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## The Positive Psychology Approach to Coaching

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Positive psychology coaching (PPC) is a scientifically-rooted approach to helping clients increase well-being, enhance and apply strengths, improve performance and achieve valued goals. At the core of PPC is a belief in the power of science to elucidate the best approaches for positively transforming clients' lives. The PPC orientation suggests that the coach view the client as 'whole' and that the coach focus on strengths, positive behaviours and purpose. These, in turn, are used as building blocks and leverage points for coachee development and performance improvement. The positive psychology movement has developed the theoretical and research foundations for PPC and provided an arsenal of models and interventions that are invaluable for coaching practice. The present chapter is designed to provide an applicable overview of PPC and to help coaches find specific ways in which PPC can be utilized to optimize the effectiveness of their coaching practices.

Positive psychology arose largely from a shift in the interests of many academic psychologists. Before the recent shift within the field of psychology, most psychologists focused on ridding the world of mental illness, while paying little attention to the enhancement of positive mental health. Although some psychologists researched well-being before the official launch of positive psychology in 1998, these early investigations pale in comparison to the 2000 articles, chapters and books that are now published annually on positive psychology (Diener, 2007).

Both positive psychology and coaching philosophy are inconsistent with interventions that are disproportionately or inappropriately driven by pathology-focused medical models. Linley and Harrington (2005) note that coaching involves a focus on the positive aspects of human

nature, and on inspiring growth and change. Gable and Haidt (2005) suggest that ‘positive psychology is the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions’. This definition encompasses much of what one would hope to observe in any coaching engagement. Indeed, coaching has been described as a ‘natural home’ for positive psychology, suggesting that coaching is an ideal vehicle through which the science of positive psychology can be applied.

With its origins in academia, it is not surprising that the scholar–practitioner model has been implicitly integrated into PPC (Grant, 2006). A recent definition of coaching psychology suggests that it is ‘grounded in established adult learning or psychological approaches’ (Palmer & Whybrow, 2005), alluding to the scientific underpinnings that are becoming an increasingly integral part of coaching practice. Positive psychology coaches attempt to weave the ‘straw’ of research into the ‘gold’ of artful coaching.

PPC is deeply influenced by a number of psychological paradigms. For example, it has a great deal in common with humanistic psychology. Both orientations focus on developing talents, building self-efficacy and moving individuals toward self-actualizing goals.

The cognitive-behavioural model currently influences PPC far more than psychoanalytic perspectives. This may reflect the academic origins of positive psychology and the shift from psychoanalytic to cognitive-behavioural approaches that has occurred in academia during the past few decades.

This chapter explores the processes and tools of PPC. It describes positive psychology theories, and explores how they can impact the approach taken toward the client, the issues focused upon and the co-construction of coaching relationships. Specific interventions are discussed, with an eye toward the kinds of goals that clients bring to their sessions. In this way, we explore how positive psychology can inform the process as well as the content of coaching.

## **DISTINCTIVE FEATURES**

### ***Coaching for change, positive emotions and strengths***

Before describing the goals and tasks of PPC, it is helpful to explore the importance of interventions designed to increase well-being. We now know that we can reliably increase life satisfaction and other measures of psychological well-being (Boniwell, 2008; Kauffman, 2006; Seligman, Rashid, & Parks, 2006; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005), and that interventions designed to do so may provide measurable benefits that extend far beyond simply ‘feeling good’. A recent meta-analysis of more than 350 studies indicates that, although ‘feeling good’ is a temporary experience, positive emotion can help build enduring personal resources. Positive emotions enhance cognitive, affective and physical resilience, and broaden our repertoire of thoughts and behaviours (Fredrickson, 2001). Hundreds of studies have reported associations between positive emotion and tangible outcomes such as higher wages, customer satisfaction, creativity, big-picture thinking, physical health, quicker cardiovascular recovery and work engagement (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005).

These benefits may give rise to a frequently-observed positive upward spiral. The increased positive affect that clients tend to experience often leads to a broadening and building of their thought–action repertoires. This fosters big-picture thinking and creativity, and gives clients access to a wider range of choices. These benefits may then help clients achieve goals, overcome challenges and perform more effectively, which may in turn boost positive affect, inciting the next iteration of the upward spiral toward improved performance and life satisfaction.

In addition to promoting positive affect, another significant goal of PPC is *directed purposeful change*. This is facilitated in part by employing successful transition models. All significant models of change in human behaviour distinguish between several stages, including pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance (Prochaska, Velicier, Rossi, & Goldstein, 1994). The coach assists the coachee through the change process, providing challenges and support that are appropriate for the coachee's current stage of change. As we will see below, interventions based on hope psychology provide important insights for facilitating change. Here we emphasize that focusing on what is 'right' with a person reduces resistance throughout the change process. Applying positive psychology interventions to promote well-being, helping clients achieve the tangible benefits of well-being and facilitating lasting change, are some of the many goals of PPC.

Perhaps the most ambitious positive psychology initiative has been the development of the *Values in Action Institute Inventory of Strengths* (VIA-IS) (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), a carefully developed classification of character strengths. After consulting with numerous experts, Peterson and colleagues identified 24 strengths of character that are valued by most of the world's cultures. These qualities include critical thinking, humour, spirituality, hope and many others. The VIA-IS is a 240-item self-report questionnaire that assesses these character strengths, each categorized within six virtues (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005). Virtues are defined as 'the core characteristics valued by moral philosophers and religious thinkers', while character strengths are 'the psychological ingredients' – i.e., processes or mechanisms – that define the virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The five highest strengths are often referred to as 'signature strengths', which are celebrated and exercised frequently. The VIA survey is available free of charge online ([www.AuthenticHappiness.org](http://www.AuthenticHappiness.org)) and provides a list of top strengths.

The following exemplifies how positive psychology tools like the VIA can be integrated into coaching models in common use. Many coaches use the 'GROW' model as a way to structure the coaching session. This model incorporates the coachee's *goals*; the *reality* of the coachee's current circumstances, resources and obstacles; the *options* available for moving toward a goal; and the *will/way forward*, that is, the personal importance of a goal that ignites the coachee's motivation and the specific action steps needed for goal achievement (Whitmore, 2002).

The VIA has facilitated a new approach to this process. One frequently used PPC exercise involves finding ways in which coachees can apply their strengths to achieve desired outcomes. The coach might describe the process to the client using an image similar to the following: 'Visualize yourself on one side of a gap, with the goal on the other side. Now, let's construct bridges over that gap. Let's consider your top five strengths and see how each one can be used

to connect you to what you truly want to be'. If the client's top strength is curiosity, we would begin there. For example, we might encourage a CEO to use his or her creativity to improve products that have been profitable in the past. The coach and coachee then develop an action plan, a road map for traversing the aforementioned bridge. The coachee is then asked to create another bridge based on his or her second-highest strength and to repeat the process until five bridges have been developed. This step-by-step process integrates the VIA with established coaching approaches for translating brainstorming into action. This approach can easily be translated into an unstructured, emergent process. When coaching in the 'options' phase, for example, the coach might use knowledge of strengths to ask powerful and inspirational questions that reveal a broader range of choices. Such questions can be as simple as: 'how can you use your strengths in this situation?'

### ***Essential processes and the coaching relationship***

The following section explores how a positive psychological orientation influences assessment, coach expectations and the coaching relationship.

*Assessment.* PPC offers a clear and articulate assessment of the coachee's strengths, orientation toward well-being, life satisfaction and potential routes to peak performance. There is a wide array of empirically supported assessments available, some of which have been tested on nearly 1,000,000 participants. These include the VIA inventory, the 'satisfaction with life scale', the 'meaning in life questionnaire' and many others. Additional measures are available for the assessment of optimism, hope, career self-efficacy, positive emotion and many other positive constructs (Lopez & Snyder, 2003). They are helpful with a wide range of clients, from those whose performance is merely adequate to those who have achieved the highest levels of performance.

*Expectations and coaching orientation.* It is known that an instructor's expectations of a student powerfully affect student performance. Teachers who genuinely believe that their students have great potential are more likely to have students who perform well on objective measures of academic success (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Similarly, a body of research on 'affective priming', suggests that expectation has a tremendous impact on client functioning. When people are informed that they or their group generally do poorly on a task, their performance declines. In contrast, groups or individuals who are told that they perform well tend to do better than those who expect themselves to do poorly (Cooperrider, Whitney, Stavros, & Fry, 2003). Positive psychology coaches seek to harness this 'Positive Pygmalion' effect; it is crucial that coaches identify reasons to genuinely believe in the potential of their clients.

*The coaching relationship.* There are several studies now conducted within the coaching context (De Haan, 2008; Gyllensten and Palmer, 2007; O'Broin and Palmer, 2010). that confirm the psychotherapy research (e.g. Horvath & Bedi, 2002) clearly suggesting that the relationship is a key ingredient in successful outcomes A positive psychological approach is highly congruent with the Co-active Coaching model proposed by Whitworth, Kimsey-House and Sandahl (1998). They emphasize an egalitarian approach in which coaches engage in active listening, powerful questioning, designing actions, goal setting and managing accountability.

Another important role of the coaching relationship is achieving an optimal balance between positive and negative. It is important to note that, contrary to misperceptions, positive psychologists do not endorse unbridled positivism. The field advocates a shift to a greater focus on the positive, but does not ignore negative issues or emotions that warrant attention. This approach is based in part on a solid foundation of research. Fredrickson and Losada (2005) have demonstrated that high performing teams are characterized by a ratio of positive to negative emotions of approximately three (positives) to one (negative). Negative emotions encountered in such teams include criticism, anger and anxiety. PPC involves a coaching relationship in which there is a productive ratio of positive to negative emotions and interactions; coaching relationships should not, by any means, be relentlessly positive. The evidence suggests, in fact, that ratios of positive to negative exceeding 11:1 give rise to performance that is just as poor as the functioning associated with excess negativity (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). When investigating this phenomenon, performance of businesses was operationalized to include parameters such as customer satisfaction, profitability and team members' performance reviews. PPC puts this research into practice by structuring the coaching encounter as an active synthesis of support and challenge, addressing both positive and negative emotion and experience.

## METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

The following section provides a brief description of several evidence-based interventions that are often used in PPC. Originally validated as stand-alone exercises to be completed without the help of a coach, in practice, however, these tools are often offered as part of the ongoing coaching process, integrated into powerful combinations of interventions (Kauffman, 2006).

*Three good things.* One of the most powerful and well-studied of all positive psychology interventions, it is also one of the simplest. The instructions are straightforward. Every night, just before going to sleep, write down three things that went well during the day. This deceptively simple exercise has been shown to increase happiness and decrease depressive symptoms for at least six months (Seligman et al., 2005). The exercise may feel too simple-minded to be useful, but it is important to remember that studies have clearly demonstrated the remarkable effectiveness of this simple intervention.

Variants of this exercise have also been scientifically investigated, always with promising results. If the coachee feels that a meeting has been disastrous, for example, the coach might simply ask the coachee to name three things that went well with their project today. The coach might then ask what the client did to make those positive things happen. By no means would the coach minimize negative aspects of the meeting; he or she would simply try to cultivate a ratio of positivity to negativity that is likely to promote success. Another variant is useful when unfinished business causes people to lose sleep. Rather than ruminating about problems that have arisen or may arise, it is useful to ask, 'When was I at my best today?' Clients often remember positive events that they would otherwise have overlooked (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2004).

*Three question process.* This exercise is a modification of the Meaning, Pleasure, Strengths (MPS) Process, proposed by Tal Ben-Shahar in his book *Happier*. In a nutshell, it involves asking a coachee three questions:

- What gives you meaning?
- What gives you pleasure?
- What engages you?

These are straightforward questions, that, however, one does not pose oneself often. It is important to encourage your client to take some time reflecting on these questions and avoid jumping to conclusions too fast. The next step involves discovering where and how the answers your coachee comes up with overlap. What activities would bring them meaning, engagement and pleasure? How can they further use the three question process to make important decisions in their lives?

*Gratitude visit.* For many people, the gratitude visit exercise can be genuinely ‘life changing’. Instructions for this exercise are as follows. Think of a person to whom you feel gratitude for something he or she has done in the past. Draft a concrete and well-written letter to this person, describing what the person did and how it affected your life. Next, call this ‘gratitude recipient’ and arrange to meet with him/her. When you meet, read your letter aloud. Both individuals generally find this experience to be extremely meaningful (Seligman, 2002). This exercise can also be adapted for the work setting. If a manager is angry at an employee and feels an impulse to counterproductively chastise the employee, then it may be helpful for the manager to identify things the employee has done that inspire feelings of gratitude. Doing so may reveal a more balanced picture of the individual in question, defuse anger and set the stage for faster resolution of the problem. Both the preparation and feedback on this exercise should be addressed within the coaching session.

*Savouring.* Noticing and savouring life’s pleasures, both those that are subtle and those that are spectacular, can powerfully enhance well-being. According to Bryant and Veroff (2007), ‘people have capacities to attend, appreciate, and enhance the positive experiences in their lives’. Coaches can encourage clients to find specific positive experiences in their daily lives, and focus intentionally on these experiences. This technique might be considered a specific type of mindfulness skill and is an excellent way to help busy executives slow down and manage stress. Research has shown that positive emotions arising from this technique can buffer one from stress and lead to quicker cardiovascular recovery after difficult experiences (Fredrickson, 2006; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004).

*Best possible future self.* This exercise is similar to the coaching technique of ‘futuring’ and is similar in spirit to the ‘miracle question’. Coachees are asked to imagine that everything has gone the way they wanted and that all goals have been realized. They are asked to vividly imagine this future. Coachees can also do this as homework, typically during a period of approximately four weeks, bringing the results back to the session. This exercise enhances optimism and helps elucidate priorities and goals. It is hardly surprising that an increase in happiness usually follows from this exercise.

*Using your strengths in a new way.* This exercise involves choosing a top strength and applying it in a new way, every day, for one week. On the first day, the client simply identifies situations in which signature strengths are already in action. Clients then brainstorm new ideas, identifying novel approaches to applying their strengths (see case example of Antonia, described below). Clients may also find it helpful to identify ways in which they can apply their strengths to improve or make the most of a trying situation. To ameliorate public speaking anxiety, for example, clients might apply their gratitude, love of learning, or capacity to love. This may help them focus on their core strengths or values, and find the energy and resolve necessary to move forward effectively.

Applying strengths proved invaluable for Antonia, an executive coach, who referred frequently to other coaches. Unfortunately, these referrals were not reciprocated and Antonia could not afford to lose business. Her top strengths were teamwork and authenticity. When being coached herself, Antonia was challenged with the following questions: ‘You use your teamwork to serve others, but why not also apply your teamwork strength to help those who count on you for support?’; ‘What about “Team Antonia?”; How can you use this strength on behalf of the people to whom you are most responsible, including yourself?’

As a reflexive giver, Antonia demonstrated a novel application of her teamwork strength. She needed a few strong reflections and repeated exploration of this positive challenge, as she defaulted to helping others at her own expense. However, because we were harnessing an established strength, this orientation soon led to a cascade of new possibilities that she could contemplate. She realized that she was largely the author of her own dilemma. As a result, Antonia was better able to find ways in which she could apply her strength of authenticity to attract more clients. This process could then be integrated into the GROW model for translating insight into action and accountability.

## APPLICATION

The following describes how positive psychology theories and tools may be particularly useful when applied within specific coaching genres such as life coaching, performance coaching, executive coaching and team coaching.

### *Life coaching*

Empirically-validated positive psychology interventions can be invaluable in the context of life coaching. The approaches and research of self-determination theory (SDT) and self-concordance theories (SCTs) are particularly informative. SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) postulates the existence of three inherent universal needs, or basic psychological nutrients.

Autonomy: the need to choose what one is doing, being an agent of one’s own life

Competence: the need to feel confident in doing what one is doing

Relatedness: the need to have human connections that are close and secure, while still respecting autonomy and facilitating competence.

SDT asserts that satisfaction of these needs enhances motivation and well-being, and that deficiencies of these needs undermine effective functioning and well-being. These needs, moreover, may inspire progression from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation, thus enabling individuals to feel more self-determined. Self-determination, in turn, is associated with higher self-esteem, improved weight loss management, success in alcohol treatment programmes, work enjoyment and other positive outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

PPC applies SDT in many ways. The coach supports the client's autonomy by enabling clients to make their own decisions. Coaches may also help clients achieve or enhance competencies by guiding them through the applications of strengths, and by identifying evidence supporting the use of these strengths. Finally, relatedness is encouraged when the coach expresses empathy, demonstrates understanding and finds ways to help clients enhance their existing relationships. Interventions such as the 'random acts of kindness' technique (Lyubomirsky, 2008) are also frequently used, in part to help satisfy the client's relatedness needs.

SCT, like SDT, is applied frequently in the context of life coaching. The coach helps the client ensure that his/her goals are self-concordant (i.e., based on fundamental human needs), inspired by lifelong passions and consistent with core values. Both working toward and achieving these goals is likely to enhance well-being.

### ***Skills and performance coaching***

Many PPC theories and tools can be useful in the context of skill and performance coaching. These include theories of flow and peak performance states, theories of explanatory style, interventions such as the 'best possible future self' exercise and many others. For the present discussion, we focus on an area of positive psychology that is particularly important for skill and performance coaching: cognitive hope theory.

Contrary to common misconceptions, hope is more than 'wishful thinking'. Rick Snyder and Shane Lopez, the leading researchers on hope theory, have carefully elucidated and defined the construct of hope. According to this cognitive theory of hope, the construct is comprised of two aspects: 'waypower' and 'willpower'. Waypower is a process that involves identifying goals and finding ways to achieve goals despite obstacles. Willpower involves a general belief in one's own ability to achieve goals (i.e., 'agency beliefs') (Snyder et al., 1991). Pathways thinking (i.e., generating several feasible routes toward a goal) is crucial; the first pathway toward a goal that is considered or attempted may not be the best path available. If the primary pathway is unavailable, a hopeful person will find an alternate route (Snyder, 2003).

Research suggests that a hopeful disposition yields many benefits. Hope inhibits handicapping and self-deprecatory thoughts, as well as negative emotions. Hopeful people focus more on disease prevention and hopeful athletes exhibit better athletic performance. In fact, up to 56% of the variance in females' athletic success can be attributed to hope (Curry, Snyder, Cook, Ruby, & Rehm, 1997). Hope may also promote academic achievement and is one of the strongest predictors of overcoming adversity (Snyder, Rand, & Sigmon, 2002).



PPC builds on both aspects of hope, in order to help clients improve their performance. During coaching sessions, agency and pathways thinking are often described as WILL power and WAY power. Both are essential for successful performance. Self-efficacy, which is very similar to agency thinking, is crucial for behaviour change; self-efficacious individuals are more likely to make an initial decision to change, generally devote greater effort to achieving change and persevere longer in the face of adversity (Bandura, 1994). While many coaches address agency beliefs in a way that is consistent with research literature, few take full advantage of this rich body of scientific findings. We know, for example, that an individual's prior successes are the most powerful source of self-efficacy, followed by vicarious experiences (e.g., observing the success of another person whom you believe has similar skills). Maddux (2002) suggests that 'imaginal' experiences (e.g., imagining ourselves or others behaving effectively in hypothetical situations) can also boost self-efficacy. Verbally persuading individuals of their efficacy, in contrast, is only occasionally successful (Bandura, 1994).

### ***Executive coaching***

According to positive psychology research, top performers have very specific goal setting habits. It is often assumed that these individuals set high goals, while low achievers set low goals. However, evidence suggests that top achievers know their capabilities and set goals that are only slightly above their current performance levels (Latham, 2000). Conversely, low achievers are unaware of their ability levels and often set goals that are unrealistically ambitious. Top achievers also set goals based on their strengths, building their personal and professional lives on these personal assets. They learn to recognize and develop their talents, find roles that suit them best and creatively invent ways to apply their talents and strengths when necessary.

Assessing and applying strengths can serve many purposes beyond enhancing well-being. Knowledge of strengths can be used to re-craft jobs, negotiate development challenges, construct teams on the basis of complementary strengths profiles and build better relationships with colleagues and superiors. These types of applications often play a central role in executive coaching.

Importantly, some of the concepts in PPC may need re-branding when applied to the executive context so to speak the language of the client. For example, when introducing the notion of strengths, it might be more helpful to talk about engagement. The impact of positive emotions can be introduced in terms of increased productivity, whilst development of happiness may be positioned as work-life balance.

### ***Team coaching***

PPC also lends itself well to team coaching for businesses and organizations. One development in positive psychology is the study of organizational dynamics that produce exceptional outcomes. Cameron, Dutton and Quinn (2003) have proposed that this process depends largely on positive emotions that are contagious and that broaden our repertoires of thoughts and

behaviours (Fredrickson, 2003). They assert that positive emotions give rise to a wide range of desirable organizational behaviours, such as creativity, tolerance of failure and transformational leadership. These outcomes, in turn, promote further positive emotions. PPC can be used to help teams capitalize on this knowledge of positive group dynamics. Positive psychology coaches help teams identify and build on positive emotions through investment in high-quality connections and relationships (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003), random acts of kindness (Lyubomirsky, 2008) and other strategies.

## EVALUATION

Positive psychology and PPC, in contrast to traditional approaches, explicitly focus on character strengths, well-being and the things that make life worth living. Coaching and positive psychology are natural allies in their explicit concern with enhancement of optimal functioning and well-being, their challenge of traditional assumptions about human nature and their use of a strengths-based approach to performance improvement. As an applied tradition, PPC serves a dual function. On the one hand, it provides a context in which the scholarly ideas of positive psychology can be applied and evaluated. On the other hand, it enables practitioners to understand how the sound base of theory and research provided by positive psychology can give rise to successful intervention and change.

Some may wonder if the benefits of PPC arise simply from being reassuring, caring and kind to clients. These are certainly important aspects of any therapeutic relationship, including PPC, but PPC cannot be reduced to these relatively 'non-specific' factors. PPC is a complex confluence of science and art. Coaches utilize a variety of highly developed and evidence-based coaching tools to help clients achieve optimal performance.

When focusing on the positive, the potential exists for lack of balance; insufficient attention may be devoted to negativity, or to deeper, underlying issues (Popovic & Boniwell, 2007). One of the greatest emotions scholars, Richard Lazarus (2003: 94), challenges the implicit message of separation between positive and negative, arguing that they are two sides of the same coin: 'God needs Satan and vice versa. One would not exist without the other. We need the bad, which is part of life, to fully appreciate the good. Any time you narrow the focus of attention too much to one side or another, you are in danger of losing perspective'. The realities of life and coaching most often fall between positive and negative extremes. If the psychology of the past made the major mistake of focusing on the negative – often at the expense of the positive – is positive psychology not making the same mistake by allowing the pendulum to swing in the opposite direction? An informed PPC practitioner can draw on work in post-traumatic growth and resilience (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) as well as meaning and benefit-finding (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002), but this may not be enough to equilibrate the aforementioned pendulum to a position along the positive–negative spectrum that is optimal for a given client.

Finally, positive psychology has been criticized for adopting an exclusive focus on the individual and thereby placing responsibility for happiness squarely at the individual level (Held, 1999). This may sound noble, but it may also give rise to an unintended conclusion: victims of

unfortunate circumstances can be blamed for their own misery. Instead of acknowledging the socioeconomic forces that may have contributed to an individual's psychological struggles, we may implicitly and unintentionally highlight an individual's failures to exhibit the necessary optimism, strength, virtue and willpower to be happy despite challenges. Held (1999: 980) writes:

In my own experiences as ... a clinical psychologist, I have repeatedly noticed that some people seem to feel guilty, defective, or both when they can't feel good. They sometimes apologize for not being able to smile in the face of adversity, as if they were committing an act of treason by feeling and acting unhappy.

This appears to reflect an unspoken cultural mandate, which holds that unhappiness is intolerable and should therefore be abolished. The mandate may paradoxically decrease subjective well-being, the very condition it is designed to enhance. For some people who face trying circumstances, it may be possible to apply the tools of positive psychology in order to improve psychological well-being. For others, doing so is simply infeasible. It is crucial that coaches do not imply, even unintentionally, any culpability in those whose circumstances have made it difficult to achieve lasting happiness.

In conclusion, we have argued that PPC is a constructive coaching tradition that combines the very essence of coaching with a robust theoretical and empirical base. As coaches begin to apply the approach they may find that the dichotomy between positive and negative is somewhat misleading; it is rare for coaches to focus exclusively on either positive or negative issues. We call for a balanced approach to PPC that moves away from ideological biases on either side, an approach that combines positive psychological science with coaching intuition to positively transform the lives of coaching clients.

## FURTHER READING

- Biswas-Diener, R. (2006). *Practicing positive psychology coaching*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons (The only useful manual of PPC offers insightful exercises to help practitioners develop an experiential understanding of positive psychology principles.)
- Boniwell, I. (2012). *Positive psychology in a nutshell*. Maidenhead: The Open University Press. (Currently in its third edition, this balanced introduction to positive psychology provides a thorough and engaging overview of the field.)
- David, S., Boniwell, I., & Ayers, A. (2013). *Oxford handbook of happiness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (A major up-to-date academic volume on positive psychology benefiting from an excellent 'applications' section, where coaches would find many useful tools and suggestions for practice.)
- Haidt, J. (2005). *The happiness hypothesis: Finding modern truth in ancient wisdom*. New York: Basic Books. (An enjoyable and extremely well-written introduction to the positive psychology field that interweaves positive psychology theory with ancient wisdom.)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- In what way can coaches usefully incorporate positive psychology into their practice?
- How can a business coach frame the validated positive psychology interventions in a context that is appropriate for a corporate client?
- What is new in positive psychology for the experienced coach?
- What are the main limitations of a paradigm focusing exclusively on the 'positive'?

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