

## Book review

# Positive psychology coaching in practice

Ana Paula Nacif  (Oxford Brookes University)

### Article history

Accepted for publication: 16 January 2019

Published online: 01 February 2019



© the Author(s)

Published by Oxford Brookes University

Since Martin Seligman's landmark speech at his inauguration as president of the American Psychological Society in 1998, when he declared that psychologists should study what makes happy people happy, positive psychology has captured the hearts and minds of academics and the general public alike. Research into positive psychology has grown significantly since then.

With one of its definitions being the scientific study of what makes life most worth living (Park, Park & Peterson, 2010), it is no surprise that coaches, who are interested in supporting clients to creating more fulfilling lives for themselves, took an interest too, with some embracing positive psychology their way of working. However, although there is a lot written about positive psychology – a quick Google Scholar search (November 2018) returns around 148000 items – significantly less has been written about positive psychology and coaching - only 19500 items returned on Google Scholar. Green and Palmer's book proposes to fill the gap in the limited available texts which are specific to positive psychology coaching. The argument that these two fields are complementary and that the integration of positive psychology and coaching should be a natural step for some practitioners is not a new one. Seligman himself suggested back in 2007 that positive psychology can provide coaching with an evidence-based framework and a defined scope of practice.

Whereas previous books on the subject focused on happiness and strengths (Seligman, 2007; Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2010) or on tools and strategies for coaching clients (Biswas-Diener, 2010), this book is a robust attempt to give the reader an overview of all the different topics being currently researched in positive psychology and how they can be applied in a coaching context. The book starts with an introductory chapter which contextualises and defines positive psychology and coaching, citing current literature on these topics and ending with didactic discussion points about positive psychology coaching. The second chapter highlights some key theories in positive psychology such as Seligman's PERMA Theory of Wellbeing, Deci and Ryan's Self Determination Theory and Franklin's Thrive and Survive Theory. It also includes a list of positive psychology coaching publications from 2004 to 2017. This is a short list of only 14 texts, which reflects that fact that there is limited literature in this area.

As an academic discipline, positive psychology covers a wide range of topics, which continues to expand both in theory and practice. In this book, the editors opted for subjects that seem to be current and relevant to the context they describe, which is mostly focused on work place coaching. Mindfulness, neuroscience, strengths, acceptance and commitment training and PERMA are all presented, alongside contexts for positive psychology coaching such as health and wellbeing, resilience and wellbeing, and positive leadership.

The book places a strong emphasis on research and evidence-based practice. Apart from a theoretical overview of each topic being presented, every chapter includes sections on practice, which coachees benefit most, case study, discussion points (which is a list of questions for reflection), and a suggested reading list; these are helpful for practitioners to understand the theory as well as how its application in practice can impact the coachee.

Although not an exhaustive or comprehensive overview of positive psychology coaching, this is a good introductory text for coaches who are interested in learning more about the subject and how they can use it to enhance and inform their practice. It gives readers a theoretical overview of key topics as well as tangible and practical tools and strategies for coaching clients. Coaching practitioners will be able to transfer the knowledge gained from this book to the context of their own practice.

I would have welcomed the inclusion of more examples of positive psychology coaching outside the work place, for example in communities, social care, youth work, as well as further discussions about other positive psychology models. In addition, more thought about the distinction between 'coaching for health' and 'coaching for wellbeing', which are often – erroneously in my view – bundled together, would have been useful.

Overall, this is a welcome addition to the limited literature on the topic which hopefully will encourage more coaches to look into this fascinating subject. Positive psychology has a lot to offer to enrich coaching practice across a wide range of contexts.

## References

- Biswas-Diener, R. (2010) *Practicing positive psychology coaching: Assessment, activities and strategies for success*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Biswas-Diener, R. and Dean, B. (2010) *Positive psychology coaching: Putting the science of happiness to work for your clients*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Park, N., Park, M. and Peterson, C. (2010) 'When is the search for meaning related to life satisfaction?', *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being*, 2(1), pp.1-13. DOI: [10.1111/j.1758-0854.2009.01024.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-0854.2009.01024.x).
- Seligman, M.E. (2007) 'Coaching and positive psychology', *Australian Psychologist*, 42(4), pp.266-267. DOI: [10.1080/00050060701648233](https://doi.org/10.1080/00050060701648233).

## About the authors

This review was carried out by: **Ana Paula Nacif**, BA, MSc, Doctorate in Coaching and Mentoring (candidate) at Oxford Brookes University