

# Three Science-Based Coaching Tips for Greater Positive Well-Being

JEFFREY E. AUERBACH, PH.D., MCC

Here are three key science based coaching questions to bring greater positivity, happiness and well-being to you and your clients:

## Notice and reflect on what is going well.

### COACHING QUESTION

What can you think of that is going well in your life? Please focus on that and share with me all the things that are going well or that you are grateful for. Really let that sink in... (Adapted from: Shelley Gable, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 2006).

## “Broaden and build” on your positive emotions.

### COACHING QUESTION

What good feelings within you can you get in touch with about interactions you have had with another person or situation? In what way could those positive feelings broaden into something valuable or enjoyable to you? The “broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions” teaches us that positive emotions such as enjoyment, happiness, joy, interest and positive anticipation broaden our awareness and encourage novel and exploratory thoughts and actions. Over time, this broadened behavioral repertoire builds skills and resources. For example, pleasant interactions with a stranger may become a supportive friendship and aimless physical play may become exercise and physical excellence. (Adapted from Barbara Fredrickson’s Best-Selling book, “Positivity”)

## Be realistic about suffering and understand how gratitude can help one through rough times.

Here is what Robert Emmons, Editor of the Journal of Positive Psychology and faculty and member of the College of Executive Coaching’s Well-Being Coaching Program has said about the value of gratitude during difficult times:

The field of positive psychology has at times been criticized for failing to acknowledge the value of negative emotions. Barbara Held of Bowdoin College in Maine, for example, contends that positive psychology has been too negative about negativity and too positive about positivity.

To deny that life has its share of disappointments, frustrations, losses, hurts, setbacks, and sadness would be unrealistic and untenable. No amount of positive thinking exercises will change this truth.

So telling people simply to buck up, count their blessings, and remember how much they still have to be grateful for can certainly do much harm. Processing a life experience through a grateful lens does not mean denying negativity. It is not a form of superficial happiology. Instead, it means realizing the power you have to transform an obstacle into an opportunity.

It means reframing a loss into a potential gain, recasting negativity into positive channels for gratitude.

A growing body of research has examined how “grateful recasting” works. In a study conducted at Eastern Washington University, participants were randomly assigned to one of three writing groups that would



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recall and report on an unpleasant open memory—a loss, a betrayal, victimization, or some other personally upsetting experience.

The first group wrote for 20 minutes on issues that were irrelevant to their open memory. The second wrote about their experience pertaining to their open memory.

Researchers asked the third group to focus on the positive aspects of a difficult experience—and discover what about it might now make them feel grateful. Results showed that they demonstrated more closure and less unpleasant emotional impact than participants who just wrote about the experience without being prompted to see ways it might be redeemed with gratitude. Participants were never told not to think about the negative aspects of the experience or to deny or ignore the pain.

Moreover, participants who found reasons to be grateful demonstrated fewer intrusive memories, such as wondering why it happened, whether it could have been prevented, or if they believed they caused it to happen.

Thinking gratefully, this study showed, can help heal troubling memories and in a sense redeem them—a result echoed in many other studies.”

## COACHING QUESTION

If a situation is troubling you, please think about and share with me, what good may actually have come, or be able to come, out of that situation that you would be grateful for? (Adapted from Robert Emmons, *Gratitude Works! A 21-Day Program for Creating Emotional Prosperity*).



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