



## Life Coach Feature

# An Introduction to Positive Psychology

An interview with [Caroline Adams Miller](#)

*I've heard and read a lot about positive psychology, especially in relation to studies on happiness conducted in the University of Pennsylvania [Positive Psychology Center](#). I thought it would be interesting to hear life coach Caroline Adams Miller, who received a masters from that program, explain the ideas behind "positive psychology."* - [Susie](#)

### Exactly what is positive psychology?

Positive Psychology is the scientific study of well-being, and a method of creating, sustaining and amplifying happiness for personal, professional and collective well-being.

### What got you interested in this field?

I have been fascinated by the work of people like Martin Seligman, who is considered the "Father of Positive Psychology," ever since he began to shift interest away from fixing what is "wrong" with people and instead focusing on what is "right." I read the best-selling book, [Authentic Happiness](#), when it came out in 2002, and then read his [other books](#).

I recently earned a Masters in Applied Positive Psychology as part of the University of Pennsylvania program's inaugural class. With this masters, I have been able to hone my approach as a performance coach to working with clients on goal-setting and how it relates to the creation and amplification of well-being.

### How does coaching with a positive psychology approach differ from other life coaching techniques?

Positive Psychology is a specific line of research that can be integrated into many forms of coaching and/or therapy because of its focus on "strengths."

This differs tremendously from many other types of coaching and therapy that are deficit-based, and that focus on "fixing" weaknesses as opposed to focusing on flourishing. Positive Psychology is actually complementary to coaching when the goal is to help a client be at their best and to accomplish the goals they have for themselves. When you coach with a Positive Psychology background, you begin with a backdrop of knowing how to help clients identify their signature strengths, use them in new ways, assist them in using gratitude (among other character strengths) to be at their best, and flourish in the home and workplace.

### Can you give some examples of situations where positive psychology can help?

First of all, is now apparent that happiness precedes success in life, and not vice versa. Therefore, it doesn't make sense to put off working on being a happier and more engaged individual if you want to be successful in life.

It makes more sense to know what your well-being level is and to then work on how to use Positive Interventions systematically to change and augment your happiness levels. At that point, you will begin to experience more success and fulfillment, so I believe all coaches should know about Positive Psychology in order to most effectively help their clients.

When clients come to me, they are often in transition, or they need assistance in accomplishing goals that have eluded them. Studies have shown that the pursuit of meaningful goals enhances well-being, so I work with them to understand how to create blueprints of change that encompass intrinsic (as opposed to extrinsic) goals, challenging and specific goals (according to goal-setting theory, this is optimal), and how to use the environment and the power of positive relationships to achieve your goals.

Happy people have flourishing social relationships, and some clients don't understand the importance of socializing or gratitude in goal accomplishment, and when I link it all together with happiness, they have greater incentive to move forward.

### What kind of track record does positive psychology have, or is it too new to tell?

Positive Psychology has become one of the most exciting and vibrant areas in the study of psychology. Research is now piling up that it has the ability to help people who are very depressed (Positive Psychotherapy), and that focusing on strengths can change a workplace or a marriage.

Barbara Fredrickson's work on "Broaden and Build" has demonstrated that when a workplace has a ratio over 3:1 (three positive interactions for one negative), workers are more creative, successful and resilient. It also increases their thought-action repertoire, and is a powerful boost to human flourishing.

### How does having a life goal list fit in with positive psychology?

The happiest people work every day towards goals that fit their long-term vision for themselves. I encourage all clients to have "life lists" so that they have a long-term vision that can be matched with short-term goals with deadlines. Without a life list, it's impossible to be proactive in life, because you have no road map for success!

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*Caroline Adams Miller, MAPP, ACC is a performance coach who specializes in working with clients on specific goal accomplishment and how to create and sustain well-being for maximum results. She and her partner, Steve Kraus, PhD, lead ten week "Success Boot Camp" groups by phone, and Caroline also works with individuals privately. Caroline will be featured on Channel 155 on XM Radio with her "Tip of the Day." To learn more about Caroline and her work, visit [www.carolinemiller.com](http://www.carolinemiller.com).*

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