance (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009) while being strongly

negatively correlated with turnover (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009, as cited in Berridge, Rockind & White, 2011). Thus, coaching clients to develop more positive emotions in their lives can lead to both individual and organizational improvements.

Macey and Schneider (2008) describe that a positive “state” at work leads to behavioral engagement, which then leads to desired outcomes. They define “state” as “positive affect associated with the job and the work setting connoting or explicitly indicating feelings of persistence, vigor, energy, dedication, absorption, enthusiasm, alertness, and pride” (p.24). Affect has been found to be a reliable measure of overall satisfaction, and therefore engagement (Fisher, 2000). Affect is measured by attitudes, real-time mood, emotions, and flow states and it is the frequency of positive affect that most strongly predicts overall job satisfaction (Fisher, 2000, as cited in Berridge, Rockind & White, 2011). We know that positive emotions affect the workplace and performance. How else can positive emotions lead to greater effectiveness?

The ability to see a situation from a more positive perspective has been studied within another construct – Psychological Capital. Within Psychological Capital (PsyCap), the central point is agency and positive appraisal. “You see a situation and if you’re high on psychological capital you appraise it differently. You want to try it, try harder, try different ways to come up with solutions, and you enjoy it more” Carolyn Youssef (personal communications, June 17, 2011).

### **1. Increasing positive emotions.**

So positive emotions lead to increased well-being and performance, how about the other way around? Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2007) found that there are ways to increase well-being and positive affect over the long term beyond a person’s genetic baseline, disposition, or “set point.” They studied both positive changes created through individuals’ effortful activities and

positive changes in one's circumstances. The results indicate that effort and hard work result in sustainable increases in well-being and positive affect, however effortless improvements in circumstances do not result in sustained gain in well-being and affect. So, positive emotions lead to improved well-being and performance and effortful change results in lasting increase in positive affect. In this way, Lyubomirsky's (2006) work challenges the set point theory of happiness while reinforcing Fredrickson's (2002) concept of "upward spirals."

Positive emotions are neglected in research compared to our study and understanding of negative emotions. Positive emotions may be more difficult to clearly identify, however they have the potential of helping individuals and groups to make vast improvements. For example, elevation and awe have the potential of dramatically changing individual's minds, allegiances, and ideas (Haidt, 2010). Cultivating elevation and loss of self through peak experiences, priming, meditation or other positive interventions may lead to greater well-being and commitment to change.

There are a number of studied interventions that result in increased positive affect including: Best Possible Future Self (King 2001), Gratitude Visit (Seligman, 2002), Three Good Things (Seligman, Steen, Park, Peterson, 2005), Savoring (Bryant, Smart & King, 2005), Using Your Strengths in a New Way (Seligman, et al., 2005), Practicing Acts of Kindness (Lyubomirsky, 2007), connect with others (Fredrickson, 2009), meditation and physical activity (these interventions are discussed more fully in the referenced works). We know that in positive psychotherapy, increasing positive emotions through discussion of signature strengths, emotions, and gratitude contributes to a reduction in depressive symptoms (Seligman, Rashid, & Parks, 2006). Studies done by Gable, Reis, Impett, and Asher (2004) show how responding positively to another's success through Active Constructive Response (ACR) leads to increased positive



affect, life satisfaction, belongingness, and enhanced memory. Further, it leads to relationship benefits of increased satisfaction, intimacy, trust, happiness, and reduced conflicts. However, just as striking is how the responders also benefit from ACR achieving greater positive effect themselves. ACR is good for the person receiving the response, the person responding, and the relationship between them as well. Considering that it is possible to induce positive emotions and increase positivity (Fredrickson, 2009), can positive priming be used in the coaching session itself?

## **2. Priming positive emotions.**

The coaches I interviewed used positive emotions in two ways in their coaching approach. First, many interviewees reported that they regularly began sessions with a focus on what is working. “Start with sharing a win – get people to start at the point of positivity” Louis Alloro (personal communications, July 1, 2011). Or, the coach would build upon the client’s strengths from a particular successful situation before turning attention to a current problem that the client is facing. “I start with a positive story and then move to the client’s challenge. I mine for positive emotion and then switch to a cognitive mode of coaching and ask, what did you learn from that? I call it *success stories*” Eleanor Chin (personal communications, June 2011). “Having strengths-based conversations is energizing. Planning and scheduling positive experiences and working to create a positive vision for the client’s life is energizing and can boost mood. Positive emotions definitely help the client create a real and meaningful sense of their life” Timothy Sharp (personal communications, June 19, 2011).

Second, coaches use various methods to simply increase positive affect in the session. “You might see me tell a joke just to boost positivity” Robert Biswas-Diener (personal communications, June 21, 2011). Biswas-Diener (2009) recognizes the benefits of establishing

expectations that sessions can be humorous, positive, and esteem building and bringing one's own strengths to the session. For me, this means using my signature strengths of curiosity, humor, and playfulness. In research studies of emotions, positive priming is often used with participants.

Gerrards-Hesse, Spies, and Hesse (1994) review 250 studies that involved experimental induction of mood states and develop a classification system for mood induction procedures (MIP's). Methods used by experimenters to induce specific moods include: instructing subjects to imagine and re-experience situations or events to evoke a particular mood; provide emotion-inducing material such as a film or music plus instruction to create the suggested emotional state; presenting emotional stimuli without specific instructions such as showing a film or giving participants a gift; presenting need-related emotional situations such as providing positive feedback; and generating physiological states through the use of drugs, placebos, or directing participants to create specific facial expressions. In their review, the film MIP and the gift MIP proved highly effective in creating positive affect.

In their studies of the effect of positive moods on performance and efficiency, Grawitch, Munz, and Kramer (2003) had participants imagine an event from their recent past that put them into a good mood. This imagery technique, they believe, is a more powerful means of inducing positive mood than providing participants with pre-designed scenarios because it uses scenarios that are relevant to the individual.

Custers and Aarts (2005b) conducted remarkable studies showing that it is possible to prime participants using subliminal positive words, which resulted in increased effort by participants - they worked harder than participants in the control groups. Their studies show that linking behavioral states to positive affect results in motivation and desire to engage in those

activities. Subsequently, Custers and Aarts (2005a) shows that non-conscious (subliminal) goal pursuit is heightened if representation of the goal state is available, is dissimilar to the actual state, and associated with positive affect. This would support many of my clients' claims that having a vision board (visual representation of their future goals) in sight, even if not revisited often, helps them achieve their goals.

The findings above demonstrate that thinking about past positive situations (similar to building off of recent wins) and positive visual cues increase positive emotions and may enhance coaching sessions. How do coaches use visuals to enhance positive emotions and what support is there in the literature for the use of visuals? Let's look at visual learning.

### **C. Visual Learning**

#### **1. Interviews.**

First, we return to the interviews with practitioners to gain more insights.

**Q: Do you use visual tools to help your clients understand specific concepts or to work through coaching issues?**

**A: Gretchen Pisano**

Yes, all kinds of good things happen when you can see your thinking. Visuals allow us to access and integrate three sophisticated systems – emotional, physical, and cognitive. When we can utilize all three of these we get fast and powerful learning. Never underestimate the power of making your thinking visible to others. We can show someone what we mean, or help that person show someone else by using a visual. We can use the picture to understand a concept at an intuitive level (we can see hierarchy on the page), words to help understand the concept at an intellectual level, and our voice as the narrative that accompanies the picture and adds additional context.

**A: Timothy Sharp**

More and more, yes. I use video clips, TED talks, YouTube, and classic Hollywood movies. These lead to conversations about particular strengths of the characters or bring out client creativity.

**A: Robert Biswas-Diener**

Yes, sometimes I'll work with a client at a board, each of us with a different color marker. I'll often have clients do activities in front of them on a piece of paper – timelines, etc., that gives us each an activity to do on either side of the phone (telephone coaching).

**A: Caroline Miller**

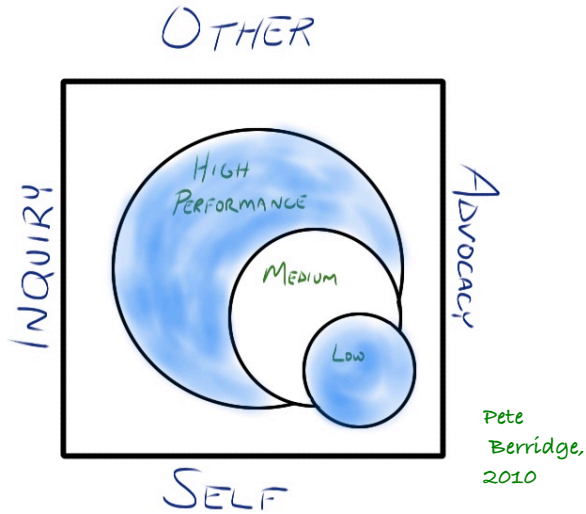
I use pictures such as the heliotropic effect of a sunflower turning toward the light in order to grow or of Dan Janssen falling in the 1980 winter Olympics. I use vibrant memorable pictures illustrating self-regulation and social contagion.

**2. The power of visuals – research.**

Art can be a didactic form, which can be used as a door of entry to teach, engage, create meaning, connect with others, communicate, and spur change. In addition to individual coaching, I do team coaching and visual facilitation. However, during training in visual facilitation and visual strategic planning at the Grove Institute, the first instruction we received was that we do not need to be artists to be comfortable drawing and realize the benefits of visuals. I may not be an artist. However, I am visual and have a great appreciation for the power of visual representations and experiences.

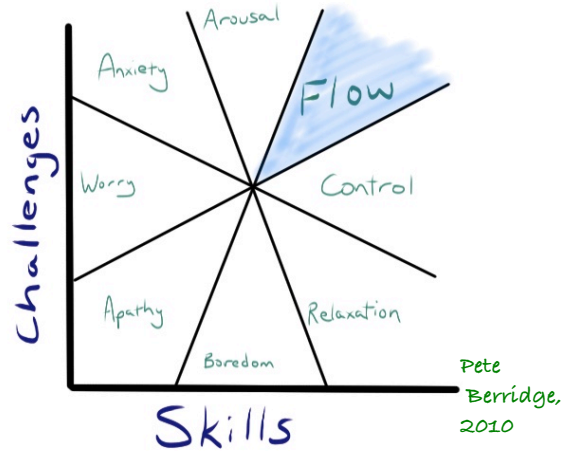
Taking complex concepts and portraying them visually in an easily understood manner supports the coaching engagement. I use visuals with my interventions to illustrate cognitive coaching, team effectiveness (Losada & Heaphy, 2004, p. 756) (see Figure 6), flow

(Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 31) (see Figure 7), career development, flourishing (see Figure 8), positive emotions, and others.



(Losada & Heaphy, 2004)

Figure 6



(Csikszentmihalyi, "Finding Flow", 1997, p.31)

Figure 7



Figure 8

Also, I have clients develop visuals such as vision boards and sketches of their current circumstance and desired future. We can then explore the composition, size, components, color, tone, and mood. Having one's vision represented in a drawing can be a powerful form of agency

for a client. Therefore, looking at research in art, visual learning, and human behavior including positive emotion, engagement, comprehension, communication, and change, is beneficial in developing further interventions.

Regarding emotions, De Petrillo & Winner (2005) determined that art-making enhanced mood among artists and non-artists while Dalebroux, Goldestein and Winner (2008) found that people who portrayed something “happy” through art experienced short-term mood enhancement. Making art also enhances emotional expression, spirituality, psychological well-being, and self-awareness while reducing negative affect (Puig, Lee, Goodwin, & Sherrard, 2006). This has been my experience in working with people using visuals – there is more energy and a lighter mood as they engage artistically.

Regarding comprehension and engagement, participating in visual arts instruction is associated significantly with growth in self-efficacy, originality and creative thinking (Caterall & Pepler, 2007). Further, during art instruction, Caterall and Pepler (2007) found students to be 15% to 30% more engaged than in non-arts classrooms. This fits with Tyler, Valek, and Rowland’s (2005) evaluation of how graphic facilitation supports increased engagement including: transcending language barriers, engaging multiple senses, providing focus and grounding, helping participants to be heard, bridging cultures, and summarizing and integrating information. The process of drawing, as well, supports improved learning. Schwamborn, Mayer, Thillmann, Leopold, and Leutner (2010) found that students who were instructed to generate drawings while reading text scored higher on transfer and retention than students who only read information. In addition, Mayer and Gallini (1990) found improvements in memory and deep comprehension through combined verbal and visual presentation as opposed to text-only

instruction. More specifically, simplified diagrams that depict key functional relationships help most during learning (Butcher, 2006).

Visuals support increased communications as well. Eppler and Burkhard (2007) explain *knowledge visualization*. Visual tools are used for the creation, organization, transfer, and visibility of knowledge. Visual metaphors organize information while also conveying an implicit message – an iceberg, bridge, person climbing, or a family, all have implicit meanings. Ad hoc sketches allow for the creation of insight, idea generation, active participation, and encourage creativity in groups. Visuals can also be used to convey complex information more easily to others (Eppler & Burkhard, 2007). Hence, visuals can be used for developing and sharing information, conveying implicit messages, and make that information more memorable.

Being grounded in research on visual learning therefore enhances my coaching approach with clients. Two points are of interest to me from the work of Kozbelt, Seidel, El Bassiouny, Mark, and Owen (2010). First, they confirmed a popularized technique from Edwards (1999) in which students were taught to draw objects that were displayed upside down. Kozbelt et al. (2010) found that having nonartists draw a face from a photo that was inverted enhanced drawing accuracy. Why? Because they need to learn to *see* differently; to recover the innocence of the eye. Otherwise, they continually make errors by drawing what they think they *know* rather than what they actually *see* (Kozbelt et al., 2010). In a practical way, this tells me how I can develop better visuals and use them in my coaching. However, a second point is more powerful. Clients make errors because they act on what they think they *know* rather than what they *see*. For me, in my coaching, this reinforces the concepts of resilience and thinking traps; helping clients learn how to look for new evidence so they can *see* situations accurately. To develop, they need

to look in new ways and seek objective information. Overall, art and visuals bring pleasure and transcendence as well as powerful tools for growth, tools I can bring to my clients.

## **Part V: Applying the Tools**

### **A. Priming Positive Emotions and Using Cognitive-Behavioral Coaching and Visuals**

Next, I look at applying these three constructs, cognitive-behavioral coaching, positive emotions, and visuals, into an effective coaching approach. With regard to application, Stephen Joseph (as cited in Kauffman & Linley, 2007) stated, “One of the most important light bulb moments for me as a psychologist was the understanding that research findings are not instructions for practice” (p. 92). While it is necessary to have a basis in research, as coach, I must translate research into actionable steps with the client. Further, there are relatively few proven interventions so it is necessary to take what I have learned and do some experimenting. Moreover, as stated by Robert Biswas-Diener, (as cited in Kauffman & Linley, 2007) “I think there is much more to positive psychology than this [an intervention]. I see the structure of the coaching session itself as a kind of intervention” (p. 95). So, how can I construct an effective coaching environment while bringing together the cognitive approach, heightened positive emotions, and effective visuals?

How would a positive psychology coaching session work? First, I envision creating a disposition or habit of starting with the positive, seeding positive emotion, and then helping the client translate current successes to new challenges to leverage a broadened thought-action repertoire. A return to the literature highlights this approach. Sharp (2011) describes using a “primacy of positivity.” Rather than working primarily toward goals in order to help the client achieve greater happiness, he argues “that achievement and success are far more likely to be met if happiness and positivity are created first” (Sharp, 2011, p. 44). He recommends that coaches



help boost positive emotions and create positive experiences with their clients at the outset of a session. This can be done using fun and humor, focusing on positive experiences, using strengths, doing good deeds for others, and providing positive reinforcement (Sharp, 2011).

Also, through positive emotions, people have a positive effect on others via social contagion. It is important, therefore, that prior to each session, I am in a good mood. I can do this by listening to uplifting music (a current favorite being, *Dog Days Are Over* by Florence and the Machine), and I may connect or text a couple of friends of mine who always have a light mood. Or, I can simply practice gratitude exercises.

In the session, I can start by being intentionally positive such as by telling a story and reflecting positive facial expressions. I can ask the client, “What has gone well since we met last?” Additionally, I am creating a set of YouTube videos and TED talks that help to prime positive emotions, which I can use in the right circumstances.

I have developed a particular exercise of constructive engagement entitled, *In the Moment*, as shown below in Figure 9. It is a chart used to influence the client’s stories and subsequent feelings and actions. How does it work? First, I begin by visually capturing the client’s response to the “what has gone well since we last met” question, identifying a specific recent positive event. I fill in the event, the client’s observations, physical feelings, internal dialogue and questions, emotions, subsequent actions, and what strengths were used. Next the client and I move to the client’s current objective for the session. We go through a similar exercise identifying an upcoming event or goal and describing the client’s current observations and feelings. Next, we construct solution-focused questions (Grant, 2006b) or *learner* questions (Adams, 2004) to identify the possible opportunities in the upcoming event. In this moment is also an opportunity to gather supporting and contrary evidence for the client’s beliefs and to

practice methods of disputation (Seligman, 2006). We discuss the client's strengths and how to apply them to the situation. The goals are to influence how the client is thinking about the upcoming situation and increase the individual's repertoire of possible actions. Between sessions the client can also use this worksheet to log experiences as a method to become more self aware of thinking patterns and actions.

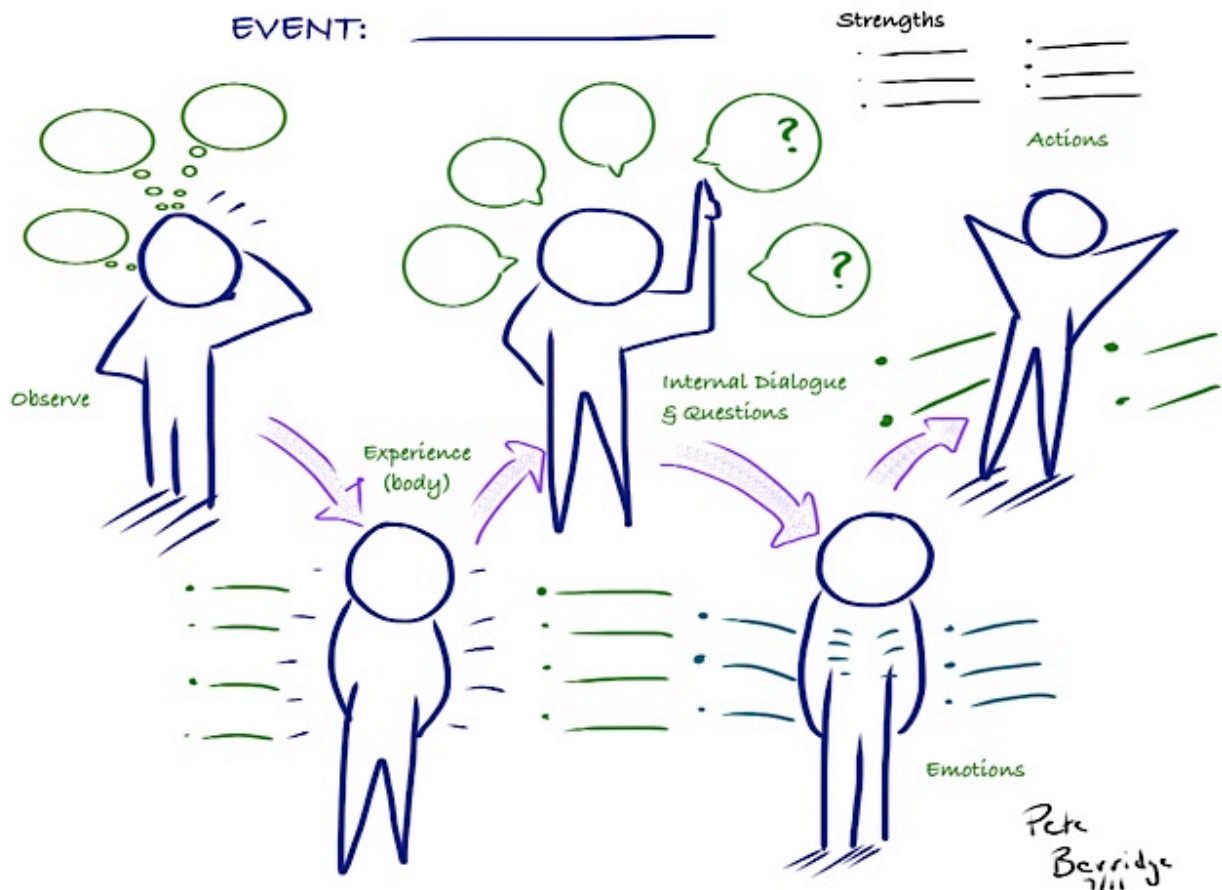


Figure 9

I will use this process when working with clients to help them slow down, broaden their perspective, evaluate specific situations, and look for evidence that supports or refutes their beliefs. The goal, then, is to extrapolate their learning to other situations outside of the coaching sessions and develop effective in-the-moment responses.

## **B. Measuring Impact**

A hallmark of positive psychology is that it is an applied science based on empirical evidence. Coaches can partner with positive psychology to further both coaching and positive psychology. To this end, leading figures in positive psychology urge coaches to systematically collect data on their clients while collaborating with researchers and academic positive psychologists (see e.g., Kauffman & Linley, 2007). Therefore, utilizing assessments to measure client progress offers useful information in supporting the link between researchers and practitioners.

There are many empirically validated surveys to measure well-being that can be used with coaching clients. I suggest focusing on three. One is Fredrickson's (2009) Positivity Self-Test with which the client indicates the amount of positive and negative emotions experienced over the preceding 24 hours. Then, the client calculates the ratio of positive to negative emotions. As referenced earlier, flourishing occurs above a 3-to-1 positivity ratio known as the tipping point (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). This assessment can be used to track a client's progress in increasing positive affect. Further, measures can be made of the components of flourishing (e.g., broader perception, increased resilience, social relationships, optimism, engagement, positive emotions, purpose and meaning, and positive and negative affect).

I would use the next two assessments to gain a broader measure of well-being. One assesses psychological flourishing and the second measures emotions over a longer period of time. The Flourishing Scale (FS) developed by Diener et al. (2010) is a brief eight-item self-report assessment which provides a single psychological well-being score. It was designed to assess major aspects of social-psychological functioning including: social relationships (supportive and rewarding relationships, contributing to the happiness of others, being respected

by others), purposeful and meaningful life, being engaged and interested in one's activities, self-respect, optimism, and feeling confident and capable. A high overall score indicates that the respondent views themselves as doing well across these important domains of functioning.

The Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE) measures subjective feelings - six items to assess positive feelings and six items to assess negative feelings with individual scores for positive feelings, negative feelings, and affect balance (negative feelings score subtracted from positive feelings score) (Diener, et al., 2010). I would utilize the SPANE rather than the more frequently used PANAS (Positive and Negative Affect Schedule) because the SPANE offers improvements including: measuring the full range of emotions, levels of emotions, and duration of emotions (Diener, et al., 2010). Specifically, the SPANE instructs respondents to think about their experiences over the last four weeks which allows for specific recollection of experiences while avoiding short-term mood. This will supplement the more immediate perspective of Fredrickson's Positivity Self-Test.

To this point I have reviewed coaching, positive psychology methods and constructs, positive psychology coaching, developed specific interventions, and discussed ways to measure impact. Next, I consider how to integrate positive psychology coaching as an important element of my personal and professional identity.

### **Part VI: Positive Psychology Coach - Identity and Depth**

*“Identities change in practice, as we start doing new things (crafting experiments), interacting with different people (shifting connections), and reinterpreting our life stories through the lens of the emerging possibilities (making sense)”* Herminia Ibarra (2003, p. 16).

An aspect that is unexplored in the literature is the impact and integration of positive psychology to the identity of coaches. I addressed this specifically in the interviews, which are reported below.

#### **A. Interviews**

**Q: How has positive psychology impacted your identity as a coach or your coaching approach? How do you talk about positive psychology with clients and potential clients? What has helped you most in developing your coaching presence or in becoming a deeper coach?**

#### **A: Robert Biswas-Diener**

In some ways there is not a huge distinction between positive psychology and coaching. On top of contracting, asking powerful questions, accountability etc., that is part of coaching, we add this wonderful suite of theory, empirical findings, tested interventions and assessments directly informed by the science of positive psychology. So, from time to time you'll see me do strengths-spotting, brainstorming aimed at understanding pathways thinking, or tell a joke in order to boost positive affect – these are all informed by positive psychology. I do speak about positive psychology from time to time but most of my clients know it is what I use. What helped me most to develop my coaching presence or become a deeper coach is that I'm pretty authentic – I speak how I speak and people resonate with this. What has really helped me learn though, is making all the mistakes in the world – I've done some terrible work with people – classic mistakes – and now I feel pretty confident. Making mistakes has worked well for me.

#### **A: Carolyn Youssef**

Positive psychology became part of my identity because of my area of research – you sometimes get labeled by what you study. However, I am extremely passionate about positivity. I say my passion is making people more positive.

**A: Timothy Sharp**

I talk about positive psychology very excitedly with a lot of passion. I love and fundamentally believe in it. My clients are pretty self-selecting and people come to me at this point because they know who I am and what my approach is. So my identity has changed quite a bit and it's something I'm quite proud of and pleased with. I think this is what I was looking for when I first got into psychology but it didn't exist 20 years ago. So, when people like Marty started talking about positive psychology it was like, yeah, this is what I always wanted to be doing.

**A: Caroline Miller**

Positive psychology changed everything while affirming what I was already doing. It gave me a new language and tools to use. It gave me a credible niche (in goal setting) rather than anecdotal stories. Yes, I talk about positive psychology because it gives me the evidence-based approach that differentiates me from other coaches who work with clients on goal setting. The MAPP degree is incredibly useful. I describe it as, “I work with people to achieve success while also living at the top of their spectrum for emotional flourishing.” To become a deeper coach I practice what I challenge clients to do – I take risks and achieve my goals – I walk the talk.

**A: Eleanor Chin**

It has given me tremendously more confidence as a coach. I like to know why things work and positive psychology helped me to understand, e.g., positive emotions, broaden and build, self-determination, peak-end theory all provide insights into the tools we use as coaches.

Now I have the ability to float between different tools and combine them – taking what’s being presented and dance in the moment. I feel I have the understanding in my muscle memory and that brings me more confidence in my instincts.

While I sometimes mention positive psychology at the beginning of an engagement, I don’t talk about it much and don’t call myself a positive psychology coach. Instead I use the language that appeals to my client’s need, e.g., employee engagement vs. intrinsic motivation. In order to develop greater depth as a coach I access the research – constantly going back and reading articles and following the Friends of Positive Psychology postings.

**A: Gretchen Pisano**

I don’t often use the term “positive psychology” but I practice it so my clients can see it in action. The title on my business card reads “Future Minded Optimist.” The [MAPP] learning process has helped me to feel very confident in what I’m talking about; I am now able to speak to the link between how we think and what we do in a way that I wasn’t able to before MAPP. I don’t call myself a positive psychologist. I call myself a coach – I coach the full continuum of human potential. I think of that continuum as represented in the work I do one-on-one with my coaching clients, the work I do with corporations working one-to-many, and the work I do to help those people understand how they can be a more positive impact on their network of people. Essentially, I help grown ups grow. I often do talk about the fact that I have my Master’s in Positive Psychology and how that helps me in working with people and I am finding more and more people interested in what that means.

**A: Louis Alloro**

I talk about positive psychology all the time with clients – it’s my thing. Positive psychology is all about creating your best possible future. It helps you get out of your own way

and realize that you can only change yourself – “it’s an inside job.” To become a deeper coach, I’ve had to do the work myself – challenge my own beliefs and put effort into getting more of what I want.

### **B. Integration: Approach, Materials, Identity and Depth**

As I look ahead, there are four aspects to my positive psychology coach development: approach, materials, identity, and depth. While researching this project, I have learned much from the work of leaders such as Grant, Auerbach, and Reivich, as well as from the interviewees regarding cognitive approaches and the nuances of coaching. I have much to hone with my coaching skills and I look forward to doing so (and, like Biswas-Diener, learn by failing). In addition to continuing my understanding of cognitive coaching approaches, I am now more mindful of how I can use positive approaches to build from clients’ strengths in helping them to achieve their personal and professional goals. While, in the past, I always looked at both strengths and weaknesses in helping clients to move ahead, it was very easy to focus on gaps and needed improvements. Now, I see greater possibility in exploring strengths and recent successes to help clients apply them more broadly and in new ways and situations. Cooperrider’s (2011) sharing of the Peter Drucker quote, “The task of leadership is to create an alignment of strengths...making a system’s weaknesses irrelevant” had a strong influence on me.

Beyond strengths, I am motivated to increase my positive affect with clients, building positive emotion in our sessions and simply having more fun. I want to become more practiced in priming positive emotions and using a growth mindset (Dweck, 2002) in relating to my clients. I find myself being supportive and praising a client personally at times, which is acceptable. However, using strategy or effort-oriented criticism and praise rather than trait/person praise can support persistence, and constructive, creative solutions (Dweck, 2002).



Slowing down with clients has also led to greater depth and opportunity to apply new skills to different situations. This is a good approach for me as often, in a coaching session, I can try to cover too much ground.

Regarding materials, I will continue to study the positive psychology constructs, the current proven interventions, and develop my own tools and interventions. Getting to that “curriculum” level of detail is helpful to me. At the same time, I need to be conscious of the context in which I use an intervention because it will be a different setting than that of the original research. Also, it is important to create confidence in the approaches that I employ as a key reason why interventions work is because clients expect that the intervention will have a positive effect for them (Lopez, et al., 2004). Confidence also comes from developing my coaching identity and depth.

As Ibarra (2003) points out, developing new language and sharing our life stories is an important part of defining who we are. Recently, I wrote a new description of my coaching - *“Partnering with clients with whom I want to spend time; willing to be there “with” that person in what they are trying to achieve ~ in work and in life; processing thoughts, feelings, and actions. My guiding ambition is to help others be who they want to be.”*

Biswas-Diener’s *Practicing Positive Psychology Coaching* (2010) provides practical information for coaches such as developing language for talking about positive psychology in one’s practice. Developing language helps me to gain greater comfort and sense of character. Often potential clients want to know what coaching is and the coach’s philosophy or approach to coaching. From this, I developed the following introduction - *“Coaching is focused time spent on your own self-development – like taking a class on yourself. It is focused on your goals and putting together a plan to achieve them. In my approach as coach, I will draw heavily upon*

*scientific research to inform my thinking about human behavior, emotion, motivation, engagement, performance, and human strengths as means to make personal and professional change. My approach is deeply rooted in the sciences of positive psychology and of coaching.”*

Now, how do I become a “deeper” coach? Initially, I thought that understanding positive psychology constructs and being more present in the moment with clients, more of a sage if you will, would create depth. I believe I have become a deeper coach, albeit, through an additional route – my signature strengths. Curiosity and interest in the world, gratitude, humor and playfulness, judgment and critical thinking, and capacity to love and be loved, have been instrumental in my growth. Throughout the MAPP program, my classmates have created a safe, trusting environment, which has given me the opportunity to be more open and to create much deeper relationships. This environment has helped me to feel comfortable sharing, to have more substantial conversations and connections, and I know it has helped me to create a similar environment for my clients.

There are practical steps that I can take to develop greater depth as a positive psychology coach as well. These include: staying connected to the field; maintaining active relationships with others in positive psychology; developing new language; reviewing my studies and organizing the material in the context of my work; creating methods of constructive engagement; learn by teaching others; working with other positive psychology practitioners; staying engaged with emergent research; staying physically fit; and allowing myself to try and fail.

To be truly deeper as a coach is to be authentic - to understand and recognize my own strengths, have success with my explanatory style, practice priming my own positive emotions, develop a high positivity ratio, and to be somatically aware and present. Strengths that I enjoy using are: ability to form strong relationships, listen and be truly interested in others, offer

resources, love to laugh, the ability to lighten the mood, and to tell people the tough stuff while still maintaining good relations.

As I progress as a coach, working with more experienced executives, the issues we address are more complex and related to questions of ethics, virtue, and flourishing more than business or achievement. How does that executive want to *be* in the world? We can grow in virtues such as wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence (Peterson, 2006). The development of wisdom and virtue, however, is something that only experience can bring (Annas, 2011); it takes reflection and intention, and is something a coach can certainly support. Clients are faced with deep questions and I have the privilege of helping them find their own answers, their own purpose and meaning.

### **Conclusion & Summary**

The field of positive psychology is rapidly identifying methods for helping individuals move from languishing to flourishing through positive interventions or *constructive engagement*. As a whole, the field of positive psychology shifts our attention and effort from what is broken to what is what is working. This capstone project is a story of my development and understanding in particular constructs of positive psychology and ways to utilize them in my coaching. The process has helped me to understand methods for applying positive psychology to coaching, important constructs and interventions that work well in coaching, to dive into relevant research, and find ways to be authentic in my use of positive psychology in my coaching while further developing my identity and depth as a coach. In this, I believe I embrace the criteria for a bona fide coach of positive psychology as laid down by Dr. Martin Seligman (2007)<sup>1</sup>. As I grow, I will

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<sup>1</sup> “People who are adequately trained in the techniques of coaching, in the theories of positive psychology, in valid measurement of the positive states and traits, in the interventions that work, and who know when to refer a client to someone who is better trained will be, in my lights, bona fide coaches of positive psychology.” (Seligman, 2007, p. 267)

continue to develop my approach, identity, and depth in the field of positive psychology and coaching, focusing my attention on what is right while helping others to flourish.

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