

Applying Positive Psychology Coaching to Your Practice

“If you plan on being anything less than you are capable of being, you will probably be unhappy all the days of your life.” —Abraham Maslow

It's the quest of many clients to find purpose to their lives. For me, Positive Psychology Coaching (PPC) offers a toolkit enabling clients to increase their self-awareness and optimize performance to enhance their overall well-being and success.

PPC is [defined](#) as “a scientifically-rooted approach, helping clients increase well-being, enhance and apply strengths, improve performance and achieve valued goals.”

Science Based

For me, the science-based part of the definition is important, as it gives assurance that PPC stems from extensive research and proven interventions. PPC can be traced back to the founding days of psychology and its focus to enhance fulfillment in a person's life. World War I and its war veterans created a need for psychologists to focus on mental illness.

It wasn't until the new millennium, though, when the then President of the American Psychological Association, Martin E.P. Seligman, alongside psychologists Christopher Peterson and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi introduced the field of positive psychology, a science of what makes life worth living and how to achieve optimal human functioning.

Well-being

The second part of the definition relates to how positive psychology applied with coaching can increase well-being, which Seligman breaks down into [five areas](#): Positive Emotion, Engagement, Meaning, Positive Relationships and Accomplishment (PERMA). Strengths can be [defined as](#) “positive traits reflected in thoughts, feelings and behaviors,” and this is an area I researched as part of my Masters of Science in Coaching.

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Character Strengths

For my research, I developed a group coaching program to identify and develop character strengths. Initially, participants took the [Values in Action](#)

[\(VIA\) Survey of Character Strengths](#). The survey evolved from studies by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi and has been taken by over five million people worldwide. Once completed, 24 strengths are uniquely ranked to the individual. Through the group coaching sessions, it was found that identifying and developing strengths enhanced well-being through increased positivity and enjoyment of daily tasks.

Developing Strengths

One way to develop strengths is to list out times you have leaned on a certain strength to progress a situation. This allows you to more easily draw on your strengths in challenging times.

For example, I completed the VIA survey and noted one of my top strengths is perseverance. I listed out all the times this strength had helped me through challenging situations.

Last year, my master's study coincided with the birth of my third child. My plan was to study and complete my thesis while my baby slept—I had conveniently forgotten the numerous night feeds! I was beyond tired, and it was then my work on identifying and developing my strength of perseverance gave me inner confidence to keep going and to not abandon my study.

What Went Well?

In my research coaching program, I applied another simple, yet powerful validated positive psychology exercise designed by Martin Seligman called the “What-Went-Well” exercise. Each night for a week, the group coaching participants noted three things that went well for them during that day.

This exercise resonated with the group; it was a pleasant change to focus on positives before sleep rather than dwelling on the negative experiences of the day. Some participants found it difficult to think of three things initially; however, within a week they had progressed to three.

Participants reflected that they were quicker to note smaller accomplishments throughout the day and the exercises enhanced their engagement in activities. They also found it easier to immerse themselves in their daily tasks without getting distracted.

For me, PPC, with its collection of robustly tested exercises, adds value to the coach's toolkit. The intention of Positive Psychology is to bring a balance to the science of human experience from suffering to optimal living. Positive Psychology Coaching shines a light on what is working well for the client and enhances performance.

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