

Coaching Notes

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Lifting wellbeing: customised approaches



One effect of coaching is to increase wellbeing – illustrated in a randomized controlled trial reported in 2009 by Anthony Grant and colleagues¹. Increased wellbeing can be the result of solving problems – resulting in less negativity in the work and life of those coached. On the other side wellbeing can be enhanced through increasing the effectiveness of these people. In Coaching Note 1² I discussed how developing self-efficacy leads to positive outcomes. Also better integration of day-to-day activity and longer-term goals with personal values (Coaching Note 2³) lifts the meaningfulness of life and work, and so engagement with these.

So - coaching enhances the well-being of those coached. Intriguingly, research by Sean O'Connor and Michael Cavanaugh⁴ shows how the followers of coached managers, and others in the coached managers' social networks get a lift in wellbeing as well. This positive contagion effect could be part of the reason that coaching leaders does improve team and wider performance – the positive emotions rippling out from managers are likely to mobilise effort, and also to promote creative problem-solving and teamwork.

In this context we are focusing on psychological wellbeing rather than the physical fitness that is often the target of “wellness” initiatives. There is reasonable evidence that moderate activity does lift wellbeing⁵, but much of the effort in typical wellness approaches is around lifting awareness rather than promoting actual exercise behaviour.

How can we help people develop their (psychological) wellbeing in a sustainable way? While there is evidence that the settings for negativity and positivity are reasonably constant (meaning net wellbeing varies around a

¹ <http://solutions-centre.org/pdf/Grant-et-al-Executive-coaching-enhances-goal-attainment-resilience-and-workplace-well-being-a-randomised-controlled-study-JOPP-20092.pdf>

² <http://www.fxc.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Coaching-Notes-Stewart-Forsyth-2016-07.pdf>

³ <http://www.fxc.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Coaching-Notes-Stewart-Forsyth-2016-09-1.pdf>

⁴ <http://psywb.springeropen.com/artides/10.1186/2211-1522-3-2>

⁵ https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Gershon_Tenenbaum/publication/7716085_Physical_activity_and_psychological_well-being_in_advanced_age_A_meta-analysis_of_intervention_studies/links/0912f5062faff1afb2000000.pdf

particular “set-point”), there are also indications of how well-being can be nudged up, and kept in individual’s upper range of such settings. Here I outline some evidence-based suggestions⁶, organized by personality inclinations. The personality model here is the Big Five (or OCEAN) model – the five-factor view of personality that forms the basis of all modern personality theory and assessment.

Personality aspect – note the behavioural indicators include both positive and negative (where “over-use” of some behaviours may result in negative issues)	Well-being approach that plays to personality strengths (for those higher in these traits) – typically practiced daily for a week
High – creative or strange Openness to experience Low – consistent or conventional	Positive writing – write up positive experiences and think about how to tap into or recreate such inspiring feelings.
High –hard worker or compulsive Conscientious Low – flexible or casual	Use of signature strengths – at the end of the day – how have I used my ‘Signature Strengths’ (derived for example from the free online VIA survey) in a new and different way
High –lively or flighty Extraverted Low – steady or aloof	Gift of time – contact/meet 3 people in the week about who you care (beyond planned activities) Three funny things – the funniest things experienced, or done, and an explanation for why these things happened
High – nice, gullible Agreeable Low – assertive, selfish	Acts of kindness – count and report on acts of kindness Loving kindness meditation – try an on-line guided session (see “Sharon Salzberg” reference below)
Low - calm, easy-going Nervous High – sensitive, worrier	Three good things – 3 things that went well during the day, and their causes

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⁶ These approaches have demonstrated effectiveness – so they will work for most, my assumption is that by customizing by personality we are able to build on existing strengths. The evidence is that one week of practice of these approaches will make a positive difference – and that more practice over longer time will have a greater long term effect. If you want references for these approaches – please contact me on stewart@fxc.co.nz
 I recommend Sharon Salzberg’s Stuck in Traffic Loving Kindness Meditation – a 2-minute illustration - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWnKxKHf9Z0>

