



## **Building Professional Excellence- Part 1**

### **Session 5: The Science of Well-Being: An Introduction to Positive Psychology**

#### **Webinar Follow-up Question and Answer Session with Dr. Bob Bertolino**

##### **\*Common Audience Question**

How do we get the book of activities you created?

##### **Answer from Presenter**

The Therapist's Notebook on Positive Psychology is published by Routledge and is available at Amazon or at [www.routledgejournalhealth.com](http://www.routledgejournalhealth.com). I also wrote a book entitled, *Thriving on the Front Lines: Strengths-Based Youth Care Work*, that has examples of Positive Psychology exercises. It is also available through the previously mentioned sites.

##### **Question from Yolanda Wilson**

Since there are so many factors that don't increase happiness; why do you feel that their coping mechanism drops so quickly when it is taken away? Thus causing extreme depression and/or suicidal ideation.

##### **Answer from Presenter**

Thank you for your question. My understanding from the research and my own practice is that people's explanatory styles—which are largely based on genetics—are so influential that people experience significant depression and/or suicidal ideation because of perception. It is not that things are lost or taken away but people's perceptions of those things going away. What we focus on in developing well-being is on people taking deliberate actions that challenge their genetic temperament. In other words, through changes in routine and patterns we can override our genetic propensities. Happiness takes work! I'm not sure that this fully addresses your question. Please let me know if it does not.

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##### **Question from Tamia Faison**

What is the best way to counsel people who have a difficult time to find anything to be happy about?

##### **Answer from Presenter**

Excellent question. The two things I would do are validate and search for small moments of happiness. Let's start with validation. For most people we are seeking a gentle shift in attention toward happiness. But when clients are unhappy, our suggestions to find something to be happy about tend to feel invalidating to clients. They think we do not understand their suffering and pain and are trying to gloss over things. So we start by first acknowledging and validating what clients' experience. We do this through Carl Rogers' core ideas of empathy and positive regard. We say, "I understand," "That must be hard," "Uh huh," and "I see" combined with, "It's okay." Next, we help clients to experience some degree of positive emotion in our sessions. For example, we might ask a client to think of a recent situation that when just a little bit different. We might ask, "Given how you have been feeling, how did you get yourself here today?" or "Tell me about a time recently that went just a little bit better than you expected. What was different about that situation?" "What did you feel?" "What is the most vivid part of that situation for you?" Our intention is to elicit just a sliver of positive emotion then take steps to build on that. We recommend that a client then write down, each evening before going to bed, three



things that went well and the emotions associated with those things. Have the client do that for a week then come back and talk with us about that.

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**Question from Elizabeth Cole**

The 10% Life Circumstances can become larger as a concern for people--such as college students trying to find their meaningful and desired career that will make them happy and give them a decent income; and they are exploring and defining their life philosophies and values.

**Answer from Presenter**

Good question. Consider the percentages generalities. For some people, Life Circumstances loom much larger. Your example makes a good point. Choosing a career that is meaningful is big concern for many persons, especially college students. I would add that sometimes people make career changes because they do not find their work meaningful. What I would recommend focusing on is how people can find meaning no matter their vocation. There are people in virtually every professions that are measurably happy in what they do even though outsiders do not understand how that could be so. I really love that.

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**Question from Kristian Alton**

Does the set point include perceived locus of control?

**Answer from Presenter**

This is a good question. We can use self-report instrumentation to gauge optimism and pessimism. Interestingly how people self-report tends to remain fairly static over time. I suspect that one's set point does include their perceived locus of control. I would add that when people begin to experience greater well-being they also begin to realize that they have the ability to override genetic propensities, which are related to the set point idea. That is, once people learn that by changing their routines through deliberate actions, I believe most will come to the conclusion that they can change things for the better by what they choose to do, and that, speaks to the point of locus of control, in and in my mind, primary internal locus of control.

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**Question from Kathleen Floyd**

Perhaps you'll discuss this in future webinars but I am wondering how to people can still meet goals of happiness while facing roadblocks others may try to sabotage our achievements because they perceive others getting ahead of them - like when someone develops an initiative in the workplace and others do not.

**Answer from Presenter**

Very interesting question. For me, this question relates to explanatory style and personal philosophy or worldview. For the person who has an explanatory style in which they interpret events as happening to them and as others trying to sabotage their efforts, even events that might be construed as positive to the majority will be construed as short-lived, anomalies. On the other hand, I would not discount the idea that some persons may in fact try to short-circuit others attempts to improve their lives or get ahead. What I would suggest is that we focus our clients' attention on their own actions, meaning, and emotion. In this way, the most substantial roadblocks are not the ones others place before us or ones that occur through happenstance, but instead, the ones we create ourselves. I will speak more about this in future webinars but let me finish by saying that I think



Positive Psychology is largely about what people choose to do when they are free to choose. There are circumstances in the world in which people are not afforded choice. They are treated in inhumane and unjust ways. They have no choice when it comes to moving to a safer places or having opportunities to choose a more meaningful line of work, and so on. But is those things do not apply to us or our clients then I believe we can make things better for ourselves and others no matter what others choose to do us.

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