

PERMA-powered coaching

Building foundations for a flourishing life

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Introduction

The search for happiness and the “good life”¹ has become a hot topic in both the popular press and the scientific press as evidenced by the thousands of studies relating to positive psychology since its formal launch in 2000 (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Hart & Sasso, 2011). However, many individuals hold a pessimistic world view that is often accompanied by a mindset of lack despite multiple successes in life. As such, many feel lost in how to find the “good life” as they struggle with their own perceptions and evaluation of their lives. The conflict between an individual’s current reality and their ideal reality results in rising levels of stress, anxiety and depression in both adults and young people (WHO, 2011), where fewer people are able to “feel good and function well.”

The fundamental aim of positive psychology is to promote flourishing for the purpose of optimal human functioning, where the use of positive psychology coaching can support an individual to feel good, function well and be their optimal best (Huppert & So, 2009). While there are many models of well-being, the PERMA Model is an increasingly popular model developed by Professor Martin Seligman (2012). PERMA is a multidimensional model to assist individuals, organisations and communities to explore and enhance five key domains: Positive emotion (P), Engagement (E), Relationships (R), Meaning (M), and Accomplishment (A).

This chapter will present an overview of the PERMA Model, discussing relevant theories and research associated with each domain and its relationship to Positive Psychology Coaching (PPC). Evidence-based Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs) will be reviewed and a case study will also be used to highlight the application of PERMA in a coaching context. Whether exploring the domains separately or holistically, coaches will have a better understanding of PERMA as a coaching framework to support their coaches and themselves in building the foundations for a flourishing life.

Development of the PERMA Model

The PERMA Model first emerged in Seligman’s book *Flourish* (2012), where he reviewed his own original theory of Authentic Happiness (2004) to better encapsulate both subjective and psychological well-being. Diener (1984) described

Subjective Well-Being as comprising Life Satisfaction, Positive Affect and Absence of Negative Affect, sometimes referred to as happiness or emotional well-being (Lambert, Passmore, & Holder, 2015). Whereas Ryff and Keyes (1995) identified Psychological Well-Being as comprising six domains, namely, Self-Acceptance, Autonomy, Positive Relations with Others, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth and Satisfaction with Life. Both subjective well-being and psychological well-being have formed the basic divide in well-being theories, where they are typically discussed as either hedonic approaches – feeling good by avoiding pain and attaining pleasure – or eudaimonic approaches, the term Aristotle coined to describe that which makes life worth living (Lambert et al., 2015) – functioning well and living with meaning and purpose (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

In *Authentic Happiness*, Seligman (2002) identified three pathways to happiness: (1) the Pleasant Life – a hedonic approach to maximise positive emotion, (2) the Engaged Life – an eudaimonic approach driven by virtue and values and (3) the Meaningful Life – an eudaimonic approach to belonging and serving others. In 2012, Seligman revised this happiness model and moved to a well-being model, which he referred to as PERMA. While he kept the original three domains, Pleasant (Positive emotions), Engagement and Meaning, he added Relationships and Accomplishment. The need to include relationships stems from the numerous studies supporting the significance of social support in supporting well-being (Vella-Brodrick, Park, & Peterson, 2009). Accomplishment was added to reflect the skill and effort people use in striving towards, reaching and reflecting on their goals in the pursuit of mastery. It also reflects the significant amount of research on goals and their impact on well-being in the scientific literature (Seligman, 2012).

The outcome of this revised model of well-being saw a multidimensional approach that was not limited to happiness or life satisfaction alone, but as several contributing factors that formed the acronym PERMA. Here, Seligman argued that well-being could be strengthened when people plan positive actions within each of the five domains:

- **Positive emotion** – plan, invest in and participate in healthy positive experiences.
- **Engagement** – become immersed in worthwhile pursuits and the discovery and application of strengths.
- **Relationships** – develop social and emotional skills to better connect and share with others.
- **Meaning** – reflect and plan for ways to act with purpose, to think beyond themselves and contribute to higher pursuits.
- **Accomplishment** – set and strive for meaningful goals, manage setbacks, maintain mental toughness and embody a growth mindset.

Despite PERMA's holistic approach to well-being, it is not without its critics who argue that it focuses too much on the individual, does not address physical health

and overlooks cultural strengths (Biswas-Diener, Linley, Govindji, & Woolston, 2011). These criticisms have been addressed with research broadening from a focus on the individual to the “collective good,” as well as growing evidence of what it means to build positive organisations and communities (Cameron & Dutton, 2003).

PERMA unpacked

Understanding flourishing, its processes and conditions (Gable & Haidt, 2005) is a central aim of positive psychology and hence a PPC engagement. While the concept of well-being is not new, the term *flourishing* has more recently emerged with the field of positive psychology as an attempt to describe, via analogy to plants, optimal human functioning. As plants grow towards the sun, the heliotropic effect dictates too that societies, cultures, organisations, groups and individuals are drawn towards abundance, goodness and positivity (Cameron & Levine, 2006). Similarly, Rogers' self-actualising tendency infers that people are drawn to fulfil their potential and achieve congruence between their ideal self and actual self-image and behaviours (McLeod, 2014). Flourishing from a hedonic perspective entails focusing on generating more positive feelings and experiences, while flourishing from a eudaimonic perspective comes from actions such as giving to others and living in accordance with our own values (Norrish, Williams, O'Connor, & Robinson, 2013). More simply, flourishing can be defined as “a psychosocial construct that includes having rewarding and positive relationships, feeling competent and confident, and believing that life is meaningful and purposeful” (Norris et al., 2013, p. 149).

The PERMA Model provides a framework by which people and organisations can practice PPs as a way to move towards flourishing. In order for coaches to use this framework, they must understand the theory and research of each of its domains.

Positive emotions

All emotions have a purpose and place within the human experience. A common misconception is that positive psychology seeks to deny the importance of negative emotions; however, this is not the case. In fact, living a life of engagement, meaning and accomplishment often means stepping into “negative” emotions such as fear, discomfort and pain. However, our experience of negative emotions can appear stronger due to the negativity bias that has developed as part of our survival as a species and our psychological evolution (Fredrickson, 2006). This dictates that negative emotions such as fear or anger are stronger, and without effort to generate more positive emotions, it is easy for people to become defined by the more negative forces when they do not necessarily need to (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001).

Positive emotions include feelings of joy, love, gratitude, hope, pride, inspiration, curiosity, amusement, serenity and awe (Fredrickson, 2006). These

emotions have all been subject to empirical study and have been linked to well-being, where “those who experience a preponderance of positive emotions (or more ‘positive affect’) – tend to be successful and accomplished across multiple life domains” (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005, p. 801). Characteristics of people who experience frequent positive emotions include increases in confidence, optimism and self-efficacy (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005).

While positive emotions are often discussed in the context of pursuing pleasure, gratification or comfort (Lambert et al., 2015), Fredrickson argues that positive emotions also have an evolutionary role and lie at the foundation of human flourishing, where they widen a person’s array of thoughts to generate behavioural flexibility (Fredrickson, 2006). Fredrickson’s Broaden and Build Theory (1998) posits that the effortful investment in creating and experiencing more positive emotions broadens an individual’s capacity to think, see the big picture, be creative and act proactively. This in turn generates actions and behaviours that serve to build an individual’s physical, intellectual, social, psychological and emotional resources and skills that can build both resilience and mental toughness (Clough & Strycharczyk, 2012) in the face of challenge, change and opportunity.

Given “individuals emotions and reactions are determined solely by his or her interpretations of events, not by the events themselves” (Sherin & Caiger, 2004, p. 227), a coach is well placed to help the coachee identify and build positive emotions even at times of stress and adversity. This may include challenging existing perceptions of what is not working and acknowledging strategies that are working. In this way, the coach is able to support the coachee in exploring opportunities to express and track positive emotions.

Numerous evidenced-based interventions to generate increased positive emotions are applicable in a coaching context. These include “Counting Your Blessings” or “What’s Working Well?”, *Envisioning your “Best Possible Self”* past and future; *Learned Optimism*; *Strengths Discovery*; *Savouring*. Indeed evidence-based coaching itself has been shown to increase levels of hope (Snyder, 2002): a key positive trait and emotion that can be enhanced by a focus on goal setting, building agency and generating pathway thinking (Green, Grant, & Rynsaardt, 2007).

Extending beyond the individual, experiencing positive emotions have also been shown to impact positively within workplaces and institutions, leading to increased creativity, innovation, transformational cooperation and organisational capacity (Sekerka & Fredrickson, 2008).

Engagement

Within PERMA, engagement has been defined as being fully immersed in an activity that is intrinsically motivating, where a person experiences “flow” and is equally matched between challenge and skill (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Flow is the state when an individual feels completely satisfied through being absorbed in a task, even if the goal is not reached. When engaged, people have a tendency

to be more curious, passionate and persevere in attaining goals (Hunter & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). One way of promoting engagement is through the application of character strengths as a way to cultivate flow and nurture intrinsic motivation.

Strengths are internal “patterns of thought, feeling and behaviour that are energising and which lead to maximal effectiveness” (Linley & Harrington, 2006, p. 6). Character has been debated across psychology, philosophy and religion for decades, and in order for positive psychologists to effectively describe optimal human functioning, researchers needed to develop a common language to use and measure. To this end, Seligman and Peterson and their researchers collated how character had been defined for centuries and found six themes emerging known as virtues; within these virtues, they identified twenty-four universal and cross-cultural character strengths that live within each of us (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). How these strengths are organised is what makes each of us unique as individuals. Foundational for any positive psychology coaching program is knowing both your own character strengths as a coach and that of your coachees. These strengths can be identified using the Values in Action Character Strengths Survey (www.viacharacter.org).

While we may embody all twenty-four character strengths to some degree, it is our top five to seven character strengths that more closely align with our intrinsic values and interest and are known as “signature” strengths (Linley & Harrington, 2006). A large bank of research shows that when signature strengths are consciously applied in everyday life, study and work, we become more engaged and a direct increase occurs in life satisfaction, well-being, meaning and performance (Wood, Linley, Maltby, Kashdan, & Hurling, 2011).

Positive psychology coaches can use the Values in Action (VIA) Character Strengths profile as a tool to help the coachee identify their signature strengths and plan ways to use these strengths. Individuals who use their character strengths experience greater well-being (Proctor, Maltby, & Linley, 2009). In a work context, character strengths have been shown to increase both job satisfaction, productivity and organisational relationships (Lavy & Littman-Ovadia, 2017), as well as reduce work-related stress (Harzer & Ruch, 2015). Recently, the development of “lesser strengths” has also been researched and merit found in their investment of development, particularly when a coachee may already be actively applying their signature strengths (Proyer, Gander, Wellenzohn, & Ruch, 2015). As such, a PPC should review both “signature strengths” and “lesser strengths” and in collaboration with the coachee determine a strategy for future proactive strengths use.

Performance Strengths are another method of assisting coachees enhance achievement and well-being. There are a number of assessments on the market that can be used particularly in workplace settings. One effective and scientifically validated positive psychology strengths assessment is the Strengths Profile developed by the UK Centre for Applied Positive Psychology. The Strengths Profile provides a multidimensional approach assessing sixty attributes across

three dimensions of energy, performance and use, to distinguish between what energises us and de-energises us. The report generated from the profile identifies attributes as Realised Strengths, Weaknesses, Learned Behaviours and Unrealised Strengths. By understanding the attributes that are energising and de-energising, we are able to generate more positive emotions, flow and remain more engaged in our actions.

Regardless of which strength tool coaches use, strength-based interventions can help coaches increase engagement via setting and striving towards personally meaningful goals; strengths use can also assist a coach to build more positive relationships with others, as a result of understanding our similarities and differences, as well as develop more meaning and purpose in our everyday decisions. This could mean making someone laugh if your strength is humour, enrolling in an art class if your strength is creativity, visiting someone in a nursing home if your strength is kindness, writing a thankyou note if your strength is gratitude or organising a social get together if your strength is leadership. Whatever your strengths might be, by knowing them and using them, strengths interventions support each of the PERMA pillars for well-being.

Relationships

Positive relationships are central to developing sound social and emotional skills that lie at the core of our internal resources (Roffey, 2011). The often quoted "other people matter" by Chris Peterson suggests that the focus in positive psychology is not solely in improving personal well-being but how we can better connect, give and contribute to the lives of others (Roffey, 2011). "Other people are the best antidote to the downs in life and the single most reliable up" (Seligman, 2012, p. 20). Social isolation on the other hand has been linked to depression, substance abuse and other symptoms of mental ill-health (Hassed, 2008).

Coaching itself is a collaboration that requires an open, honest and trustworthy relationship that is free of judgment yet stable enough to manage challenging conversations (Adams, 2015). This being said, the coaching relationship itself must be a positive connection that requires the coach to have effective communication skills such as active listening, reflecting, clarifying, empathy, questioning techniques and rapport-building strategies (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012). As such, coaching facilitates the development of high-quality connections (Dutton & Hepply, 2003). It is these positive connections that support thriving organisations and individuals.

From a coach's perspective, every life circumstance typically includes the interaction between people, where the positive-to-negative ratio of these interactions can influence a person's well-being. In fact, Dr John Gottman, a key researcher in the field of relationships, has found a 5:1 ratio that predicts divorce rates based on how many positive interactions people have compared with negative ones. This includes how people respond and how well they are able to

manage their own emotions (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998).

In order to support individuals in building positive relationships, a positive psychology coach could encourage the coachee to record and map the positive-to-negative ratios with another individual. These data are then used as a discussion point to reflect and build on social and emotional competence. Another proven method for improving relationships is the work by Professor Shelly Gable, who "demonstrated that how you celebrate is more predictive of strong relations than how you fight" (Seligman, 2012, p. 48). She found that a very effective way of building positive relationships was through Active Constructive Responding (ACR). To develop this, coaches could model and encourage coachees to proactively listen, celebrate and respond positively to others who share good news with them, e.g. "wow, that is amazing, I can see how pleased you are, tell me how it happened and how it felt." Another relationship-building strategy that has repeatedly shown positive affect is performing acts of kindness. By choosing to be kind to others either randomly or on a regular basis whether that be volunteering in a nursing home, cooking for a neighbour or helping a colleague with a task, participants showed increases in happiness (Lyubomirsky, 2008). Being kind to others fosters a greater sense of interdependence and cooperation within the social community and makes people feel more advantaged or grateful than the recipient (Lyubomirsky, 2008). Through facilitating reflection, asking questions, drawing attention to what is working well and sharing in our experiences, we are able to form more positive relationships with others and we can see how coaching itself is a valuable tool for building high-quality connections.

Meaning

Meaning refers to the intrinsic value and joy a person feels they are able to apply their strengths and values with a sense of purpose, efficacy and self-worth by making a contribution to society (Baumeister & Vohs, 2005). When people feel a sense of purpose or meaning, they feel connected to something larger than themselves and therefore feel as though what they are doing has value (Kem, Waters, Adler, & White, 2014). Not only does having a sense of meaning at work increase well-being, it has also been shown to decrease feelings of hostility, stress and depression at work (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006). This has a direct link to eudaimonia. In order to make life meaningful, one has to apply effort and take action. Through meaning, a person is able to develop their vision which informs their direction and promotes a sense of purpose. The effort required to move in this direction may not necessarily generate positive emotions at first; however, with persistence and measured successes along the way, greater life satisfaction and positive affect may result (Lambert et al., 2015).

Strategies coaches can use to build a sense of meaning will typically involve helping the coachee act in accordance with their own values. To this end, "core values" lists are commonly used in coaching. In addition, identifying character strengths, as discussed earlier, can also become a crucial component in helping

coaches set goals and the related strategies to achieve them. Through understanding values and strengths, coaches are also better placed to visualise their best possible self. When people are asked to imagine and write about their future selves as working hard and accomplishing their goals, they show a significant increase in positive mood (Lyubomirsky, 2008). The very act of writing prompts people to organise their thoughts in a systematic manner which requires analysis, and by doing so builds meaning (Lyubomirsky, 2008).

Locke and Latham's (1984) foundational work in goal setting is also useful as a tool for building meaning for positive psychology coaches. Through goal setting, coaches can direct the coachee's attention, help them remain energised and support them in setting specific and measurable strategies that move them towards their desired goals. In particular, the use of self-concordant goal setting (Sheldon, 2002), that is goals aligned to core life values, can assist in creating intrinsic and meaningful goals.

Accomplishment

Accomplishment refers to the application of personal skills and effort as a person moves towards a desired goal (Seligman, 2012). This requires both motivation and persistence in an attempt to overcome possible challenges while having enough insight to remain flexible along the path to achievement. Setting clear goals and planning realistic and strategic ways in which to achieve these goals is foundational to the coaching process.

Research by Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007) has shown that grit is crucial when it comes to achieving success. Grit is defined as passion and perseverance where those people who are "grittier" are more likely to persevere in achieving their long-term goals than those who are less grittier (Duckworth et al., 2007).

Dweck (2008) suggested that it is still unknown how to specifically build grit; however, her work at Stanford University in fixed versus growth mindset shows that people who believe intelligence and character can be developed, instead of remaining fixed, are more likely to succeed. Research also indicates that skills in growth mindset can be developed and taught. One way coaches can do this is by praising both the effort that is put towards achieving the goal as well as reflecting on the process and strategies that contributed to the success.

The very act of ongoing reflection, especially upon what is working well, can build purpose and a sense of meaning. This reflection could be strengthened using an appreciative inquiry approach (Cooperrider, 1996; Gordon, 2008). This is the study of what is working best, envisioning what might be and planning for what could be.

It is also important to note that there are decades of research on goal commitment (Sheldon, 2002). In fact, coaching has been historically focused on achievement and shown to have a significant positive impact on goal attainment. So it is important for the PPC to acknowledge that a key challenge may be in

supporting the coachee to accomplish and experience well-being together rather than experiencing accomplishment to the detriment of their well-being which may often be the case.

As such, PPC goes beyond "coaching as usual," whereby specific PR approaches are used to support well-being in the pursuit of goals. The first one we would suggest is the identification of character strengths, shown to enhance goal attainment and well-being (Govindji & Linley, 2007). The next step is to set meaningful and realistic (self-concordant) goals. The final step is to provide feedback in the form of reflection that builds goal commitment and grit. Through praise and analysis of what worked well, together with a solution-focused approach, inherent in coaching, the coach is able to help the coachee develop a growth mindset and enhance grit.

One common coaching model that supports the process towards accomplishment is the GROW Model (Palmer & Whybrow, 2014). This requires the coach to ask questions that follow GROW as a coaching framework: **Goal** – What is the goal you would like to achieve? **Reality** – What is happening now that tells you there is a problem or an opportunity? **Options** – What options exist to move you towards your goal? **Way Forward** – Which of these options will you commit to and by when will you take this action? Through the application of the GROW framework of questions, the coach is able to raise self-awareness to support the coachee in developing self-concordant goals.

PERMA in coaching practice

When positive psychology coaches use PERMA in their practice, they create awareness of positive emotions, encourage the identification and use of strengths for enhanced engagement and flow, support the creation and maintenance of positive relationships, establish connection or reconnection to meaning and purpose and celebrate achievements that occur along the way. This may occur either explicitly or implicitly as a way of achieving desired goals for the coachee, which can also support well-being and potentially move them towards a state of flourishing. Either way, the coach who uses PERMA as a model to promote well-being or improve performance must be cautioned about addressing each domain separately and oversimplifying the model. Coaches must remain aware that each of the PERMA domains is interrelated, and while discussion of their theoretical underpinnings occurred separately within this chapter, in a coaching context they are always interwoven.

To assist coaches in the assessment of PERMA, there are readily accessible validated self-assessment tools such as the PERMAH-Profler (Butler & Kem, 2015). The profile consists of specific measures relevant to the PERMA construct to assess current levels of flourishing across the domains, including an additional measure for physical health. This can become a baseline for discussing and agreeing upon well-being goals and subsequent coaching interventions. This becomes significant because research continues to show that evidence-based

ing programs can in fact facilitate goal attainment, improve mental health and enhance quality of life (Grant, 2003).

Positive psychology coaches, in addition to a focus on the promotion of well-being, can also use PPIs that enhance resilience and encourage hardness as active responses to challenge and change (see Chapter 9 on resilience). Mental toughness is one area of research that aligns to and supports positive psychology training. Mental Toughness has been defined as how individuals manage stress, cope and change, irrespective of their circumstances (Clough & Struycharczyk, 2012). Coaches can use the mental toughness assessment tool, the MTQ48 (Joseph, Earle, & Sewell, 2002), to identify how coaches measure across four components: **Challenge** and **Confidence** that are seen primarily as indicators of resilience. **Hardiness** and **Control** and **Commitment** that are seen as indicators of resilience. Hardiness and young people subject to individual needs and assessment.

Overall, it is clear to see how coaching can be a significant medium in which to support individuals to build resilience and overall well-being. By learning new skills the coachee is able to identify and take positive action towards intrinsically motivated goals and practice perspective-taking in order to reframe challenges and look for and embrace opportunities.

Which coaches benefit most?

Coaching for PERMA is applicable across all of life's domains and is ideal for those who are already flourishing, who are "moderately mentally healthy" or "languishing" and who want to move towards "flourishing." Coaching for PERMA is applied in corporate, government, educational, NFP and community-based settings, and is applicable with individuals, teams, groups and whole institutions. As noted earlier, PPC is not for those who are distressed or experience clinical symptoms of depression, anxiety or some other psychological disorder. Some specific examples include the following:

Leadership coaching – Coaching leaders using the PERMA framework has the potential to not only support and enhance the well-being and engagement of the leader themselves but also support the wider organisation as a whole in a "Ripple Effect" (O'Connor & Cavanagh, 2013). Given high performers in leadership and management roles might be vulnerable to distress and burnout (Grant, 2012; Spence, 2015), helping leaders recognise workplace challenges and opportunities promises to impact on wider workplace employee engagement and well-being initiatives.

Career Transition coaching – In a climate of increasing risk of job redundancy and the need to make career-related decisions, coaching for PERMA is potentially a very powerful approach to better support well-being during times of change. PERMA can be applied in the following ways to help coachees be better prepared, resilient and more empowered as they transition and through careers. PPC can support the coachee in the following ways:

- **Positive emotions** – supporting coachees to manage the positive and negative emotions associated with job loss and career transition through focussing on best professional self-exercises and reflection on workplace and professional achievements.
- **Engagement** – supporting coachees to reflect on their strengths use and to ensure these are reflected in achievements and job market branding through resume development and use of LinkedIn and social media. To ensure strengths are marshalled and applied while in transition to maintain well-being.
- **Relationships** – to ensure that coachees reflect on their interpersonal skills and positive work relationships and invest in connecting positively with others while in transition.
- **Meaning** – to support coachees to explore their ideal future position and future professional best self to make informed future career choices.
- **Accomplishment** – to help coachees set SMART goals to approach the job market and be successful in landing a new position.
- **Education Coaching** – The global movement in positive education has seen the increasing application of both positive psychology and coaching in schools, universities and community education services to enhance PERMA and flourishing within whole school communities (Leach & Green, 2015). Coaching outcomes for both teachers and students have shown significant increases in well-being, resilience, hardiness, goal striving and hope (Green, Grant, & Rynsaardt, 2010; Dulagiti, Green, & Ahern, 2016). In addition, Leach, Green, and Grant (2011) have highlighted the potential of PPIs including coaching to create flourishing youth provision designed to target and engage young people who fall outside of mainstream education.

Case study

The coachee

Sarah is a senior manager, aged 42 years, within a public sector organisation. She is married and has three children (aged 7, 9 and 12). She has been with this organisation for more than 15 years and is feeling overwhelmed with the new changes in leadership, which have seen increases in expectations and demands of the job. She loves the manner in which she is able to contribute to the lives of others in her role and she enjoys the fun and laughter she has with her team of six people. However, with increases in workload and accountability as a manager, she feels she spends more time on paperwork and in meetings than actually connecting with people; as a result, she is now questioning whether this is still the job for her. She feels stuck and frustrated, has lost her passion and zest for the role and is becoming increasingly negative about the organisation and life in general. The ongoing stress that Sarah has been feeling is not only impacting her personal well-being with sleepless nights and high blood pressure, but it is

also affecting her family, whereby she has little time to spend with them. Sarah has heard from a colleague in another organisation about the value of coaching and decided to try and take back control of her life. After searching the Internet and speaking to her colleague, Sarah found a certified coach who specialises in positive psychology and well-being that she felt has a good fit for her.

The coach

The coach in this case study is a certified coach who was approached by Sarah for 8 one-on-one sessions over an 8-month period. These were conducted via Skype, with each session being 1 hour in length. While there are many coaching strategies that can be used in a session, the focus with Sarah was developing the five pillars of well-being in the PERMA Model, given Sarah had specifically highlighted a key issue of being how stressed and overwhelmed she felt. She stated in the initial conversation that she was usually a "happy" person but was now finding herself cynical, pessimistic and "not nice to be around" at both home and work. Her goals for the coaching sessions were to "feel good" again, to regain her passion for work and to be a better role model for her children.

The coaching

Any first session in coaching requires the coach to build rapport and trust and highlight the current reality for the client. This meant asking and listening for the key stressors for Sarah as well as identifying what was already working well. Often when people feel overwhelmed and stressed, their attention is drawn to these stressors, yet a coach is well placed to help the client reframe this negative bias by highlighting existing areas that support well-being. To do this, the coach used the PERMA Model to ask Sarah questions that highlight any positive feelings felt at work, current strengths in the role, how people support her, how meaningful her work was and the current achievements made, all of which align with five PERMA pillars of well-being.

The first set of questions asked to Sarah are listed in Table 7.1 below.

At the completion of these questions, Sarah was surprised at how many good things existed. She reflected on how most of her time and attention was taken up by people who did not do their job properly or tasks that were not completed properly, instead of noticing the good stuff that happened. By reflecting on the PERMA questions, she realised that there was more to the picture than she had been seeing.

Once the coach had shifted Sarah's perspective to recognise that positive experiences were happening just as much as negative ones, the next step was to plan ways to take specific action to strengthen and further support her well-being at work.

The next set of action-oriented questions discussed with Sarah can be seen in Table 7.2.

Table 7.1

PERMA Model	Questions
P Positive emotion	What do you love most about your current role? How does this make you feel?
E Engagement	What are your strengths in your current role? How do you know? When do you experience flow?
R Relationships	Who are the people who support in your current role? How do they do this?
M Meaning	What brought you to this role in the first place? What contributions do you make? How important is this to you? You say you are very busy, so busy you have to bring work home? Given you are so busy, list 10 accomplishments you have made in the past month?
A Accomplishment	

Table 7.2

PERMA Model	Questions
P Positive emotion	How could you better track the good stuff when it happens at work?
E Engagement	Take the VIA Survey (www.viacharacter.org) to identify your top five character strengths. Choose two strengths, how you could use these strength in novel ways at work? Which "lesser strengths" would you like to develop and may make the biggest impact on the outcome of our goal?
R Relationships	Consider a person who supports you at work, how could you thank them and explain just how helpful they are to you? (e.g. a Thank you letter)
M Meaning	Reflect on what legacy you have left at the end of this week at work. How would you like to be remembered next week?
A Accomplishment	Set yourself a small "learning goal" (e.g. learn a new computer software) and a "performance goal" (e.g. complete the monthly report on time), how will you celebrate them once achieved?

These questions concluded session 1 where Sarah found she had the start of her own well-being plan. Together the coach and the coachee mapped out when and how these actions steps could occur so it was both realistic and meaningful.

In the next session, a review of her character strengths of gratitude, leadership, kindness, teamwork and zest occurred, to ensure future actions aligned with her strengths. In subsequent sessions, reflections on each of the PERMA pillars allowed identification of what was working well and what needed modification to occur. As a result, she identified that she enjoyed keeping a gratitude diary on

her phone to track positive emotions each day, however found reflecting on her legacy difficult. Instead, she decided to place a collage of photos taken on a family holiday on her desk to remind her of what was important. She encouraged her team to take the VIA Strengths Test so they could each better identify their different strengths, and instead of celebrating her own achievements, she developed a team "Achievements board," where all the team members were encouraged to post success stories or accomplishments each week. Sarah also began mapping the positive to negative comments made in meetings to determine if they were forming positive relationships, and she began her Monday morning train ride to work by envisioning and writing about her best possible self.

At the end of the eight sessions over 8 months, Sarah reported feeling more alive and more in control of her own life. She was more aware of her own decisions, what was most meaningful to her and how to maintain that sense of purpose in her role. With this insight, she was able to set clearer boundaries between work and home and was relishing in the extra time she was spending with her children and husband. While the workplace stressors, accountability and expectations had not changed, Sarah was able to better navigate these demands with the growth mindset she was developing. As she grew in awareness of her own strengths, she was better able to spot strengths in others. This resulted in taking feedback less personally and looking for the value each person brought to their own roles. She was developing a practice of reflecting on what was working as opposed to what was not working. More importantly, Sarah was able to share these tools with her husband and family, where each night they discussed what went well in the day. Sarah said she felt invigorated again and excited to be leading her team through the new changes that were happening at work. She found herself laughing again and enjoying the challenges work was bringing. Of course, there were still days where Sarah would struggle to "do good and feel good"; however, now she felt she had some very practical tools to manage the normal ups and downs of work and life.

Discussion points

1. How can you highlight to the coachee the importance of creating meaningful goals using the PERMA framework?
2. How do you assist your coachees to ensure their accomplishment does not undermine their well-being?
3. What measures of well-being do you use to assess progress and provide a Return on Investment (ROI)?
4. As a coaching or positive psychology student or practitioner, how are you building or sustaining PERMA in your life?

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Chapter 8

Positive psychology coaching for health and wellbeing

Rebecca Reynolds, Stephen Palmer, and Suzy Green

Introduction

This chapter focuses on positive psychology coaching in the context of health and wellbeing. We focus on the lifestyle behaviours of nutrition/diet and physical activity and the physiological and psychological outcomes related to these habits.

The World Health Organization (2015a) defined good health as: “a state of complete physical, social and mental well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” Well-being has been defined as: “what people think and feel about their lives, such as the quality of their relationships, their positive emotions and resilience, the realization of their potential, or their overall satisfaction with life – i.e. their ‘well-being’” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). With the trend towards dropping the hyphen, in the context of this chapter, the term “wellbeing” will be used to refer to what makes a life go well for a person and “well-being” will refer to the more specific concept – the opposite of ill-being (see JW, 2011).

The activities and areas of research that aim to improve people’s health and wellbeing, on both individual and population levels, are broad and overlapping, include health promotion and health education. There is often cross-over in who does what, when and where; and all actions share the basic premise of aiming to enable a “healthy” state of the human body and mind in the context of the wider environment.

Development of positive psychology coaching for health and wellbeing

In 2008, Seligman introduced the term “positive health,” which he defined as: “a state (that is) beyond the mere absence of disease and is definable and measurable. Positive health can be operationalised by a combination of excellent status on biological, subjective, and functional measures” (p. 3). Aspinwall and Tedeschi (2010) highlighted how the growth in the positive psychology movement has paralleled the general interest in positive affect and cognitions to enhance health and wellbeing, although they were concerned about popular views of positive thinking being seen as a cure for serious diseases such as cancer.