



HOW TO PUT WELLBEING INTO ACTION

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Why mental wellbeing



We've all heard of wellbeing in different contexts. But more often than not in the context of physical wellbeing where we're being nudged to eat better, exercise – live better. And we try and conform too, mostly in the hope of leading fuller lives with more energy and less illness. But what about emotional and psychological wellbeing?

For over a century, the emphasis in both psychological theory and practice has been on dysfunction, mental illness, and repairing emotional damage. This focus is hardly surprising given that seminal figures like Sigmund Freud were medical doctors trained to find pathology rather than health. Then, in 1998, Dr Martin Seligman of the University of Pennsylvania promoted the scientific study of what he called 'human strengths and virtues' – focussing on traits like kindness, curiosity, creativity, courage, forgiveness, hope, zestfulness, and leadership.

"Though Seligman is credited with coining the term 'positive psychology,' the idea of focusing not on what's wrong with us, but what's right, originated with another noted American psychologist more than 60 years ago - Abraham Maslow"

Maslow was known for his studies on personality and motivation, and concepts like self-actualization, peak-experience, and synergy have become part of the everyday English language.

You may argue that many aspects of mental wellbeing have made it to the mainstream with buzzwords like mindfulness and meditation. Both strong concepts that contribute to wellbeing and emotional regulation. However positive psychology does have other tools that can set you on the path of wellbeing. In this introductory booklet we introduce you to some new aspects of positive psychology with edited excerpts from White Swan Foundation's positive psychology column, *Living Positively* by psychologist Dr Edward Hoffman. We urge you to read comprehensive pieces on our portal: www.whiteswanfoundation.org

Savoring simple moments



Positive psychology is increasingly discovering that little pleasurable moments of daily life forge our overall happiness – and we should therefore increase our mindfulness to them.

Is savoring only a single type of experience? Dr Fred Bryant of Chicago's Loyola University and his colleagues have found that four different types of savoring. These include:

- **Basking** or receiving praise and congratulations
- **Marveling** or getting lost in the wonder of a moment
- **Luxuriating** or indulging in a sensation
- **Thanksgiving** or expressing gratitude

"The passing moment is all we can be sure of. It is only common sense to extract its utmost value from it."

- W Somerset Maugham, in his memoir *The Summing Up*

How to enhance your experience of a moment

- Tell your friends about your happy experience.
- Take a mental photo of the experience.
- Congratulate yourself for an achievement or well-earned outcome.
- Sharpen your sensory perceptions. Pay more attention to sounds, colors, fragrances, tastes, and tactile sensations.



Gratitude



What are you most thankful for in your life? How often do you feel grateful, and how easy is it for you to express gratitude? The more that you can bring gratitude into your daily life, the greater likelihood of increasing your happiness and wellbeing.

Based on his studies of self-actualizing (highly productive, creative, and self-fulfilled) men and women, Abraham Maslow was convinced that the ability to feel and express gratitude easily is a vital aspect of mental health – and those with difficulty doing so can be guided in developing such traits.

How to include gratitude in daily life

- 1) **Make a gratitude list:** Once a week for the next four weeks, identify everything in your life for which you're grateful. Your list can include people or other aspects of your life.
- 2) **Keep a gratitude journal:** Each night before you go to sleep, write about an event of that day for which you're grateful. It is important to write on a daily basis and strengthen your 'gratitude muscles'.
- 3) **Write a gratitude letter to a relative:** If married, write it to your spouse. If single, write it to a parent or sibling.
- 4) **Write a gratitude letter to a friend:** Select a close friend and send a personal, handwritten letter expressing gratitude.
- 5) **Make a vow to practice gratitude:** Research shows that promising to perform a behavior increases the likelihood that it will be done. Write your gratitude vow and post it somewhere visible in your home.



Finding flow in everyday life



Have you ever been so absorbed in an activity that you 'lost yourself' happily – and time seemed to disappear completely? If so, you're no stranger to the flow experience, known for its personal as well as organizational benefits.

"It was a miraculous way of entering into a different world where all those [terrible] things didn't matter. For hours, I'd just focus within a reality that had clear rules and goals."

- **Dr Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi** who researched the effect of flow on wellbeing

How to maximise the occurrence of flow in your life

- 1) Write about a time when you experienced flow – preferably in the past few weeks. It could be related to work, your home, a creative activity or even a sport. As fully as you can recall, describe: where and when it took place, who was with you and how long it lasted.
- 2) How emotionally, intellectually, or physically challenged were you?
- 3) Now that you've identified the basic features of your flow experience, how can you increase their occurrence? Such self-reflection will help you to make flow a frequent, uplifting event in your life.



Time affluence: A Key to wellbeing



American psychologists Tim Kasser and Kenneth Sheldon found that, even after controlling for material wealth as a possible factor, the individual's sense of time affluence – the sense that one regularly has ample time available – was linked to greater happiness. They found that people who reported close relationships generally experienced greater time affluence than others.

Dr Cassie Mogilner of the Wharton School of Business and her colleagues experimentally found that – seemingly paradoxically – our sense of time affluence increases when we spend time benevolently on others.

How is this possible? In their view, it's because such altruistic behavior boosts our self-esteem and self-confidence—and this, in turn, stretches out time in our minds.

How to increase time affluence in your life

- To enhance your sense of time affluence and resultant psychological well-being, We recommend that you become more generous with the hours at your weekly disposal.
- Build into your weekly routine helping activities to benefit others – whether family members, friends, or persons in your larger community. If you engage in any kind of volunteer work, your sense of available time will expand – so seek it out.



Peer support and finding a confidant



Since the advent of behavioral medicine in the 1970s, investigators have closely studied what is known as *social support*. From the inception of this field, researchers have differentiated *instrumental* from *emotional* support. *Instrumental* support involves tangibles such as money, food, cooking or house-cleaning, while emotional support relates to intangibles such as empathy and advice. Increasingly, research has come to focus on one specific aspect of social support: the confidant relationship. The select individual(s) whom a person trusts in sharing important personal matters is sometimes referred to as a confidant.

How does having a confidant exert such an enormous influence on our wellness? In a direct way, the presence of a close friend enables us to receive both empathy and guidance from someone who is familiar with our personality quirks, yet cares about our happiness. Having a confidant enables us to make more effective decisions in domains such as work and family – and reduces our vulnerability to the stressors of daily life.

- As entrepreneurs you may often find yourself alone and the receiving end of stressful situations. Finding a peer group or a confidant who can listen and empathise with your situation can help you steer these situations better.
- You could also consider speaking to a therapist (counselor/ psychologist) to help you with both work-related and emotional issues. A therapist, unlike a friend, is trained to give you an objective hearing and help you work through your difficulties.