POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Positive psychology was a term defined in 1998 when Dr Martin Seligman, an American psychologist, began to scientifically explore the possibility of harnessing a person's innate desire to perform and live a happy live, rather than focusing on the negative.

The phase 'positive psychology' is defined by the Positive Psychology Institute as: "The scientific study of human flourishing, and an applied approach to optimum function." It is therefore a study of the strengths and virtues that enable people, companies and communities to thrive.

In 2011, after extensive research, Martin Seligman published his PERMA model in a book called *Flourish*. He concluded that five measurable elements contribute to a person's well-being or achievement of a good life.

The PERMA model lists the following elements - positive emotion (focusing on the positive and embracing all the positive emotions), engagement (finding flow in your life's activities), your relationships (the people you interact with), the meaning in your life (a purpose or meaning in your life) and your achievements (goals, dreams and your definition of success) as the elements needed for happiness and contentment in life.

How to be more positive
How do you view life - on the positive or negative side? Learning to think more positively doesn't mean that you should ignore your problems but rather that you should not allow them to define you. You can choose to approach issues logically and look at the 'best case scenario' rather than everything that may go wrong.

1. Check your self-talk
"Life inflicts the same setbacks and tragedies on the optimist as on the pessimist but the optimist weathers them better." Martin Seligman

Your inner voice can be a deeply cynical, critical and damaging force that can leave you feeling (and believing) the worst about yourself. Positive thinking starts with learning to challenge what your inner voice is telling you.

Challenge your negative thoughts. Put your critical thinking on trial and let positive self-talk be your attorney. For example: your inner voice tells you that you are a failure. Consider three things you have succeeded in and verbalise them, explaining in detail why each was a success.

Often, one negative thought leads to another and another, leaving you feeling low and depressed in a short space of time. Learn to recognise and challenge that first thought. Pause and observe your thoughts. Question your thinking. Look at the situation from another perceptive. What is the logical way to proceed?

2. Check your disposition and posture
"If you have only one smile in you, give it to the people you love. Don't be surly at home, then go out in the street and start grinning 'Good morning' at total strangers." Maya Angelou

How you feel inside manifests how you feel on the outside. If you can't seem to shake negative thoughts, try to portray a more positive attitude through body language. Maintaining a good posture is also good for your physical health. If you are suffering from tension headaches and neck and back stiffness, consider how you sit at your desk at work. Slouching puts extra stress on your spine and strain on your muscles.

Sit or stand up straight. Push your shoulders back and lift your chin.

When you are at work or out in public, consider your facial expression. Do

you frown? Is your jaw set in a hard line? Do your shoulders sag? Lift your chin, take a deep breath and smile!

3. Check your manners
"Appreciating what shows up in your life changes your personal vibration. Gratitude elevates your life to a higher frequency." Oprah Winfrey

If you focus on what you don't have you are bound to feel low. Turning that into positive feelings towards the number of things you have to be grateful for, can lift the spirit. Being grateful doesn't only mean for material things. What about being grateful for the people that love you, or the person that allows you to be who you are?

Start a gratitude journal - on paper or on your computer or cellphone. Everyday, list five things you have to be thankful for. If you have a roof over your head and food on the table, you have something to be grateful for.

How often do you thank your partner, family, friend or colleague for doing something nice for you? Just like you want to feel appreciated, others do too. Saying 'thank you' boosts the recipient's self-esteem and helps them to feel more appreciated.

4. Check your environment
"I believe your atmosphere and your surroundings create a mind state for you." Theophilus London

You spend most of your waking hours at work and go home to unwind. If either environment is uninspiring, negative or even toxic, you are unlikely to feel any positivity within that space.

Find a place in your home and make it your personal 'me time' space. Perhaps a small reading area of your

lounge or bedroom. Add things you love and a few inspiring quotes.

Consider your work environment. Are you valued and appreciated? Do you enjoy working as part of the team? Being unhappy at work will impact on your job. If you feel stagnant or demotivated, consider the changes you can make. Could you perhaps move to another department? Apply for a promotion? Relocate to another branch.

5. Check your schedule
"There is virtue in work and there is virtue in rest. Use both and overlook neither." Alan Cohen

Life can be boring and monotonous doing the same thing day in and day out. Being stuck in a rut can lead to depression and unhappiness. Change can be scary but if you keep doing the same thing you won't get different results.

Schedule time every week to do something you enjoy. Play golf, read a book, play a musical instrument or work in your garden. Many of us use 'time' as an excuse. If you really want to do something you'll make time for it.

If you can't make changes right away, make them in smaller increments. For example, if you want to experience nature, don't look at visiting a game park hundreds of kilometres away. Find a botanical garden, zoo or nature reserve in your town or city. Spend two hours there on a weekend to relax and refocus.

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Remember: if you are struggling with stress, anxiety and depression and you're finding it hard to channel positivity it may be time to contact your employee wellbeing programme to speak to a counsellor.

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Health benefits of being more positive
There are a number of health benefits to being more positive:

- You'll likely live longer.
- You'll be less distressed and depressed.
- Your immune system will be stronger.
- You'll have better resilience and handle problems, hardships and stress far better.
- You'll have a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease.

Source: The Mayo Clinic

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Feeling sad or down? Try these positive pickups
- Call up a friend. Have no agenda other than to find out how they are.
- Turn off the news. Turn up any vibrant music you enjoy.
- Do something spontaneous, off schedule - nothing you had planned.
- Take a 20 minute walk to get those endorphins flowing.
- Make a cup of tea. Find a quiet spot and light a scented candle.
- Don't entertain negative thoughts.
- Page through an old family album.
- Try a new recipe or bake cupcakes.
- Do something nice for someone. Got a friend with a birthday coming up? Find a nice gift (something you can afford).
- Declutter your space. Clean and organise your desk, a bookshelf, your car. A clean and tidy space can be a great pick-me-up.