

Positive Psychology & Coaching

Dr Penny Cortvriend
Chartered Occupational Psychologist
penny@aspirepod.com
www.aspirepod.com

What is positive psychology?

- The scientific study of well being, happiness, thriving and enhanced mental health.
- A philosophy, the way we live our lives. When applied involves leading a 'good life', personal growth, finding meaning in our lives by commitment or dedication to something/someone else which transcends one's own personal interest.

Focus on 3 levels of functioning

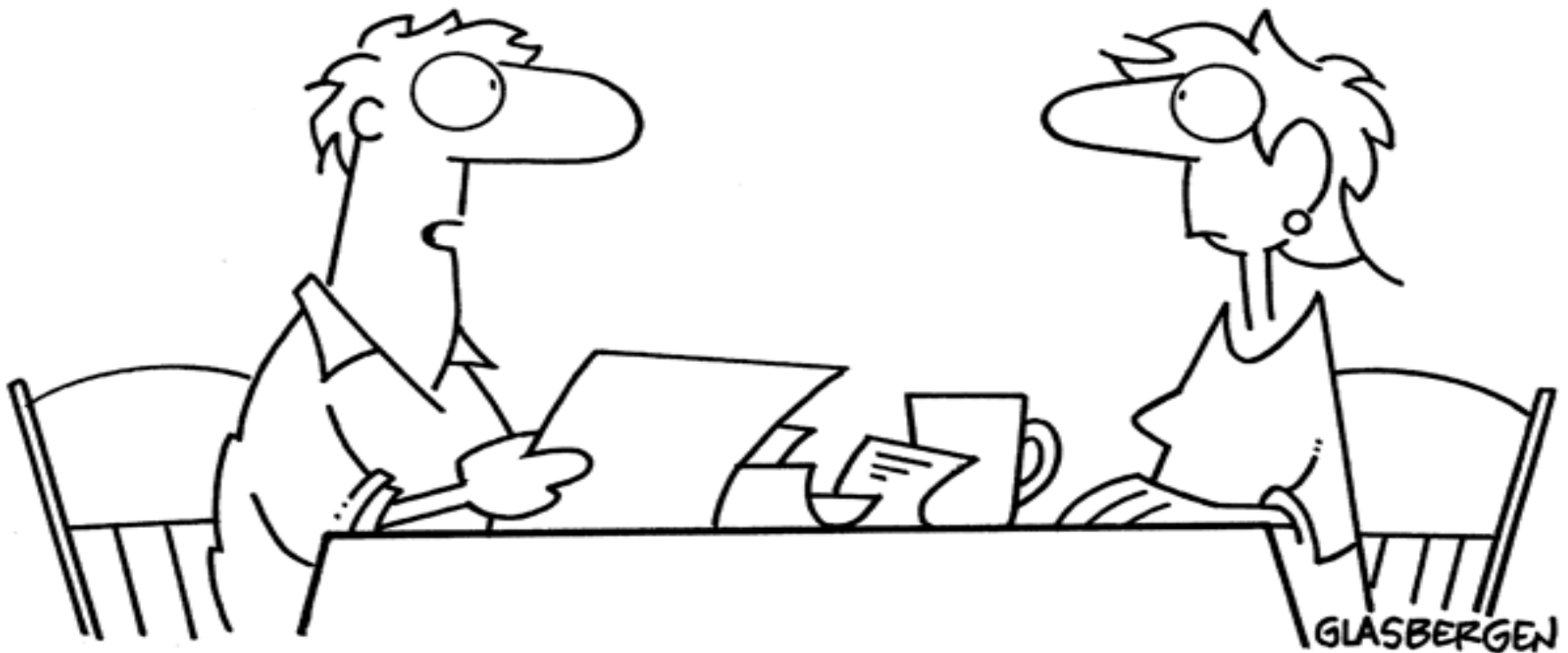
- **Subjective:** well-being, contentment, satisfaction, hope, optimism, flow, happiness, joy
 - This is about feeling good rather than doing good or being a good person
- **Individual:** studying human strengths/virtues, future-mindedness, capacity for love, courage, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, wisdom, interpersonal skills, giftedness
 - Identifying the elements that make up a 'good life' and the personal qualities necessary for being a 'good person'
- **Group or community:** civic virtues, social responsibility, nurturance, altruism, tolerance, work ethics, positive institutions, citizenship
 - Development and maintenance of value driven/nurturing social groups/communities/organisations

What makes you happy?

- Sit and think of a time during the past week, month, year when your life was really good – what characterised this time?
- Share with the person sitting next to you.

What makes people happy?

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“Money can’t buy happiness, but if I had a big house, fancy car and a giant plasma TV, I wouldn’t mind being unhappy!”

What makes people happy?

- The mean score of happiness in 1.1 million people in 45 nations was 6.75 out of 10 (Myers 2000)
- Freedom (Veenhoven, 2000)
- Friends, family and marriage
- Faith or spirituality
- Meeting basic needs
- Having engaging work
- Good sleep, exercise & subjective health
- Savouring/mindfulness
- Flow states (more on this later)
- Pleasure, **engagement, the meaningful life** (Seligman, 2002)

What is happiness?

- a.k.a. Subjective Well Being or SWB
- Happiness is usually termed SWB in the literature
- SWB = satisfaction with life + affect
- Life satisfaction: one's assessment of one's own life; one is satisfied when there is little or no discrepancy between the present and what is thought to be an ideal or deserved situation
- Dissatisfaction = a substantial discrepancy and the ideal standard; can also be a result of comparing oneself with others
- Affect: the emotional side of SWB; positive and negative moods and emotions that are associated with our everyday experiences.

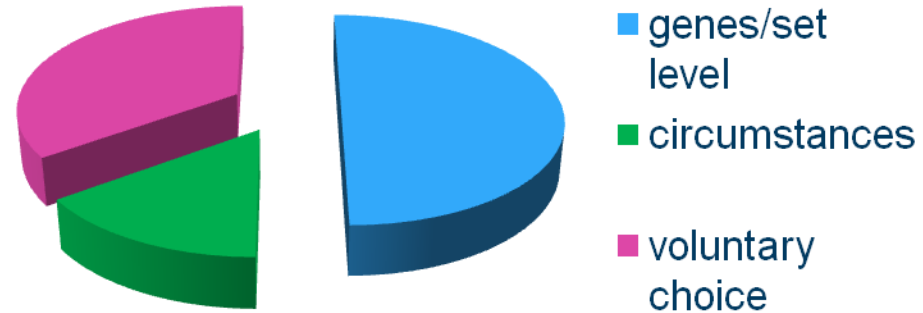
The Happiness Formula (Seligman 2002)

$$H = S + C + V$$

Happiness (enduring level)

= Set range +
Circumstances +
Voluntary control

Happiness formula



Set range: genetic – contributes to 50% of happiness level

Circumstances: where we live, age, our sex etc.

Contribute about 10-15% of our happiness level

Voluntary control: our choices, behaviour, attitudes, the way we think contributes about 35-40% of our happiness level

- **Nuns diary study (Danner et al, 2001)**
 - Short personal life sketches Sisters of Notre Dame (1932); raters examined phrases/words used, e.g. Very happy, eager etc.; 90% of 'most cheerful' alive at 85 compared to 34% of 'least cheerful'
- **Duchenne smile study (Harker & Keltner, 2001)**
 - Senior class photos of 141 students from Mills College (1960); classified according to Duchenne or PanAm smile; women contacted at 27, 43 and 52; Duchenne smilers more likely to be married, stay married, experience more personal well-being. Looks had nothing to do with good marriage or life satisfaction – so why do women strive for socially constructed aesthetic beauty?

Using positive psychology in coaching

Measuring Happiness, SWB, optimism etc.

One example....

Scoring scale

7. Strongly agree
6. Agree
5. Slightly agree
4. Neither agree nor disagree
3. Slightly disagree
2. Disagree
1. Strongly disagree

- **The satisfaction with life scale (Ed Diener)**
 - In most ways my life is close to my ideal
 - The conditions of my life are excellent
 - I am satisfied with my life
 - So far I have got the important things I want in life
 - If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing

When to use questionnaires in coaching

- Use when coachees present with a sense/feeling of unhappiness or lack of confidence that they want to deal with – can help to pin point what is wrong and be the beginning of discussion for goal setting
- Use with coachees who have little insight into their 'negative state' or have a desire to change this – use as a baseline before interventions and then re-measure
- **BIG HEALTH WARNING!**

Flow – ‘being in the zone’

- State of mind in which someone experiences enhanced engagement and optimal performance
- Occurs when encountering a challenge which tests our skills and yet is just about possible to meet
- If challenge exceeds skill we become anxious; if skill exceeds challenge we become bored

Flow involves....

(Csikszentmihalyi, 1975)

- Clarity of goals and immediate feedback on progress
- Complete concentration and focus so that nothing else enters our mind
- Actions and awareness are merged so the activity becomes automatic and involvement seems effortless even if it isn't – people often exceed their abilities when experiencing flow
- Losing self awareness or self consciousness
- A personal sense of control over what one is doing with no worries about failure
- Transformation of time – time passes much more quickly than usual although the reverse can be true
- Activities are intrinsically rewarding

- 'Peak flow' exercise can be used to uncover true values
- Can remind coachee of times at work/home when they were happy and confident and what is missing from their lives now
- Use as starting point when someone is unhappy at work or wants to focus on career change/development
- A volunteer please!

Using laughter/mindfulness in coaching

- 'Laugh when you can – it is cheap medicine' Byron
- Research mixed but a recent study found that stress responses decreased post laughter and immunity function increased (Bennett et al, 2003)
- 'Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgementally' (Jon Kabat-Zinn)
- Mindfulness is about savouring the moment, 'being' not 'doing'
- Mindfulness promotes positive subjective experience according to recent research (e.g. Davidson et al, 2003)
- Let's practice a mindfulness activity

IT SAYS HERE THAT THE SECRET
TO HAPPINESS IS TO ENJOY
THE PRESENT.



Taking a cognitive behavioural approach

- Stop rating yourself – rate your behaviour, accept yourself
- E.g. Change 'I am stupid' to 'I am a person who sometimes says stupid things'
- Detect and reduce cognitive distortions or thinking errors (see handout)
- Change PITs to PETs, e.g.....
- PIT: 'People say the workshop was a success but they are just trying to make me feel better because they know it was a failure'
- PET: 'Certainly the workshop had its flaws but I very much doubt that these people are banding together to lie to me'

Some things I haven't mentioned but could have done....

- Strengths
- Doing one good turn....random acts of kindness
- SPACE model – changes negative emotions, physical reactions, behaviours, cognitions into positive ones
- The power of exercise and nature
- What not to do, e.g. Watch too much TV, compare yourself
- The power of goals
- Emotional intelligence
- Positive reinforcement
- The Losada Line and high performing teams
- Appreciative Inquiry

So if you want to know more.....



- Book a one day workshop for your organisation
- Talk to me later
- If you're based in an organisation work in partnership with us to improve the performance and well-being of your employees and do some research at the same time!
- E-mail me: penny@aspirepod.com

To finish.....

3 good things exercise.....and
one act of kindness

