

## **Authentic Happiness - Developing a Positive Emotional Life**

### **I. Introduction**

The information used in this training is based on the work of Martin Seligman, Ph.D. and his book Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment

For the last 50 or more years psychology has been focused on what's wrong with people. There's good understanding of how troubles develop-their genetics, biochemistry and psychological causes. And many disorders can now be treated.

The problem that's developed is that there has been a strong focus on what makes life difficult with a lack of focus on building those things within people that make life worth living. Many people want to do more than correct their weaknesses. They want to live lives that have meaning. The field of positive psychology seeks to understand positive emotion, how to build strengths and virtues and to help people live the "good life".

New research into happiness demonstrates that it can be lastingly increased. Seligman asserts that there is a pervasive belief that happiness is inauthentic. One of the goals of his book about authentic happiness is to challenge that belief.

Seligman believes that authentic happiness comes from identifying and cultivating fundamental strengths and using them every day in every aspect of life. His goal is to provide some balance in the field of psychology so that in addition to its focus on suffering and mental illness there will be acknowledgment of the role of positive emotion, strengths and virtues.

### **II.**

**The following two studies are examples of how positive emotion can affect long-term happiness.**

**Nun Study-One study that illustrates how positive emotion can affect longevity and long-term happiness.**

A study of happiness and longevity was done using 180 nuns living together in Milwaukee as subjects. The nuns were good subjects because they lived routine and sheltered lives. Many of the things that might confound the study were eliminated because they ate the same diet, lived in the same place, were in the same socioeconomic class etc. However with all of these things being constant among the nuns there was wide variation in how healthy the sisters were and how long they lived. One sister lived to be 98 and was never sick. Another sister had a stroke at age 59 and died shortly thereafter. Both ate the same diet, had the same medical care, had the same lifestyle etc. What was the difference?

Researchers went back and read the essays each of the sisters wrote when they took their vows to become nuns. They found a strong and surprising difference between the essays of the two nuns described above. One sister used the words "very happy" and "eager joy" among other positive terms in her essay. The other sister in her essay expressed no positive emotion. When the researchers started to read all the essays and quantify the amount of positive feeling it was discovered that 90% of the most cheerful quarter was still alive at age 85, while only 34% of the least cheerful quarter was alive at that age. 54% of the most cheerful quarter was alive at age 94, as opposed to 11% of the least cheerful quarter.

### **College yearbook photo study**

Researchers have also done studies of college yearbook pictures. They determined that there are two kinds of smiles evident in the pictures and that these are a determinate of happiness.

The Duchenne Smile: (named after its discoverer Guillaume Duchenne) Is a genuine smile where the corners of the mouth are turned up and the skin around the corners of the eyes crinkles. The muscles that control this are difficult to control voluntarily.

The Pan American Smile: (named after the flight attendants in TV. ads for the airline) These are inauthentic with none of the features of the Duchenne smile.

Trained psychologists looked at the photos and could distinguish between the two types of smiles. Researchers studied 141 women in senior class photos from a 1960 yearbook. One half of the smilers had Duchenne smiles. The women were contacted at age 27, 43, and 52 and asked about their marriages and life satisfaction. In the 1990s the researchers tried to predict from the photos what these women's married lives would turn out to be like. The women with the Duchenne smiles on the average were more likely to be married, stay married and to experience more personal well being over the 30 years since the pictures were taken. The researchers considered attractiveness and determined that looks had nothing to do with marriage or life satisfaction. A genuinely smiling woman was simply more likely to marry well and be happy.

### **Three questions Seligman addresses:**

\*Why do people have positive emotions? What are the functions and consequences of these emotions beyond making us feel good?

\*Who has positive emotion in abundance and who doesn't? What enables or disables these emotions?

\*How can you build more and lasting positive emotion into your life?

Seligman believes that many people try to achieve happiness by taking shortcuts. Drugs, alcohol, shopping, food, etc. Relying on shortcuts rather than being entitled to these feelings through the exercise of personal strengths and virtues leads to many people being wealthy materially but starved spiritually. He believes that positive emotion, which is separated from the exercise of character leads to emptiness and depression.

The positive feeling that arises from the exercise of strengths and virtues rather than shortcuts is authentic. The happiness that comes from doing for others, kindness and other exercises of character is much greater and long lasting than the happiness that comes from engaging in a pleasurable activity like watching a movie, hanging out with friends etc.

To understand wellbeing you need to understand personal strengths and virtues. When one's wellbeing comes from engaging strengths and virtues than it is authentic.

### **Feelings versus traits:**

Seligman differentiates between feelings and traits. **Feelings** are momentary occurrences rather than recurring features of personality. **Traits** are negative or positive characteristics that recur across time and different situations.

**Positive Psychology chose 24 strengths out of many possible traits and those will be covered later when we discuss signature strengths and how they relate to authentic happiness.**

### **Negative VS positive emotions:**

All emotions have 4 components:

Feeling  
Sensory  
Thinking  
Action

**Negative** emotions tend to be focused and intolerant. These narrow our attention and lead to quick and decisive actions such as fighting or fleeing.

**Positive** emotions create an ability to be expansive, tolerant and creative. When we're positive we're better liked and we're open to new experiences and ideas.

Positive mood allows us to think in an entirely different way than a negative mood. We focus on what's right rather than on what's wrong.

**Our emotions affect our health, productivity, how we handle adversity, and our social resources.**

### **Health:**

There is direct evidence that positive emotion predicts health and longevity. Happier people are less likely to die younger or become disabled and they age better. Happy people have better health habits, lower blood pressure, and stronger immune systems. Happy people seek out and absorb more health risk information as well. (NUN STUDY FOR EXAMPLE)

### **Productivity:**

Happier people are more satisfied with their jobs than less happy people. Research suggests that more happiness causes more productivity and higher income.

## **Adversity:**

Happy people deal well with negative events and cope better with adversity. They endure pain better and take more health and safety precautions.

## **Social resources:**

Happy people tend to have a rich social life. They have more casual friends, more close friends and they're more likely to be married and more likely to be involved in group activities. In addition happier people tend to be more altruistic. Happy people are more likely to display empathy and willing to help others because when we're happy we're less self-focused, we like others more and we want to share our good fortune. When we're unhappy we become distrustful, turn inward and focus on our own needs.

Developing more positive emotion will build friendship, love, better physical health and greater achievement.

## **III.**

**So now that we understand the impact of positive and negative emotions we can begin to look at what we can do to make ourselves happier.**

**Seligman has developed something he calls the "happiness formula":**

**H=S+C+V**

H= Enduring level of happiness

S=Set range

C=Circumstances of your life

V=Factors under your control

H=Enduring level of happiness: Seligman makes the distinction between momentary and enduring happiness. Momentary happiness can be increased by any number of things-chocolate, a movie, shopping etc. It is transient. Whereas enduring happiness is long-term lasting happiness.

S=Set range: The range of happiness we inherit. Our personal set range of positive and negative emotion.

Seligman refers to "The Hedonic treadmill"-The rapid and inevitable adaptation to good things by taking them for granted. This can be a barrier to raising our level of happiness. With the treadmill the more we accumulate the more our expectations increase. Things we worked for no longer make us happy so we need to get something better to increase our level of happiness. Research has shown that good things and high accomplishments have little power to make people happy in the long run.

Together the "S" variables-your genes, the hedonic treadmill and your set range tend to keep your happiness level from increasing.

C=Life circumstances: how external circumstances influence happiness. And these can change happiness for the better. However changing circumstances can be impractical and expensive.

## **Circumstances:**

**1. Money**-How important money is to you-more than money itself influences your happiness. Materialism seems to be counterproductive. People who value money more than other goals are less satisfied with their income and their lives as a whole. Money has not been shown to have a large impact on happiness.

**2.Marriage**-This is strongly correlated to happiness. The National Opinion Research Center surveyed 35,000 Americans over 30 years. 40% of married people said they were very happy, while only 24% of unmarried, divorced, separated, or widowed people said they were happy. This holds when controlling for age and income and is true for women and men.

Unhappy marriages undermine wellbeing. For those in unhappy marriages their level of happiness is lower than unmarried or divorced people.

## **Why are married people happier?**

### **Some possibilities:**

- \*Marriage causes increased happiness
- \*People who are already happy are more likely to get married and stay married
- \*Some other variable such as sociability causes more happiness and a greater likelihood of getting married

Seligman feels that the jury is still out on this.

### **3.Social Life**

In Seligman's study of happy people he found that every person except for one in the top 10% of happiness was involved in a romantic relationship.

Very happy people have rich, fulfilling social lives. They spend the least time alone and the most time socializing. They're rated highest on good relationships by themselves and by their friends.

### **Why are social people happier?**

#### **Some possibilities:**

- \*A rich social life will make people happier
- \*Happier people are better liked so they have a richer social life
- \*Some other variable such as extroverts are more social so they have a richer social life and are happier

### **4.Negative Emotion**

Having more than your share of misery doesn't mean you can't have a lot of joy. There's only a moderate negative correlation between positive and negative emotion, In other words if you have a lot of negative emotion in your life you may have somewhat less positive emotion than average, but you're not doomed to a joyless life. On the other hand if you have a lot of positive emotion this only protects you moderately well from sorrows.

### **5.Age**

A study of 60,000 adults from 40 nations divides happiness into three components:

- a. life satisfaction
- b. pleasant affect
- c. unpleasant affect

life satisfaction goes up slightly with age. Pleasant affect declines slightly with age. There is no change in unpleasant affect.

So what changes? The intensity of emotions decreases with age. The top of the world versus the depths of depression become less common with age and experience.

### **6.Health**

Objective good health is barely related to happiness. What matters is our subjective perception of how healthy we are. Moderate ill health doesn't bring unhappiness. But severe illness does which may be defined as 5 or more health problems over time.

### **7.Education, climate, race and gender**

These are all grouped together because Seligman says none of them strongly affects level of happiness.

Education: this isn't a means to greater happiness. Only slight impact and only among those with a low income. Intelligence doesn't affect happiness in either direction.

Climate: sunny climates do combat SAD but happiness levels don't vary with climate since people adapt to weather quickly and completely.

Race: in the United States it's not related to happiness either way. In spite of worse economic situations of many black and Hispanics both groups have markedly lower rates of depression than whites but their level of reported happiness isn't higher than whites except maybe among older men.

Gender: In average emotional tone men and women don't differ. But women are both happier and sadder than men.

## **8. Religion**

Religious Americans are less likely to abuse drugs, commit crimes, divorce or kill themselves. They are physically healthier and live longer. They are less thrown by divorce, unemployment, illness and death. Survey data consistently shows religious people being somewhat happier and more satisfied with life.

Seligman asserts that religions instill hope for the future and create meaning in life.

**Changing your external circumstances can be difficult if not impossible. And even if you could change them it wouldn't do much for you since they account for no more than 8-15% of the variance in happiness.**

### **Final part of the equation:**

V=things under our control: There are lots of internal circumstances we can do something about. These are under our control and changing these can increase our level of happiness.

## **IV.**

**Satisfaction about the past, present and future-how we see and interpret our past, present and future impacts our emotions.**

**Past:** satisfaction, contentment, fulfillment, pride and serenity.

**Present:** joy, ecstasy, calm zest, ebullience, pleasure and flow.

**Future:** optimism, hope, faith, and trust

### **Satisfaction about the past:**

All feeling about the past is driven by thinking and interpretation. Seligman believes that events of childhood are over-emphasized, as is a person's past history in general. He thinks that major childhood trauma does have some impact on adult personality but only a barely detectable one. There is no justification in his thinking for blaming adult woes on what happened to you as a child. He also believes that many people who are embittered by their past and are passive about their futures are that way because they think their personal history imprisons them. They feel like victims.

Cognitive therapy emerged out of the frustration some practitioners felt with the psychodynamic approach to therapy. That approach required people to focus on their pasts rather than getting people to think differently about the present and future. It was also thought that expressing emotions such as anger kept people from developing symptoms. Seligman believes the opposite. That dwelling on anger produces more symptoms. Emotions left to themselves will dissipate. But if they're dwelt upon the emotions multiply and imprison people in a vicious cycle of dealing with past wrongs.

The insufficient appreciation and savoring of good events in the past and the overemphasis on bad ones undermines serenity, contentment and satisfaction.

**There are two ways of bringing feelings about the past into the region of contentment and satisfaction:**

**Gratitude:** this amplifies the savoring and appreciation of past good events. Gratitude buffers us from stress, enables us to feel less envy, anger, resentment and regret. It leads to positive emotions such as joy and contentment.

### **Exercises:**

1. Gratitude letter and visit. Compose a letter to someone important in your life. Tell them what they've done for you or mean to you. Then take it to them and read it to them.
2. 3 Good things: Before going to bed write down 3 things from the day that you're grateful for and what it is about you that made it possible.
3. Gratitude journal-keep a journal in which you write down things and people you're grateful for.

People who keep a gratitude journal are happier, sleep better and exercise more than those people who don't.

**Rewriting history:** learning to **forgive** loosens the power of bad events to embitter and can transform memories.

Why do many people hold on to the bitter thoughts about their past? There are sometimes good reasons to hold onto bitterness.

- Forgiving may be unjust. There may be a reason to be angry and not want to let the perpetrator off the hook.
- Forgiving may seem like a lack of caring for the victim.
- Forgiving blocks revenge-which may be right and normal.

But forgiving transforms bitterness into neutrality or even into positive memories and therefore makes life satisfaction possible. "You can't hurt the perpetrator by not forgiving, but you can set yourself free by forgiving". Physical health- especially cardiovascular health is better in those who forgive.

**Forgiveness:**

**There are 5 steps to forgiveness:**

**REACH developed by Everett Worthington:**

R: Recall the hurt in an objective way

E: Empathize-try to understand why this person hurt you from their point of view

A: Altruistic gift of forgiveness-recall when you transgressed, felt guilty, and were forgiven

C: Commit yourself to forgive publicly

H: Hold onto forgiveness, remind yourself that you have forgiven

Forgiveness=less anger, less stress, more optimism, and better reported health.

**Satisfaction about the present:**

**This consists of pleasures and gratifications.**

**Pleasures:** delights that have clear sensory and strong emotional components. "Raw feelings" They involve little, if any, thought.

Bodily pleasures: immediate, come through our senses and are momentary. Touch, smell, taste etc.

Higher pleasures: More complex and varied. Bliss, comfort, harmony.

Pleasures can increase short-term happiness. They fade quickly because we adapt to them. But we can learn to spread them, savor them and be mindful of them.

Pleasures are momentary and full of emotion. They can be increased by savoring, not allowing things to become habitual, and being mindful.

**Gratifications:** Activities we like doing but they're not accompanied by "raw" feelings. These engage us fully. We become immersed and absorbed in them. We lose self-consciousness and time stops. These last longer than pleasures. They require thinking and interpretation. Our strengths and virtues underlie them.

Seligman believes that the distinction between pleasures and gratifications is the difference between a pleasant life and a good life.

Whereas pleasures are about senses and emotions gratifications are about enacting personal strengths and virtues. Gratifications cause you to be so engaged that time stops and there is "flow".

**The psychological components of gratification are:**

The task is challenging and requires skill  
We concentrate  
There are clear goals  
We get immediate feedback  
There is deep involvement  
A sense of control  
The sense of self vanishes  
Time stops

Notice there are no emotions on the above list. The absence of emotion or consciousness is at the heart of flow.

When we are absorbed in something we are investing in something. When we engage in pleasures we are consuming rather than building.

When we habitually choose easy pleasures over gratifications there can be negative consequences.

### **Increase in depression:**

In the last 40 years there's been an increase in depression in wealthy countries. Depression is now 10 times more prevalent as it was in the 1960s and it strikes at a younger age. The mean age of 1<sup>st</sup> episode 40 years ago was 29.5. Today it is 14.5.

The paradox is that the objective indicators of well-being like purchasing power, education, and nutrition have increased while indicators of subjective well-being have decreased.

### **Why?**

There is an over reliance on short cuts to happiness-television, drugs, shopping, spectator sports and the list goes on. There are also those who believe that our culture espouses a victim mentality, individualism and unwarranted focus on self-esteem. Our lives are full of easy pleasures that don't call on our strengths or present challenges.

One of the major symptoms of depression is self-absorption. Depressed people are focused on how they feel much of the time. And Seligman believes that our culture is obsessed with self-focus.

One of the hallmarks of gratification is an absence of feeling-a loss of self-consciousness and self-focus. When one is experiencing flow depression decreases. So Seligman asserts that an antidote to depression is to strive for more gratification and tone down the pursuit of pleasures.

### **Satisfaction about the future:**

Positive emotions about the future include faith, trust, confidence, hope and optimism. Optimism and hope cause better resistance to depression when bad events strike, better performance at work, and better physical health.

### **How can you increase optimism and hope?**

Recognize and dispute pessimistic thoughts. The key to disputing pessimistic thoughts is to first recognize them. Then treat them like they were uttered by an external person whose mission in life is to make you miserable. You can dispute them using the ABCDE model.

- a. adversity
- b. beliefs you automatically have when that adverse thing occurs
- c. the usual consequences of the belief
- d. your disputation of your routine belief
- e. the energizing that occurs when you dispute it successfully

By effectively disputing the beliefs that follow adversity you can change your reaction from dejection and giving up to activity and a positive outlook. It's essential to understand that beliefs are just that-beliefs. They may or may not be facts.

We're bad at distancing ourselves from accusations we hurl at ourselves. It's important to stand back and get some distance so you can verify their accuracy.

Step 1-know your beliefs warrant dispute

Step 2-put disputation into practice

You need to learn to argue with yourself. So how can you do that convincingly?

1. Dispute the negative belief by showing that it's factually incorrect. What's the evidence for this belief? What's distorted about this belief?
2. Look for alternate causes for what happened. Pessimists latch on to the worst of all the possible causes. Ask yourself "is there any less destructive way to look at this?"

What if the negative belief you hold about yourself is true? Decatastrophize it. Even if the belief is true what are its implications? How likely is the worst- case scenario?

## **Part V**

### **Strength and virtue-These underlie authentic Happiness**

There are 6 virtues that are ubiquitous and valued in virtually every culture. These virtues were gleaned from religious and philosophical readings covering over 3,000 years.

#### **The 6 virtues:**

Wisdom and knowledge

Courage

Love and humanity

Justice

Temperance

Spirituality and transcendence

These 6 virtues are the core characteristics endorsed by almost all religious and philosophical traditions.

**We can achieve the above virtues by way of strengths of character.**

#### **How do we know a strength?**

It is a trait-a psychological characteristic-that is seen across different situations over time. Not a one-time display. It is valued in its own right and it often produces good consequences. They are ubiquitous-they're valued in almost all cultures in the world.

**In his book Seligman outlines 24 strengths and breaks them down into virtue clusters:**

#### **I.Wisdom**

1. curiosity-interest in the world
2. love of learning
3. judgment/critical thinking/open-mindedness/thinking things through
4. ingenuity/originality/practical intelligence/street smarts
5. social intelligence/personal intelligence/emotional intelligence
6. perspective-others seek you out to draw on your experience to help them solve problems and gain perspective

#### **II. Courage**

7. Valor and bravery-you don't shrink from threat, challenge, pain or difficulty-take tough stands when necessary
8. Perseverance/industry/diligence-you finish what you start, do what you say you'll do. Flexible, realistic.
9. Integrity/genuineness/honesty-honest, authentic, down to earth.

#### **III. Humanity and Love**

10. kindness and generosity
11. loving and allow yourself to be loved

#### **IV. Justice**



12. citizenship/duty/teamwork/loyalty
13. fairness and equity
14. leadership

## V. Temperance

15. self-control
16. prudence/discretion/caution-you don't say or do things you might regret. Far sighted and deliberative.
17. Humility-don't seek the spotlight, unpretentious

## VI. Transcendence-these reach outside and beyond you to connect to something larger.

18. appreciation of beauty and excellence
19. gratitude
20. hope/optimism/future mindedness
21. spirituality/sense of purpose/faith/religiousness-strong and coherent beliefs about a higher purpose and meaning in the universe.
22. Forgiveness and mercy-forgive those who have hurt you. Mercy not revenge.
23. Playfulness and humor
24. Zest/passion/enthusiasm

**Seligman believes that using your signature strengths-which are the top 5 of the 24 listed-as frequently as you can- brings you gratification and authentic happiness.**

To find out what yours are you can go to [www.authentichappiness.org](http://www.authentichappiness.org) and take the strengths survey.

## Part VI

**So how can we use our signature strengths to increase our happiness?**

### Work:

Our economy is changing from a money economy to a satisfaction economy. This changes when jobs are scarce, however. Money can't buy happiness. As an example some law firms are spending more money on retention than recruitment because staff was leaving for work that makes them happier.

Work can be more satisfying if you use your signature strengths in your work. Re-crafting your job so that it utilizes your strengths and virtues makes your work more enjoyable and fulfilling so that you experience "flow".

**There are three kinds of work orientation:**

Job, career, and calling.

**Job**-is done for a paycheck. It's a means to an end.

**Career**-a deeper, personal investment. It's about money and advancement.

**Calling** -a passionate commitment to work for its own sake. See your work as contributing to a greater good.

**How can you experience more "flow" at work?**

1. identify your signature strengths
2. choose work that lets you use them everyday
3. re-craft your present work to use your personal strengths more.-E.g. one of your signature strengths is leadership but your current job doesn't utilize that strength. Can you re-craft your job responsibilities to allow you to use that strength?
4. If you're the employer choose employees whose strengths mesh with the work they'll do. If you're a manager allow employees to re-craft their jobs if possible.

There is a clear correlation between positive emotion at work and higher productivity, lower turnover and increased loyalty.

## Love:

In a study of very happy people every person except for one was currently involved in a romantic relationship. Married people were happier than anyone else. Marriage was a more potent factor than job satisfaction, finances, or community.

Married people have the least amount of depression and never married the next to least. Followed by people who have been divorced once, people who are living together and last those who have been divorced more than once.

A primary cause of distress is the disruption of a significant relationship. As marriage has decreased and divorce has increased the amount of depression has greatly increased.

Social psychologists define three kinds of love. 1. The love of the people who give us comfort, acceptance and help and guidance-such as children's love for parents. 2. The love we have for people who depend on us for comfort, acceptance, etc.-the love of parents for their children. 3. Romantic love-the idealization of another-idealizing their strengths and virtues and downplaying their shortcomings. Marriage combines all three of love.

Marriage and relationships go better when they are a vehicle for using our strengths and virtues. Hopefully our partners fall in love with us because of these strengths and virtues. But those strengths that initially drew us to our partners easily get taken for granted. Couples that do the best are able to appreciate their partner's strengths. Happier couples look on the bright side of the relationship, focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses. It helps if one or both of the partners view things with optimism. So when negative things do occur they make temporary and specific explanations for the event rather than seeing the event as permanent and pervasive. Optimism helps marriage.

Studies show that marriage acts as a buffer against troubles, and that children of stable relationships do better.

## Parenting:

1. Positive emotion in children broadens and builds the intellectual, social and physical resources that children can draw on later in life. Secure attachments allow children to explore and gain mastery sooner. When children and people in general feel mastery and positive emotion they think and act differently.
2. Parents should augment positive emotions in their children so that there is an "upward spiral" of better coping and more positive emotions.
3. Take the positive emotions of your children as seriously as the negative ones and his/her strengths as seriously as their weaknesses.

## Summary

There are several ways to achieve authentic happiness:

**Increase positive emotion-** Focus on increasing your positive emotions. There are three different kinds-past, present and future. It is possible to cultivate any of these separately from the others.

Past-can be increased by gratitude and forgiveness.

Present-divided into pleasures and gratifications

Future-can be increased by learning to recognize and dispute pessimistic thoughts

## **Determining your signature strengths**

### **Using your signature strengths in three arenas-work, love, and parenting**

Seligman believes that the good life consists of using your signature strengths as frequently as possible. Living a meaningful life has an additional feature-using your signature strengths in the service of something larger than you are.