Meaning Based Coaching
Utilising the science of Positive Psychology & Coaching Psychology to promote proactive personal growth

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Cognitive-behavioral, solution-focused life coaching: Enhancing goal striving, well-being, and hope

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Abstract
Research is in its infancy in the newly emerging field of coaching psychology. This study examined the effects of a 10-week cognitive-behavioral, solution-focused life coaching group programme. Participants were randomly allocated to a life coaching group programme (n = 28) or a waitlist control group (n = 28). Participation in the life coaching group programme was associated with significant increases in goal striving, well-being and hope, with gains maintained up to 30 weeks later on some variables. Hope theory may explain such positive outcomes. Life coaching programmes that utilize evidence-based techniques may provide a framework for further research on psychological processes that occur in non-clinical populations who wish to make purposeful change and enhance their positive psychological functioning.

Keywords: Evidence-based life coaching; goal-striving; subjective well-being; psychological well-being; hope theory

University of Sydney
Coaching Psychology Unit
10 Years “Applied Positive Psychology”
Coaching Psychology: 
A definition

An applied positive psychology that draws on and develops established psychological approaches …can be understood as being the systematic application of behavioural science to the enhancement of life experience, work performance and wellbeing

(APS IGCP Mission Statement)

Evidence-Based Coaching

“The intelligent and conscientious use of best current knowledge integrated with practitioner expertise in making decisions about how to deliver coaching”

Grant & Stober, 2006
Positive Psychology Coaching
- a new definition

...is evidence-based coaching practice informed by the theories and research of positive psychology for the enhancement of resilience, achievement and well-being...

(Green & Palmer, 2018)

PERMA Theory of Well-Being
Seligman (2011)
Delivering value in coaching through exploring meaning, purpose, values & strengths

Spaten & Green
2017, Chapter 7
The need to experience life as meaningful is fundamental to human nature
Baumeister 1991; Frankl 1963

Experiencing meaning is strongly and repeatedly associated with well-being and thriving
Ryff & Singer 1998
Scollon & King 2004

Meaning historically….

• Inquiry into the meaning of life goes back to antiquity from Lao Tzu to King Solomon (Wong, 2011).
• There is also a long and venerable tradition in psychology of exploring the meaning of human existence (Adler, 1931/1958; Frankl, 1963/1985; James, 1902; Jung, 1933; May, 1958) and self-actualization (Maslow, 1962; Rogers, 1980).
• However, empirical studies of meaning have been very recent (Wong & Fry, 1998).
Meaning historically…. 

Formulations about people struggling to deal with challenges they confronted in life, finding ways to manage them, if not learn from them, and deepen their sense of life meaning and increase personal growth.

The meaning of life differs from man to man, from day to day and from hour to hour. What matters, therefore, is not the meaning of life in general but rather the specific meaning of a person's life at a given moment.

Viktor E. Frankl
(1959, p. 110)
A prospective study considered a way that short-term personal growth might occur in the absence of strong trauma, role transition, or environmental challenges—specifically, through the proactive process of striving to achieve personal goals.

One of the most interesting findings of the study was that only individuals who were already fairly well-integrated at the beginning of the study expected, and actually found, the intervention to be beneficial for their goal functioning.

Meaning in Life
(Steger, 2012)

There are several different models and theories of what meaning in life is:

- Making sense of life (Battista & Almond, 1973);
- Nurtured by goal-directed behaviour (Klinger, 1977; Ryff & Singer, 1998);
- Linked to transcendent or spiritual concerns (Emmons, 2003; Mascarro, Rosen, & Morey, 2004; Reker, 2000);
Meaning & Purpose
(Steger, 2012)

• Terms used interchangeably
• Although scholars agree not equivalent
• Meaning is seen as a superordinate term that encompasses two main dimensions (Steger, 2009; Steger et al., 2006)

- **Comprehension**: Making sense of one’s self, life and world (meaning in life?);
- **Purpose**: Overarching, long-term life aspirations (meaning of my life?)

Origins of Purpose in Life
(Kashdan & McKnight, 2009)

• Offer a conceptual model...
• Discuss broader developmental process of purpose.
• Suggest 4 broad processes:

  1. Proactive
  2. Reactive
  3. Social Learning
  4. Hybrid development
Measuring Meaning

The most widely used measure for meaning in life, the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ; Steger et al. 2006), is made up of two subscales:

- **Presence of meaning** (MLQ-P) - the subjective sense of one’s life as being meaningful and

- **Search for meaning** (MLQ-S) - reflects “the strength, intensity, and activity of people’s desire and efforts to establish and/or augment their understanding of the meaning, significance and purpose of their lives” (Steger et al. 2008a; p. 200).

Meaning & Goals

*(Emmons, 2009)*

- Emmons states that “goals allow lives to be meaningful and worthwhile and orient people to what is valuable and purposeful.”
- “Not all goals are created equal”
- It is the pursuit of intrinsically motivated goals that are congruent with personal resources and values which contribute to a strong sense of meaning and are associated with life satisfaction and happiness.
Meaning & Goals
(McGregor & Little, 2009)

• Research on “happiness” and “meaning” – refers to the “Integrity Shift”
• Research showed that highly successful executives had habituated to their success leaving integrity as the primary source of their well-being and that concerns with efficacy had been supplemented by developmental concerns of generativity (leaving a positive legacy and guiding future generations) and meaning.

Meaning@Work

Meaningful work is the subjective experience that:

• One’s work is significant and matters;
• One’s work feed the creation of meaning in life;
• One’s work has the capacity to serve some greater good

Steger, Dik & Duffy, 2013
Meaning@Work

Is having meaningful work good?

- Increased job satisfaction;
- Increased career commitment;
- Increased intrinsic motivation;
- Increased meaning in life;
- Increased strengths utilisation
- Increased experiences of “flow” at work

Steger (2014)

Meaning@Work

Is having meaningful workers good?

- Increased organisational commitment;
- Decreased intention to leave;
- Decreased days absent;
- Increased faith in management;
- Increased discretionary effort;
- Increased work team functioning

Steger (2014)
Meaning@Work

Job vs Career vs Calling…

Sources of Meaning
(Joel Vos, 2010)

“Sources of meaning represent generalized and relatively stable orientations towards life … Sources of meaning motivate commitment, give direction to life, and increase its significance” (pp. 353–354)
Sources of Meaning
(Vos, 2016)

After examining 79 studies on the meaningful life, Vos uncovered 5 main areas:

1. **Materialism**: possessions, nature, health
2. **Self-Growth**: resilience, goals
3. **Social**: relationships, community
4. **Transcendent**: purpose in life, religion
5. **Being here**: being alive, freedom

What gives your life meaning?
Meaning Based Coaching: 
3 primary pathways...
(Spaten & Green, 2017)

1. Strengths based
2. Values based
3. Vision based

Values In Action Project
- 24 different strengths and 6 core virtues
- Taken by > 1.3 million people around the world

Strengths Profile
- Assesses 60 strengths according to the three dimensions of energy, performance and use
- Taken by > 50,000 people around the world

Clifton Strengthsfinder
- 34 strength themes
- Given to > 100,000 college students through Strengthsquest program
Character Strengths...

Research has found that people who use four or more of their top character strengths at work are more likely to experience job satisfaction, pleasure, engagement, and meaning in their work.

Values
What matters most…

Values are the guiding principles that people use in organising their lives (Rokeach 1973; Schwartz 1992)

Walking the Talk
(Sheldon & Krieger, 2014)

• There was a significant behaviour/ importance gap, such that participants “walked” (acted on values) less than they “talked” (endorsed those values);
• Participants with higher meaning in life, lower search for meaning, more self-concordance at work, and greater chronological age evidenced more consistency between their talking and their walking.
Acceptance & Commitment Therapy/Training (ACT) — Crystallising Values

"Today we are faced with the preeminent fact that, if civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships... the ability of all peoples, of all kinds, to live together, in the same world, at peace."

Franklin D. Roosevelt

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<th>Acceptance</th>
<th>Friendship</th>
<th>Privacy</th>
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Imagine that you have passed away after living a fruitful and satisfying life. What would you want your obituary to say?

Write a 1-2 page essay summarising what you would like most to be remembered for.....
Vision
A fuzzy vision

LETTER FROM THE FUTURE
“Creating Dreams”
(Grant & Greene, 2001)

A Letter from the Future:

Choose a date in the future – approximately 5-10 years. Imagine that you have
travelled in time to this date and you are sitting down writing a letter to your coach
(which can be yourself) telling them how great your life is now, and how you’ve
managed to get rid of so many of those things that were irritating you.

Vision
Prospecting...

Navigating Into the Future or Driven by the Past

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Abstract
Prospection (Gilbert & Wilson, 2007), the representation of possible futures, is a ubiquitous feature of the human mind.
Much psychological theory and practice, in contrast, has understood human actions as determined by the past and viewed
any such teleology (selection of action in light of goal) as a violation of natural law because the future cannot act on the
present. Prospection involves no backward causation; rather, it is guidance not by the future itself but by present, exclusive
representations of possible future states. These representations can be understood minimally as “If X, then Y” conditionals, and
Prioritizing Meaning
Russo-Netzer (2018)

• Little is known about the extent to which individuals actually incorporate meaning into their daily lives.
• Prioritizing meaning refers to the differences in the way people approach meaning through the concrete actions they choose to be involved with in their daily lives.

Prioritizing Meaning Scale
(Russo-Netzer, 2018)

• I prefer to engage in activities which are related to the sense of meaning in my life
• I devote as much time as I can to activities that have great meaning for me
• The manner in which I organize my day reflects values that are meaningful to me
• My major decisions in life (e.g., the job I choose, where I choose to live) are influenced by how much I might experience meaning as a result
• I admire people who make their decisions based on the meaning they will gain
Prioritizing Meaning
(Russo-Netzer, 2018)

Prioritizing meaning was positively associated with life satisfaction, happiness, positive emotions, sense of coherence, gratitude and presence of meaning, beyond the effect of prioritizing positivity, thus demonstrating the possibility that prioritizing meaning makes a distinctive contribution to well-being.

What is the smallest action that you could do to prioritise meaning in your life?