Positive Psychology – what does it mean for coaching?

ICF-GTA Coaches
Fall Conference 2009
Lisa Sansom, LVS Consulting
A brief history of Positive Psychology

- Dr. Martin Seligman
- Learned Helplessness
- Optimism
  - Explanatory style
- IPPA
  - International Positive Psychology Association
  - Next World Congress in England, summer 2010
- MAPP
  - Masters in Applied Positive Psychology, U Penn
Positive Psychology

- Study of people at their best
- Science of what makes life worth living
- Flourishing
  - 51% by 2051
- Umbrella term for researchers
  - Psychologists
  - Neuroscientists
  - Funding attraction
- No claims to have invented the field
Overlaps and differences

- **Client is whole**
- **Future-oriented**
  - Pulled by future, not pushed by the past
- **Strengths-based**
- "Happiness"
  - Subjective well-being (SWB), flourishing
  - Fulfilment, meaning, contributions
- **Broad applications**
  - Personal, professional, organizational, relationships, cultural
- **Real-world applications**
One key difference

- Positive Psychology
  - Scientific
  - Research-based
    - ICF research portal = 7 articles
  - Empirical studies
    - ICF research portal = 4 case studies
New model of SWB

- Authentic Happiness = 3 pillars
  - Emotion, engagement, meaning

- New Seligman book (tentative title: Search for Well-Being) = 4 pillars
  - Positive emotion (includes engagement, aka “flow”)
  - Meaning
  - Positive Relationships
  - Positive Accomplishment

- Other considerations:
  - Positive organizations (education, military, politics)
  - Positive health (more than the absence of illness)
Why be “happy”?

- Happy people (high in SWB)
  - Live longer
  - Live healthier (fewer colds and other illnesses)
  - Faster recovery when sick
  - More friends (causal?)
  - Higher pay at work and more promotions
  - Better satisfaction with work
  - Higher quality relationships
  - Overcome challenges more easily
  - And other important findings…

- Happiness is a process, not an end goal
Positive Emotion (First pillar)

- PANAS scale
  - Positive Affect Negative Affect scale / schedule
  - Watson, Clark & Tellegen 1988
- Measures positive and negative emotion separately
Sample PANAS questions

- Indicate to what extent you feel this way right now (1-5 scale):

  Interested  Irritable
  Distressed   Alert
  Excited      Ashamed
  Upset        Inspired
  Strong       Nervous
  Guilty       Determined
  Scared       Attentive
  Hostile      Jittery
  Enthusiastic Active
  Proud        Afraid
PANAS findings and implications

- Positive Affect (PA) is not simply the absence of Negative Affect (NA)
- PA seems to be consistent for an individual across time and situation
  - More variable for some individuals than others, but this variability is also consistent
- People high in PA more likely to be married (and happily so) and to like their jobs
  - Chicken and egg issue
- People who describe themselves as religious or spiritual higher on PA
Genetics of happiness?

- According to twin studies, PA is heritable – influenced by genetics – but less so than intelligence
  - About 50% of your PA is heritable
    - But does not mean inevitable as genetic expressions can be changed
  - 10% is situational
  - 40% is entirely within your choice / control
    - This is what coaches are predominantly working with
    - Maybe reframing of situational too?
Flow / engagement

- Mihaly Czikszentmihalyi
- Flow = experience of working at full capacity
- Optimal balance between skill and challenge
  - Creativity
- Activities perceived as voluntary
- Distinguished from “junk flow”
- Coaching: teach people how to rise to the occasion and meet challenges
  - Otherwise depressed people who manage to keep busy in meaningful ways are not troubled by their symptoms while engaged
Positivity Ratio 3:1

- Barbara Fredrickson
- Work with Marcial Losada
- Broaden & Build theory
  - Not specific-action tendencies
  - Positive emotions signal safety
  - Future-oriented
  - Encourage learning, openness
  - Undo the effects of negative emotions
- 3:1 for flourishing
  - John Gottman: 5:1 in close relationships
Meaning (2nd pillar)

- Coaching – meaning-making
- Post-traumatic growth (PTG not PTSD)
  - 85% know PTSD – studies show that knowing about it makes it more likely to occur
  - Yet PTG is a more common outcome
- Strengths of belief, spirituality
- Meaning in life questionnaire
  - I understand my life's meaning.
  - I am seeking a purpose or mission for my life.
Opportunities for coaching on meaning

- Values
- Strengths
  - VIA vs. Gallup
- Increasing the perceived meaningfulness of an activity
  - Increases internalization / intrinsic motivation
  - Increases task curiosity
  - Increases autonomy
- More on this in accomplishment pillar
Findings on Meaning

- Church-goers
  - Healthier
  - More forgiving
  - Less drugs, crime
  - More education, more money, live longer

- Active ingredients:
  - Comforting beliefs / ritual
  - Social support (confounding!)
  - Connecting to something permanent, important, larger than yourself
Positive Relationships (3rd pillar)

- Happy people have more friends, more likely to be married, have happier relationships
  - But which way does this go?
  - Can’t just “give you more friends” to find out
- You can’t do without social relationships
- Satisfaction with marriage spikes, and then returns to baseline
- When spouse dies, widows exhibit steep decline in life satisfaction and only slowly recover (5-7 yrs)
Adaptation to Marriage

2 Yr. Before
Marriage
2 After
Slow Adaptation to Widowhood

- All is Fine
- Widow
- 4 Yrs.

All is Fine: 7.2
Widow: 6.2
4 Yrs.: 6.6
Experience Sampling Method (ESM)

- Pager going off at random times of waking hours
- Introverts / Extroverts – how happy are you now? (1-6)
  - Alone?
  - With people?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Introverts</th>
<th>Extroverts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Experience Sampling Method (ESM)

- Pager going off at random times of waking hours
- Introverts / Extroverts – how happy are you now? (1-6)
  - Alone?
  - With people?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Introverts</th>
<th>Extroverts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Experience Sampling Method (ESM)

- Pager going off at random times of waking hours
- Introverts / Extroverts – how happy are you now? (1-6)
  - Alone?
  - With people?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Introverts</th>
<th>Extroverts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Experience Sampling Method (ESM)

- Pager going off at random times of waking hours
- Introverts / Extroverts – how happy are you now? (1-6)
  - Alone?
  - With people?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Introverts</th>
<th>Extroverts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Positive Accomplishment (4th)

- Newest addition to Pos Psych
  - Contentious
- Achievement, accomplishing goals
  - Goal theory (Locke & Latham)
  - Self-efficacy (Bandura)
  - Grit / perseverance (Duckworth)
Grit (determination / perseverance)

- Grit scale (Duckworth)
- Among college students:
  - Higher GPAs, SATs
- In military:
  - Greater retention over first summer of training (Beast Barracks at West Point)
- In Spelling Bee:
  - Predicted number of hours of study
  - Predicted advancement to final rounds
- In another study (Duckworth) – self-discipline outdoes IQ in predicting academic performance of adolescents
Future directions

- Positive health
  - WHO – health is more than absence of illness

- Public Policy
  - Bhutan – Happiness Index
  - France – Nobel economists advising
  - World Index of Happiness – Ruut Veenhoven

- Positive Organizations
  - US Military – comprehensive soldier fitness
    - Physical, spiritual (meaning & purpose), family, psychological (resilience), social
  - Links to employee engagement
  - Positive education (Geelong, charter schools, etc)
Future directions

- Evaluating and individualizing positive interventions
Penn Resiliency Program with school-aged children (8-15 yo)

Prevention of moderate to severe depressive symptoms (% of participants with CDI >=15) (From Gillham, Reivich, Jaycox, & Seligman, 1995).

![Graph showing the prevention of moderate to severe depressive symptoms over time.]
Validating positive interventions (Seligman, Steen, Park, Peterson)

- Five different positive interventions:
  - Gratitude visit
  - Three good things
  - You at your best
  - Using signature strengths
  - Identifying signature strengths

- One week
Validating positive interventions
(Seligman, Steen, Park, Peterson)
Validating positive interventions (Seligman, Steen, Park, Peterson)

[Graph showing happiness levels over different time periods for placebo control and using signature strengths groups.]

\[ \chi^2 = 0.07 \] 
\[ \chi^2 = 0.42 \] 
\[ \chi^2 = 0.33 \] 
\[ \chi^2 = 0.42 \] 

[Graph showing happiness levels over different time periods for placebo control and identifying signature strengths groups.]

\[ \chi^2 = 0.25 \]
Resources – books

- *Authentic Happiness* – Seligman
- *Learned Optimism* – Seligman
- *Positivity* – Fredrickson
- *A Primer in Positive Psychology* – Peterson
- *Happiness* – Diener & Biswas-Diener
  - Practically anything by Ed Diener
- *Spark* – Ratey (positive health)
- *The How of Happiness* – Lyubomirsky
- *The Happiness Hypothesis* – Haidt
- *Spiritual Evolution* – Vaillant
  - Harvard Study, another book: *Aging Well*
Resources – web

- [www.authentichappiness.org](http://www.authentichappiness.org) – Seligman
  - Lots of assessments – all free
- [www.ippanetwork.org](http://www.ippanetwork.org) – IPPA
  - International Positive Psychology Association
  - Membership $30-$90 US based on level
- [http://positivepsychologynews.com](http://positivepsychologynews.com) – PPND
  - Free daily newsletter – written by MAPP alum
- [www.lvsconsulting.com](http://www.lvsconsulting.com)
  - My own irregular blog – follow my MAPP