

# Positive Psychology



At the recent British Psychological Society Annual Conference in Stratford-upon-Avon I was lucky to hear Alex Linley's keynote speech on 'Positive Psychology'. He began by saying that as human beings we have a propensity towards the negative and that this was a good survival tactic in the early history of humanity. However this has led to a negative focus in everyday life which is no longer quite so useful.



Psychology as a discipline has tended to focus on the negative to a great extent investigating depression, misbehaviour in children and errors in perception. As a Work Psychologist, I think my focus has mainly been positive in terms of looking at increasing job satisfaction, redesigning jobs to make them more interesting and ensuring that employee relations are positive.

One way we as individuals can enhance the positive in our lives is to carry out a daily strengths assessment. In order to do this, at the end of each day we need to list three things that we were grateful for that day.

Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> April

- Completed most tasks on my to-do list
- Meeting up with friends for lunch
- Final planning for a future event without upsetting anyone concerned.

This simple technique has been shown to transform people's lives, changing them from angry, unhappy people to more content individuals in periods as short as one week.

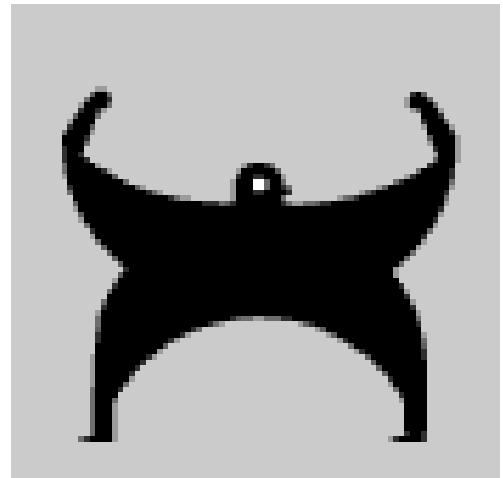
For individuals to flourish their positive to negative ratio needs to be 3 to 1 – that’s three positive assessments to one negative one.

However Positive Psychology isn’t about ‘Cloud cuckoo land’ – life isn’t all good and we have to have a balanced awareness of the negative aspects of our everyday life. But happy people flourish and happiness has been shown by research to predict a range of positive life outcomes. It’s better to be happy than to be rich (although I should be so unhappy!).



The message of positive psychology is to spot your strengths and maximise them. This doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t be aware of your weaknesses but just don’t make them your key focus. Strengths are things we do well but which are also energising, as opposed to learned behaviours which are also things we do well but which are de-energising. As a child I loved hurdles (which involved running and jumping) and getting the pace right was an energising experience for me. However, whilst I could run and also jump, I did

not find running races or jumping the high jump to be an energising experience. As an adult I find the process of carrying out research energising but in order to retain a job that allows me to carry out research I have to apply certain learned behaviours such as administration – a task that I am able to do but which I find very tedious!



For more information on positive psychology I suggest that you visit the following web-pages:

[www.cappeu.com](http://www.cappeu.com)  
[www.strengths2020.com](http://www.strengths2020.com)

Remember keep it positive!



**Christeen George**