



Building Professional Excellence- Part 2

Session 1: The Science of Well-Being: Positive Psychology Strategies for Increasing Engagement and Strengthening Relationships

Webinar Follow-up Question and Answer Session with Bob Bertolino

1. Question from Nisha Talwar

How does flow work in sports when other team members are involved?

Answer from Presenter

Great question! Flow with teams typically occurs when players are engaged in specific aspects of game that require focus and attention. For example, for a play to be executed to perfection between a quarterback and a wide receiver, each must be focused on the play at hand. I use this example because players may or may not remain “in the zone” for extended periods of time but their degree of focus will increase at certain junctures. Athletes are used to intense focus so they don’t need to practice getting into a flow state like others do. To learn flow, we recommend practicing for 20 minutes or so. However, once you learn how to “lock in” then it becomes more spontaneous. That is how athletes do it. Some team sports, such as soccer, require all players to be aware of what is happening on the field at all times—not just situationally. In other words, there is less room to turn it on and off. Therefore, when it comes to teams, we are reminded that there is a common goal between those involved. However, if some team members are not “locked in” then there is a greater risk of a breakdown.

2. Question from Daniel Burrell

Do you have any suggestions of literature for a counselor to use to better understand the experiences of soldiers?

Answer from Presenter

Wow, you really hit the nail on the head! Yes. That is the good and the bad news. We are more connected to others but not necessarily in ways that promote well-being. Face Time and Skype help people to see each other but not touch or share the ambiance of a setting. Moreover, as we know, we are texting a lot—but not necessarily connecting in meaningful ways. Without being physically present with others, we are missing out on “human” part of the human connection. There is a wonderful book by MIT psychologist Sherry Turkle called, *Alone Together*. In the book she talks about how there are measurable levels of anxiety with persons—primarily those between the ages of 12-25—when they do not get a timely response from someone after sending a text. She says, in days gone by, we would have picked up the landline and called someone because we wanted to share a feeling (e.g., We got a new job, Received an “A” on a paper, etc.). Nowadays we say, “I want to feel something so I am going to send a text.” In other words, for some people, they really aren’t sure how they feel until someone they get a response from another person. Looking ahead, there is reason to be concerned about how young people will learn to regulate their emotions, problem solve, and develop a sense of self when much of their early development was not based on face to face interactions, but on technology.



3. Question from Virginia Asher

I was wondering about my clients with borderline. How do you use positive psychology to help them build support networks, as their attachments are not secure?

Answer from Presenter

Thank you for your question. It's something I'm sure others are wondering about as well. Let me see if I can answer your question by using the second part as a lead in. You said something very important that would be my focus. For me, the key question is, "What have you observed or are aware of that lets you know her attachments aren't secure?" Does she alienate others through her behavior? Are her social skills an impediment to secure attachments? I think a little more clarity would help us to determine how best to help your client increase attachment in her life. One suggestion would be to start very small. I might try to role-play with your client to see how she approaches relationships and to see if we can help her to learn some skills such as Active Constructive Responding. If your client can learn to respond in new ways to others as opposed to falling back into her patterns, which probably are at least minimally disruptive, she may experience some success. Part of our aim is to help clients develop new habits or patterns. As you know, this often takes time and patience. One other thought is to ask your client about a few scenarios in which others have "misunderstood" her or were perhaps pushed away due to her behavior. Then, switch roles by having the client role-play the person who was pushed away and you role-play your client. You can then demonstrate some more appropriate ways of responding. After trying new activities, see if your client is willing to journal a bit or if not, talk with you about the experiences.

4. Question from Sandy Ann Griffith

In this approach would you challenge a client whose actions /responses in session are consistent with "staying depressed" etc. As you mentioned that people tend to stick to what they know, even if it's not advantageous to them.

Answer from Presenter

Very interesting question! I'll do my best here to answer your question. I have to preface my answer by saying that it would be great if you and I could discuss this in more detail. One thing I would want to ask is, "What kinds of actions/responses have you observed that are consistent with 'staying depressed.'" Your answers would help me to understand more about the patterns your client is engaged in. In lieu of this information, my approach would be to maintain the belief that the client wants to feel better but as you said, has stayed with what he/she knows. I would add that I think your client has not *yet* found a way to open the door to a positive future. I would actually use language that conveys that the future can be different. Words and phrases such as "not yet," "so far," "down the road," and "in the future," etc. (If you email me at bertolinob@cs.com I can send you some ideas about how to change language). So I might say, "You've talked about you really want things to be different. You're unhappy with the way things have been and in the future. Instead of being depressed, you'd like to be doing _____ (fill in the blank) in your life. I'm excited about that! Now, one of the most challenging things when it comes to feeling better is taking a first step. As they say, 'The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step.' The good news we don't need for you to travel a thousand miles.... We only need to take a step then another. What I'm wondering is if we can try some very small experiments to see what happens. What do you think?" Once I had agreement, I would do two things: 1) I would ask the client how he/she has made some small change in the past to a situation that was not going well. I would try to build some sense of competency by looking at recent past successes. I would say, "The first experiment is to think



about how you have stayed afloat and kept things going in your life even though you have felt down. You know a little something about how to keep going. What have you learned works, if only a little?" Then I would ask, "How did you manage to try to do something even though there were many reasons to give up?" And, "Who, if anyone, was helpful to you?" This is a way of connecting clients to others (Life Witnesses). I might follow with, "What would it take to muster up just a little bit of that gumption you have used previously when stuck or feeling down?" 2) I would say, "I have a very small experiment to try that can pay big dividends. All it will take is a few minutes a day." Then choose an activity such as thinking of three positive things that happened during the day and sharing those with another person. You could do the same experiment and then compare good things the next time you met. Because patterns become so ingrained, I always try to start very small. It's like tipping the first domino. We hope for a ripple effect, where one change leads to many others. But in the end, if your client will experiment with something new there is a good chance they will continue it once they experience the benefits. The last thing I would add is to maintain focus on what the client wants—what he or she would like to see happening in the future. So rather than "not being depressed" we want to focus on what the client wants to be doing instead (e.g., hanging out friends more often, enjoying work, etc.). A future focus is very important to well-being. And if attempts to change patterns are aimed at what people want instead of they do not, then behaviors will be proactive and toward something as opposed to reactive as clients try to avoid what they do not want.

5. Question from Jeffica Laborde

I would like some clarity, the methods you speak of when you refer to positive connections, are those methods for our clients to try, or for us workers to engage with our clients? Ex. wrapping an arm around someone to connect.

Answer from Presenter

Great question. My answer is both. As you know, client engagement is crucial to successful services. So let's look at the second part of your question first. My experience is that if you feel you already have strong relationships with your clients then take a moment to reflect on what works for you and your clients. I say this because I suspect that you are already doing some of the things I mentioned in the webinar. For example, you're probably using some variation of Active Constructive Responding. Or you are making yourself available to your clients (within limits, of course). If you think there is something missing in terms of client engagement, then I would suggest trying some of the ideas discussed in the webinar. Now back to the first part of your question. The intention I had going into this and the other webinars was to offer ideas primarily for use with clients. Having said that, as you implied with your question, these ideas are also important to us as helpers.

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