



FOLLOW UP NOTES

INTRODUCTION TO

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Thank you for a wonderful first live session, everyone. I am excited to get underway with you and appreciate how ready people were to participate. In my experience, the more people offer observations and questions, the more they use the chat scroll, and the more they volunteer for demonstrations, the better the learning is for everyone. So, thanks for getting us started on the right foot.

From Today:

1. 90 Degrees. I want to remind everyone that I approach topics from a 90-degree view. I endeavor to challenge familiar information mildly or offer a fresh perspective. You are never under any obligation to agree with me or my views. It is my hope, however, that by considering my small challenges, you will learn. In some cases, you will expand your previously held views. In other cases, you will reject my challenges and retain your earlier views. Still, in doing so, you will be better at articulating your rationale and understanding—a win in either scenario.

2. Positive Psychology Coaching. Although, in the early 2000s, a small handful of people were thinking about the links between positive psychology and coaching (Tony Grant, Carol Kaufman, Ben Dean, etc.), I am the person who coined the phrase. I have since changed my mind about some of the content I included in the seminal books on positive psychology coaching. Those were written between 2004 and 2009, and—quite frankly— I am a decade and a half more sophisticated than what is presented in those works.

At its core, I believe that positive psychology coaching is just coaching. It starts with an agenda, includes deep inquiry, and results in planning, goal setting, and accountability.



Then, on this foundation of basic coaching, we add several elements of positive psychology:

- we use established frameworks to guide our explorations and questions,
- we use established assessments as an aid to discovery,
- we make wellbeing an occasionally explicit aspect of coaching,
- we update our skills and knowledge based on emerging research.
- we use science to scrutinize the practice of coaching itself

I do NOT assign my clients assessments such as the VIA or gratitude or best-possible-self exercises. Simply put, coaches assigning homework to clients is not part of coaching. Instead, I now use more organic and often "invisible" interventions. This is what we will be addressing in the coming lessons.

3. Beyond the usual suspects. Today, I made the case that the science of positive psychology is A) a popularity contest and B) relatively heavily focused on a narrow set of topics. I do not mean this to be overly dismissive or to indict the whole field. Rather, I hope you feel empowered to expand your reading, understanding, and intervention beyond the "usual suspects" of positive psychology. As a coach and consultant, I NEVER use the gratitude exercise, train resilience, and rarely use the VIA, even though all three of these are positive psychology staples. I encourage you to feel empowered to read widely and create your own approach to positive psychology intervention. Think of it as "scientifically informed," which allows some freedom to tailor ideas to the client in front of you but also ensures that you are responsible for staying within the broad boundaries of our existing scientific knowledge.

For example, in clinical psychology, there is a useful approach known as the "local clinical scientist." This framework acknowledges that the clinician has expert knowledge in a topic such as depression. The clinician understands the symptoms, causes, and treatments related to depression. But they have an individual person sitting in the chair across from them. This person may or may not conform to all of the abstract knowledge. There might be variation in the presentation of symptoms, there might be cultural elements that are important to the case, and the client might hold unique attitudes about their experience or the treatment process. So, the clinician has to balance what they know in general with the specifics of the individual case. I think positive psychology is the same. Informed by science, but tailored slightly for the individual context.



4. Resources. If you market yourself as having affiliation with positive psychology, you must engage in 2 practices to be a responsible professional. First, you must engage in reflective, ethical practice to promote welfare and minimize harm to clients. Second, you must interface with primary sources. Even if you do not have an advanced degree in science, you must do better than reading popular books and watching TED talks. If your dentist said to you, "I don't keep up with dentistry journals, but I have seen some cool TV shows about dental care," you would not trust them. The same applies to you. In the resources for this course, you will find a brief document that will help you read academic articles more effectively, even if you do not have an advanced psychology degree.

Here is a list of resources that I recommend as primary resources. I have tried to include those that are open-source (no paywall) expert-authored, and peer-reviewed. I believe that even if you scan the titles of articles, you will get a sense of the types of topics being studied and how researchers are thinking about them:

The Handbook of Wellbeing from Noba Scholar. Created by my parents, Noba Scholar is an open-source academic catalog of expert-written chapters on virtually every aspect of happiness. These are recently published and are up-to-date. Most of these chapters include broad reviews of existing research. "Lit reviews," as they are known, are generally easier for you to read than empirical articles full of advanced statistical analyses.

[Handbook of Wellbeing](#)

Noba Project. This is the undergraduate, rather than the scholarly, version of Noba. It is essentially a free textbook for all areas of psychology. It is a good place to brush up on topics you might want, such as the brain and nervous system or developmental psychology. Noba's project contains many positive topic chapters such as "biochemistry of love," "intelligence," and chapters on scientific methods. www.nobaproject.com

International Journal of Well-being. Created in New Zealand by Aaron Jarden, this academic journal is also open (meaning no paywalls). Its articles cover a wide range of topics related to well-being.

<https://www.internationaljournalofwellbeing.org/index.php/ijow/index>



Here are a variety of other journals, some open and some subscription-based:

Journal of Positive Psychology and Wellbeing

<http://www.journalppw.com/index.php/JPPW>

Journal of Positive Psychology (considered the flagship journal of the field)

<https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rpos20/current>

Journal of Happiness Studies

<https://link.springer.com/journal/10902>

Middle East Journal of Positive Psychology

[Link](#)

If you cannot find articles, I recommend the 3 following workarounds:

A) try **Google Scholar**: <https://scholar.google.com>

B) try **Researchgate**: <https://www.researchgate.net>

C) try the researcher web site

Finally, I would encourage you to be proactive in your learning. Instead of taking a classic positive psychology topic, such as gratitude, and waiting to see blog posts about it, follow your own interests. For example, you might be interested in friendship. You might wonder what we know about friendship or if there are articles about friendship at work. Conduct your own search on Google Scholar and see what emerges. You will find that some of the results are in organizational journals, or sociology journals, and especially in social psychology journals. I believe that this approach is professionally responsible, is empowering, and can be a competitive advantage for you.