

7 WAYS TO APPLY POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY



Learn practical, proven strategies to live a happier, more engaged and more meaningful life.



Introduction

We all want to live happier, more engaging and more meaningful lives.

The science of positive psychology contributes new insights and proven strategies to increase wellbeing in individuals, workplaces and communities.

After years classifying and repairing the worst of human experience, positive psychology emerged to help us flourish and learn from the best. This rich and varied field now spans many areas, building on philosophies and practices from Aristotle to Maslow.

This eBook introduces you to some of the most practical and research-backed ways to apply positive psychology to increase happiness, wellbeing and effectiveness – in life, at work, at home and with the people you care for, help and lead.

You will learn:

- How to maximise the power of positivity to create sustainable pathways to happiness and success.
- Seven positive psychology practices - from optimism to mindfulness.
- Tips to apply these practices at work, at home and when helping people.

We look forward to inspiring you and others to live a happier, more engaged and fulfilling life!

The Langley Group team



"[Positive Psychology is] the scientific study of positive human functioning and flourishing on multiple levels."

Martin Seligman & Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

Positive psychology

Spearheaded by Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in 1998, positive psychology focuses on exploring and expanding what makes life worthwhile, productive and fulfilling, in all its complexity.

Positive psychology research shows happiness leads to success in nearly every life domain, from health and longevity to workplace performance, creativity and relationships. This is the finding of a landmark meta-study by leading positive psychologists Sonja Lyubomirsky, Laura King and Ed Diener, who brought together over 200 studies conducted on 275,000 people worldwide.

They found happier people – those with higher levels of wellbeing – are:

Healthier

Live longer

Less accident prone

More successful

More productive

More creative

Faster thinking

Harder-working

Higher earning

More caring and altruistic

More socially engaged

Luckier





7 POSITIVE PRACTICES

1

Positive emotion

Generating positive emotions helps broaden and build our resources and moves us toward greater wellbeing.

2

Mindset

Adopting a positive attitude and Growth Mindset enhances learning and opens our mind to new ways to raise happiness levels.

3

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the opposite of mindlessness. Learning to be mindful allows us to stay present in the moment.

4

Resilience

Resilience is the capacity to withstand and adapt to the challenges life throws us. There are many ways to build resilience.

5

Optimism

Optimism is a tendency to expect the best possible outcomes. We can learn strategies to be more optimistic.

6

Gratitude

Practicing gratitude makes us aware of the good things that happen and connects us to a sense of life's wonder.

7

Strengths

When we use our strengths, we enjoy what we are doing, do it better, and feel we are working toward our potential.



“Positivity puts the brakes on negativity. In a heartbeat, negativity can spike your blood pressure, positivity can calm it. Positivity works like a reset button.”

Barbara Fredrickson

POSITIVE EMOTION

Positive emotions are one of the hallmarks of happiness and wellbeing. When we feel good, we are more able to perform at our best.

Positive emotions allow us to think more flexibly and creatively. We come up with more ideas and they tend to be better quality.

They also make us more willing to try new strategies and reach out to others, according to Barbara Fredrickson, who developed the Broaden and Build Theory.

The psychological and social resources we build when we experience positive emotions buffer life's challenges, keep us optimistic and curious about the future, and propel us in an upward spiral of happiness and wellbeing.

"Positivity transforms us for the better," says Fredrickson. "By opening our hearts and minds positive emotions allow us to discover and build new skills, new ties, new knowledge and new ways of being."

High-energy emotions like excitement, zest and enthusiasm shift our mood and our physiology fast. Laughter is one of the quickest ways you can activate the healing effect of positive emotion. Just a few minutes of laughter a day can reduce stress and improve your heart rate, muscle activity, digestion and immune system.

Like laughter, positive emotions are contagious. Maximise fun moments to feel happier and healthier. Better still, share them with others to create an upward spiral of positivity that sustains everyone.

Focus on increasing the duration and intensity of your emotional peaks and shortening the duration and intensity of your lows. Do this in every domain of your life.



“I change myself,
I change my world.”

M. K Gandhi

MINDSET

Our attitude influences the way we respond, our impact on others and our happiness level. The more we recognise our power to make conscious positive choices, the more difference we can make to our own and other people's wellbeing.

The attitudes that make up our mindset aren't as set as we think, according to Carol Dweck, a Stanford University professor who discovered the concept of Growth Mindset.

People with a Fixed Mindset believe their basic qualities, like intelligence or talent, are static traits, and so don't spend time developing them. People with a Growth Mindset see themselves as a work in progress. They believe they can nurture their abilities through dedication and hard work. Their love of learning makes them more motivated, resilient and successful.

To practice Growth Mindset emphasise what you are learning each time you try something new. Focus on the progress you are making toward a goal, rather than what will happen if you don't get there. Challenge self-limiting assumptions.

So how much potential do we have to change if we set our minds to it? Research by Sonja Lyubomirsky and her colleagues and their concept of a Happiness Pie gives us a clue.

They discovered that about 50% of the differences between people's happiness levels can be explained by genetically determined set points. A further 10% is linked to your circumstances. Whether you are rich or poor, married or divorced, healthy or unhealthy, environmental factors account for a portion of your happiness overall. The remaining 40% is influenced by intentional activities. Some of these can improve your circumstances.

This means we can increase or decrease almost half of our happiness level through our choices and mindset. The tools in this ebook are designed to widen your options and capacity for happiness.



“Mental activities like meditation
can actually change the brain.”

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness involves single pointedly resting our awareness in one place for an extended period without being distracted.

Ellen Langer, a mindfulness expert and early positive psychology researcher, defines mindfulness as “the process of actively noticing new things.” She believes it’s the opposite of mindlessness, drawing us into the present. “It’s the essence of engagement. It’s energy-begetting, not energy-consuming.”

When we approach the world with mindful awareness we can more accurately assess and respond to situations and people. By noticing and separating ourselves from old beliefs and anxieties we become more accepting of ourselves and others.

A mindful state has three qualities:

- Relaxation – settling the body in its natural state.
- Stillness – avoiding movement to quiet the mind.
- Clarity – careful, focused attention on the mind itself moment by moment.

Mindfulness is a skill that takes time to learn and discipline to practice, yet it does not take long to make significant progress and the benefits are immediate. While there are many mindfulness practices such as meditation and yoga, it’s not that hard to include mindfulness in our own day-to-day, routine-filled lifestyles. We just need to notice what’s going on and savour our experiences with attention and awareness.



“If we don’t allow ourselves to experience joy and love, we will definitely miss out on filling our reservoir with what we need when...hard things happen.”

Brené Brown

RESILIENCE

Resilience is the capacity to withstand and adapt to the challenges life throws us. It is a skill anyone can learn, to survive and to thrive.

Resilient people fulfill their potential despite, and sometimes even because of, adversity, and tend to see challenges as opportunities for growth and renewal.

Karen Reivich and Andrew Shatte identify four ways people use resilience: to overcome the difficult circumstances or negative consequences of childhood, to steer through daily stressors, to bounce back from setbacks, and to reach out to pursue new goals and a stronger sense of self. Reaching out allows us to move past our urge to protect ourselves and open up to new experiences and challenges.

Resilience can be practiced through any strategy that helps you manage your emotions or dispute negative thoughts, advises Sue Langley. She recommends cultivating a range of tactics.

“Brain science shows that our emotions, brain and body are intricately linked. We can change the way we feel by adjusting how we think or hold our body.”

For example, exercise or deep breathing techniques will help you get oxygen to your body and brain and shift your emotional state. Get out into nature or change your environment when you are feeling stressed. Even a simple action like tidying your desk can create enough space to adjust and choose the best way to respond to situations rather than letting our emotional reactions dictate our behaviour.

As we’ve seen, positive emotions enhance our social resources. The more laughter, love and good feelings we experience and share with family, colleagues and friends, the more we expand our ability to shift negative emotions and bounce back.

Give someone you care about a hug. Smile at a stranger. These are great ways to build resilience daily.

Learn how to be more intelligent with emotions in yourself and others.



“Optimism is a tendency to expect the best possible outcome or dwell on the most hopeful aspects of a situation.”

Martin Seligman

OPTIMISM

If we are optimistic we tend to see more solutions. We tend to be more successful as we believe they will work. We stay motivated.

Blind optimism or rose-coloured glasses is not what we mean. Flexible, realistic optimism is about seeing the rocks in the road as well as a path through them. It is about the way we explain our experience, which is influenced by the way we feel and can change day to day.

Think about optimism and pessimism as two ends of a spectrum. If today you feel down and worried, you may have a more pessimistic explanatory style. If tomorrow you feel positive and upbeat, you may view the same situation with a more optimistic explanatory style.

Martin Seligman, one of the fathers of positive psychology, explains that we see the world through three lenses: personal, permanent and pervasive. When a problem occurs, an optimistic thinker believes they are not completely at fault and circumstances may have played a part; the situation is fleeting and

changeable, and the problem will not affect their whole life. At the same time, setbacks can trigger pessimistic thinking, quickly turning negative thoughts into beliefs that influence our reactions.

Break the cycle by distracting yourself and focusing on something else. A physical ritual or visual reminder can help you learn an optimistic habit. For example, if you want to remember to smile more, keep a note on your bathroom mirror or buy a bracelet or something that when you see it will remind you of your commitment to your positive behaviour.

Challenge negative thoughts and substitute alternative causes that are changeable, specific and impersonal. Think of all the positives in your life and remind yourself that bad things will pass. Cultivate positive beliefs that will expand your experience and set yourself up for greater success.



“Let us be grateful to the people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.”

Marcel Proust

GRATITUDE

Gratitude is the quality of being thankful, the readiness to show appreciation and return kindness. It makes us aware of the good things that happen and connects us to a sense of life's wonder.

There is no diminishing return for gratitude. Thanking others makes us more tolerant of differences, creating a sense of camaraderie and belonging.

Researchers also associate gratitude with psychological growth and a coping style known as positive interpretation. When we appreciate something it increases in value and we are more able to realise its full worth.

Ken Sheldon and Sonja Lyubomirsky found that when people with high levels of appreciation experience significant life changes they are more likely to value the experience and feel glad it happened. Continued appreciation of positive changes - a new romance, dream job or successful weight loss - counteracts the natural tendency of humans to adapt and revert back to previous levels of happiness.

Rather than taking happy events and successes for granted, continuing to remind ourselves why they made us feel good in the first place makes us happier for longer.

All this shows why gratitude is one of the most powerful antidotes to negative emotion and depression. Studies show that when people write regularly about the things they are grateful for, their mood, coping behaviour and even physical health improves.

Start a weekly gratitude journal. You can also keep a checklist in your mind -as long as you do it mindfully. The most important thing is to make this activity meaningful, not something you do because you have to. You are also training your brain to notice positive experiences that happen to you, increasing your natural positivity.



"Strengths energise people,
enabling them to be at their best."

Alex Linley

STRENGTHS

When we use our strengths, we enjoy what we are doing, do it better, and feel we are working toward our potential.

Alex Linley defines a strength as “a pre-existing capacity for a particular way of behaving, thinking or feeling that is authentic and energising to the user, and enables optimal functioning, development and performance.” In other words, our strengths allow us to be our best self.

Research shows that when people use their strengths they feel happier and more confident, are less stressed, more resilient, and more engaged in their self-development. When combining our strengths with others and assisting them to use theirs, we build stronger and more co-operative relationships, enabling greater collaboration and teamwork.

Many people don't know their strengths and are not sure how to leverage them. Linley has some great tips to get to know your strengths or spot them in others.

- **Energy.** What activities give you an energetic buzz?
- **Authenticity.** When do you feel most like the “real you”?
- **Ease.** What activities come naturally to you? What do you excel at, sometimes without even trying?
- **Attention.** Where do you focus? These activities may play to your strengths.
- **Rapid learning.** What have you picked up quickly, almost effortlessly?
- **Motivation.** What activities do you do simply for the love of doing them?
- **Voice.** A shift in passion, energy and engagement probably means you're talking about a strength.
- **Words and phrases.** When you're saying “I love to...” or “It's just great when...,” a strength is likely involved.
- **'To do' lists.** Things that never make it to your 'to do' list are often those you never need to be asked twice to do.

You can get an accurate understanding of your strengths by taking the [Strengths Profile](#).



Applying positive
psychology
at work

Positive emotions spread quickly in organisations and teams. Bringing more positive emotions into your day-to-day work life will help you develop the resources and skills to thrive and be a positive leader. It also helps create a positive climate that increases performance, engagement, wellbeing – and business results.

Start a team meeting by asking everyone to share one really good thing that happened recently. It's a great way to get people in a positive mood – and get to know them better. People are also more ready to contribute ideas.

Create a place to post and share your gratitude thoughts with your team. A gratitude board is an excellent way to start or end the day. People tend to carry home positive thoughts and emotions that counteract the stress of a busy working day. Each Monday wipe the board clean and start with a fresh lot of gratitude! A gratitude email circular is another way to inspire yourself and your team.

Remember to thank and express appreciation to your team. Notice what they do well – and the strengths they are using and developing that enable them to deliver great value and contribute to the success of the team.

Hint

In meetings, focus on increasing the ratio of positive to negative comments.

A 5:1 ratio is a good benchmark.




Applying positive
psychology
at home



Hint

Show gratitude and care for people with random acts of kindness - for your family, friends and total strangers.



Good relationships, a growth mindset and resilience skills are the building blocks on which flourishing futures are built, for ourselves, our families, our children and our communities.

Share three best things that happened each day with your loved ones and your kids. This ritual is great for family dinners, get-togethers and story time. Sue Langley and Janne Hardy wrote **The Scribbly Bark Tree and the Dragon**, an illustrated fable that engages children and adults in actively looking for, sharing and amplifying positive experiences. This book is available to purchase in the Langley Group online shop.

Kids are also really good at strengths spotting. Especially when they learn that each person has something good within them and a unique set of strengths they can grow over time. Calling attention to what is right, good and strong can also redirect kids toward positive behaviour when they get caught pointing out each others' weaknesses and mistakes.

The **VIA Survey for Children** is a reliable measure to identify strengths below the age of nine. You can also use fun games and simple tools like **Strengths Cards**, which are available from the Langley Group online shop.



Applying positive
psychology
to help people

If you are a coach, leader or trainer empowering people to be the best they can be, one of the most important positive practices you can apply is to look for what people do well and help them strengthen those capabilities.

Too often people focus on fixing weaknesses or “development areas”. While helping people design strategies to mitigate their weaknesses is important, they will perform far better and feel more motivated and fulfilled when learning to play to their strengths more effectively.

If you are a psychologist or health worker helping people cope with illhealth or overcome life’s challenges, connecting them to their strengths helps them build inner resources, positive self-image and wellbeing.

A strengths assessment tool such as **Strengths Profile** can give people a language and appreciation for their strengths.

In either case, the more you equip people with tools to generate positive emotion, create a growth mindset, practice mindfulness, increase resilience, learn optimism, express gratitude and develop strengths, the happier and more successful they will be.

Hint

Encourage people to partner with others with complementary strengths to maximise the benefits.

Learn more

1 Diploma of Positive Psychology & Wellbeing

Become a qualified positive psychology practitioner with the **Langley Group Institute's** 10653NAT Diploma of Positive Psychology & Wellbeing. This nationally-recognised course is designed for busy professionals such as coaches, psychologists, HR professionals, business leaders, teachers, health practitioners and anyone who wants to help individuals, organisations and communities to flourish. A unique opportunity to learn the science and practice of positive psychology and apply it in your work and life.

Visit www.langleygroupinstitute.com

2 Strengths Profile Assessment

Do you know your strengths and how to leverage and develop them? Take a Strengths Profile assessment for a comprehensive report debriefed with one of our qualified experts.

3 Strengths Profile Accreditation

Unlock strengths potential and performance in the people you coach, counsel and lead. Learn to use Strengths Profile, a world-leading strengths assessment and development tool based on the science and practice of positive psychology.

4 Emotional Intelligence for Leaders

Learn the art and science of emotional intelligence. This practical two-day programme is for leaders and anyone who wants to gain the in-depth knowledge and skills to use emotions intelligently to enhance self-awareness, resilience and leadership effectiveness.





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