

Increasing Positive Emotions through Emotional Intelligence

by Johanna Vanderpol

Many of you have now heard the term “Emotional Intelligence” by now, but most people are still asking, “What is it, exactly?” Well, my simple definition is: “Emotional Intelligence (EI) is the ability to recognize, honour, understand, manage and express your emotions in a way that is respectful of self and others.” In this one sentence lies a whole book (which I have already written).

As you practice EI more and more in your life, the natural result is that you will experience more positive emotions and will be able to manage negative or unpleasant emotions with more resilience and comfort.

The research on positive emotions by Barbara Fredrickson, an associate professor of the University of Michigan shows that experiencing positive emotions (PE) has the effect of broadening and building our intellectual, physical and social resources, allowing us to draw on them in time of need. When we are in a good mood, people like us more. We are more likely to create deeper social ties with others resulting in a support network. We are more likely to discover and explore opportunities for growth. Research also shows we are more creative and have a keener problem-solving ability when we experience positive emotions. Our thinking is more open. We can see options to challenges that didn't seem to exist before.

So, what can we do to increase positive emotions in our life? Actually some of the ways to do that may surprise you. The research on cultivating the quality of gratitude goes a long way to generating and maintaining positive emotions in our lives. Thoughts of gratitude reduce damaging stress hormones and creates a happier frame of mind. I didn't believe this at first, but decided to try it for myself.

During a six-month course to become a certified coach in the Authentic Happiness program, a science-based course on what makes human beings happy by Dr. Martin Seligman, one of our assignments was to do the gratitude exercise for one week. At the end of each day we were to list three things that we were grateful for that day. When I did this for the week, I noticed all kinds of thoughts like, “that's too small; it doesn't count” or, “you already said that yesterday” or, “this is silly” but I continued anyways. On one particularly challenging day that week, I had great difficulty in coming up with three things to put on my list. I wanted to hang onto thoughts like, “there really isn't anything to be grateful for” or “other people really do have a better life than me”. However, I persevered and dutifully came up with three things for my list. I noticed that coming up with these three things took the edge of my negative feelings and quieted the negative voice. I have also noticed that I have a more optimistic outlook on life than I used to and this helps me feel more resilient in challenging times. Since then, the gratitude exercise has become a regular part of my toolbox. It is almost automatic daily now, but when I get into a funk I notice that I am not feeling gratitude in my life. Now I also use it as a regular part of my coaching practice, workshops and courses. Many clients have confirmed that they too have found it to be a useful tool for increasing their happiness.

So, go ahead. Take it on as an experiment. For one week, at the end of each day, list (in writing if possible) three things for which you are grateful. They can be small, large, preferably pertaining to things that occurred to you that day, but can also be things in general. List more than three if you want. One day, I was able to list 24, no small feat for a dyed-in-the-wool pessimist.

To read the detailed article outlining the interesting research on positive emotions, email me at info@johannavanderpol.com and I will send it to you.

Meanwhile remember, nobody ever went blind from looking on the bright side of life.

For more information and to order the book *Honouring Your Emotions: Why it Matters* contact Johanna at 250-483-1877 or at info@johannavanderpol.com. Be sure to visit her website at www.johannavanderpol.com.

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