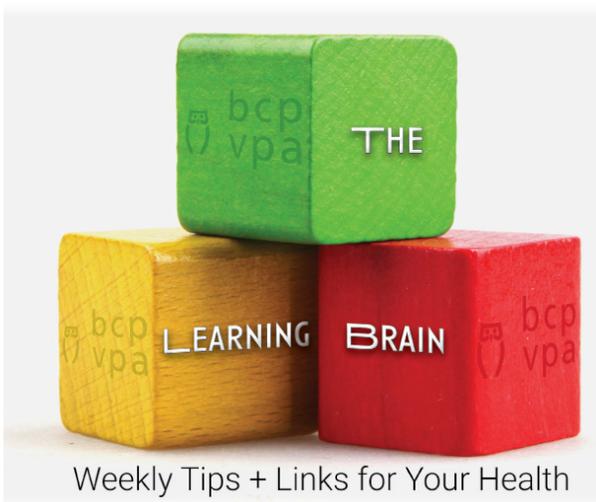# bcpvpa
THE LEARNING BRAIN

Each week in BCPVPA eNews, we share tips, links and
self-assessment tools that will help our members
to better understand the
mental health continuum, and to
use the resources that are available.
bcpvpa.bc.ca/thelearningbrain

Friday February 21, 2020
POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Weekly Tips + Links for Your Health

What is Positive Psychology?

The University of Pennsylvania – the alma mater of the
"Godfather of Positive Psychology", Martin Seligman – defines it as:

The scientific study of the strengths that enable individuals and communities to thrive.
The field is founded on the belief that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives,
to cultivate what is best within themselves, and to enhance their experiences of love, work, and play.

(Source: https://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/)

Or, as my 12-year-old son Kalen would define it:
… the study of looking at the positive side of life instead of focussing on the bad stuff.
E.g. if you were in a hit-and-run and knocked into a ditch, you could think this was awful and you were cursed.
Or you can think about how grateful you are that you do not need to go to the hospital
and that the tow truck arrived quickly to get you out!

Although I didn't know it at the time, I was first introduced to **Positive Psychology** in an executive coaching session nine years ago.
I had described an overwhelming feeling that I experienced
when I arrived home the previous evening.

I had walked in the front door to find my still-unemployed then-husband baking
cookies in the kitchen, and my seven-month-pregnant live-in nanny
playing on the floor with my 3-year-old in front of the fireplace.
The weight of my own never-ending responsibilities lay heavy on my shoulders.

After describing this event to my coach, she wisely told me,
"Rochelle, change the story. As you described the scene, I felt the
warmth of family, calm and happiness in the moment, and how grateful you are
that you have a career that enables you to provide these comforts."

This advice changed my life!

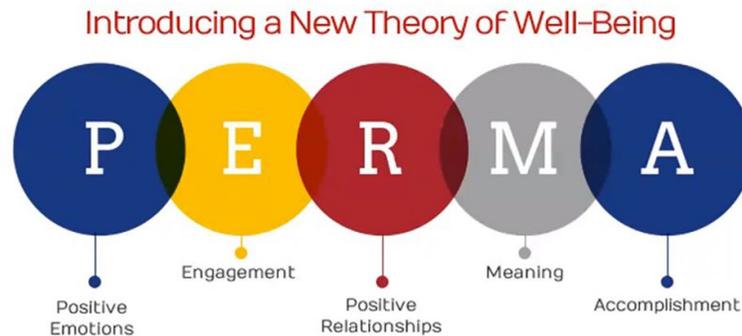To get an even better understanding of the power and ripple effect of Positive Psychology,
I recommend this 10 minute TedTalk:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w4nbt6afV3o
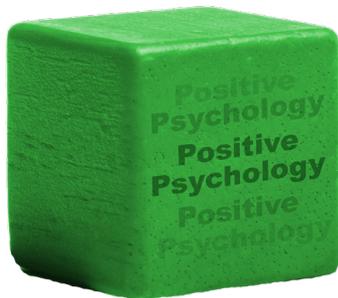
This website provides an informative foundation on the topic:
https://positivepsychology.com/what-is-positive-psychology-definition/

The website introduces the **PERMA** model which
"is a widely recognized and influential model in positive psychology".

Introducing a New Theory of Well-Being

P E R M A

Positive Emotions — Engagement — Positive Relationships — Meaning — Accomplishment

(Source: Martin Seligman, *Flourish,* 2011)

Seligman proposed this model to help explain and define well-being in greater depth.
If you are looking to enhance your own sense of authentic happiness and well-being, all you need to do is focus on:

- **Experiencing more positive emotions:**
do more of the things that make you happy, and bring enjoyment into your daily routine

- **Working on upping your engagement:**
pursue hobbies that interest you, develop your skills, and look for a job more suited to your passions, if necessary;

- **Improving the quality (and/or quantity) of your relationships with others:**
work on building more positive and supportive relationships with your friends, family, and significant other(s);

- **Seeking out meaning:**
if you don't find it through your work, look for it in volunteering opportunities, personal hobbies or leisure activities, or acting as a mentor for others;

- **Keeping your focus on achieving your goals — *but not focusing too hard*:**
"try to keep your ambition in balance with all of the other important things in life" (Seligman, 2011).

What has Positive Psychology taught me?

The key is that **how you think** has a tremendous impact on your emotions and even shapes the physiology of your brain!

And we can control how we think. I am working on "unlearning" my regular thinking loops that were picked up in a household with an anxious, pessimistic father. Believe me, it takes practice, but I can assure you it gets easier and more habitual over time. Positive thinking offers compounding returns, so the more often you practice it, the greater benefits you'll realize.
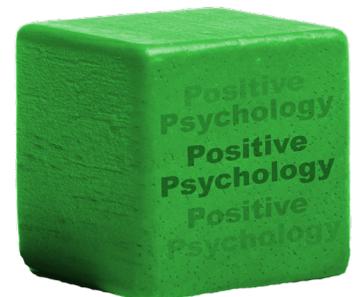
Here is a great 4 minute video describing learned optimism – based on the work of Martin Seligman:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2hHNq45rEnU

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Finally, here are 7 practical tips to achieve a positive mindset: *commit to trying a couple today!*

1. Start the Day with Positive Affirmation

How you start the morning sets the tone for the rest of the day. Have you ever woken up late, panicked, and then felt like nothing good happened the rest of the day? This is likely because you started out the day with a negative emotion and a pessimistic view that carried into every other event you experienced. Instead of letting this dominate, start your day with positive affirmations. Talk to yourself in the mirror – even if you feel silly – with statements like, *"Today will be a good day"* or
"I'm going to be awesome today." You'll be amazed by how much your day improves.

2. Focus on the Good Things, However Small

Almost invariably, you're going to encounter obstacles throughout the day—there's no such thing as a perfect day. When you encounter such a challenge, focus on the benefits, no matter how slight or unimportant they seem. For example, if you get stuck in traffic, think about how you now have time to listen to the rest of your favorite podcast.

3. Find Humour in Bad Situations

Allow yourself to experience humor in even the darkest or most trying situations.
Remind yourself that this situation will probably make for a good story later, and try to crack a joke about it.
[Personally, I think my sense of humour has been my most valuable gift in helping keep me positive!]

4. Turn Failures into Lessons

You aren't perfect. You're going to make mistakes and experience failure in multiple contexts, at multiple jobs and with multiple people. Instead of focusing on how you failed, think about what you're going to do next time — turn your failure into a lesson. Conceptualize this in concrete rules. For example, you could come up with three new rules for managing projects as a result.

5. Transform Negative self-talk into Positive self-talk

Negative self-talk can creep up easily and is often hard to notice. You might think "*I'm so bad at this*" or "*I shouldn't have tried that*".
But these thoughts turn into internalized feelings and might cement your conceptions of yourself.
When you catch yourself doing this, stop and replace those negative messages with positive ones.
For example, *"I shouldn't have tried"* becomes "*That didn't work out as planned—maybe next time.*"

6. Focus on the Present

I'm talking about the present — not today, not this hour, only this exact moment. You may have missed your bus,
but what in this exact moment is happening that's so bad? Forget what cost you five extra minutes this morning.
Forget what will happen when you arrive 20 minutes late. Focus on this one individual moment.
In most situations, you'll find it's not as bad as you imagine it to be. Most sources of negativity stem from a memory
of a recent event or the exaggerated imagination of a potential future event. Stay in the present moment.

7. Find Positive Friends, Mentors and Co-Workers

When you surround yourself with positive people, you'll hear positive outlooks, positive stories and positive affirmations. Their positive words will sink in and affect your own line of thinking, which then affects your words and similarly contributes to the group. Finding positive people to fill up your life can be difficult, but you need to eliminate the negativity in your life
before it consumes you. Do what you can to improve the positivity of others, and let their positivity affect you the same way.

https://www.success.com/7-practical-tips-to-achieve-a-positive-mindset/

So, what practical tips do *YOU* use to achieve a positive mindset?

We'll be posing that question on Twitter and Instagram this week
Follow **@bcpvpa** to read, engage, share and comment!

Next week
The Building Blocks of Resilience