

## THE BIG IDEAS

### Well-Being Theory

vs. Authentic happiness theory.

### PERMA

Positive emotion + Engagement  
+ Relationships + Meaning +  
Achievement.

### Strengths & Virtues

Are super important.

### What Went Well?

Powerful exercise!

### Dealing With It

An important approach.

### More ABCs

How are yours?

### Character

& 10,000 hours.

### Optimists vs. Pessimists

Which are you?

### Measuring Well-Being

vs. GDP.

*"The goal of positive psychology in well-being theory... is to increase the amount of \*flourishing\* in your own life and on the planet."*

~ Martin Seligman

# Flourish

A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being

BY MARTIN SELIGMAN · SIMON & SCHUSTER · © 2011 · 368 PAGES

"This book will help you flourish."

There, I have finally said it.

I have spent my professional life avoiding unguarded promises like this one. I am a research scientist, and a conservative one at that. The appeal of what I write comes from the fact that it is grounded in careful science: statistical tests, validated questionnaires, thoroughly researched exercises, and large, representative samples. In contrast to pop psychology and the bulk of self-improvement, my writings are believable because of the underlying science."

~ Martin Seligman from *Flourish*

Martin Seligman is one of the founding fathers of the positive psychology movement and this is the third Note we've done on one of his books. (Check out the Notes on his other classics: [Learned Optimism](#) and [Authentic Happiness](#) for more science of happiness goodness.)

I got this book the day it was released and I HIGHLY recommend it.

It's an interesting and inspiring mix of personally practical, scientifically-grounded wisdom and an inspiring public policy call-to-action on what's possible in education, government and business.

As always, we're going to focus on a handful of my favorite practical Big Ideas—stuff that we can immediately apply to our lives.

We'll barely scratch the surface of this great book. If you're feelin' it, I think you'll LOVE it. (So, go get it. :)

For now, let's jump in!

## AUTHENTIC HAPPINESS THEORY —> WELL-BEING THEORY

"I used to think that the topic of positive psychology was happiness, that the gold standard for measuring happiness was life satisfaction, and that the goal of positive psychology was to increase life satisfaction. I now think that the topic of positive psychology is well-being, that the gold standard for measuring well-being is flourishing, and that the goal of positive psychology is to increase flourishing. This theory, which I call well-being theory, is very different from authentic happiness theory, and the difference requires explanation."

An essential theme of this book is establishing the next version of Positive Psychology—what I'll call Positive Psychology 2.0.

Whereas Positive Psychology 1.0 was focused on "Authentic Happiness" (the title of Seligman's last book), Positive Psychology 2.0 is all about "Well-Being."

Here's a handy-dandy little chart from the book that helps us capture the difference:

*"The entire thrust of this book is that optimal performance is tied to good well-being; the higher the positive morale, the better the performance."*

~ Martin Seligman

Authentic Happiness Theory	Well-Being Theory
Topic: happiness	Topic: well-being
Measure: life satisfaction	Measures: positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment
Goal: increase life satisfaction	Goal: increase flourishing by increasing positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment

The biggest thing we need to know about the shift from authentic happiness theory to well-being theory? We've gotta keep in mind the acronym PERMA. Which leads us to the next Big Idea:

## PERMA

"Here then is well-being theory: well-being is a construct; and well-being, not happiness, is the topic of positive psychology. Well-being has five measurable elements (PERMA) that count toward it:

- Positive emotion (of which happiness and life satisfaction are all aspects)
- Engagement
- Relationships
- Meaning
- Achievement

No element defines well-being, but each contributes to it."

*"Is there someone in your life whom you would feel comfortable phoning at four in the morning to tell your troubles to? If your answer is yes, you will likely live longer than someone whose answer is no."*

~ Martin Seligman

So, as we strive to develop our well-being and flourish, we want to keep PERMA in mind: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and achievement. Now, let's look at some Big Ideas on how we can rock our PERMA, shall we?

## STRENGTHS & VIRTUES

"In authentic happiness theory, the strengths and virtues—kindness, social intelligence, humor, courage, integrity, and the like (there are twenty-four of them)—are the supports for engagement. You go into flow when your highest strengths are deployed to meet the highest challenges that come your way. In well-being theory, these twenty-four strengths underpin all five elements, not just engagement: deploying your highest strengths leads to more positive emotion, to more meaning, to more accomplishment, and to better relationships."

Strengths and virtues. We talk about them a lot. Before we go any further, have you taken the strengths assessment at [AuthenticHappiness.org](http://AuthenticHappiness.org)?!?

If you only get one thing out of all these Notes, I'd recommend you identify your signature strengths and figure out how you can engage in them more often in your day-to-day life. It's that big.

So, get on over to [AuthenticHappiness.org](http://AuthenticHappiness.org) and take the "VIA Survey of Character Strengths" test (you'll find it in the middle of the page). You'll be in good company as over 1 million people from 200+ countries have taken it so far!

Once you've taken the test, let's capture your signature strengths here:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Now, schedule some time over the next month when you can put those strengths into action!

## WHAT-WENT-WELL EXERCISE

*"We scientists have found that doing a kindness produces the single most reliable momentary increase in well-being of any exercise we have tested..."*

*Here is the exercise: find one wholly unexpected kind thing to do tomorrow and just do it. Notice what happens to your mood."*

~ Martin Seligman

"Every night for the next week, set aside ten minutes before you go to sleep. Write down three things that went well today and why they went well. You may use a journal or your computer to write about events, but it is important that you have a physical record of what you wrote. The three things need not be earthshaking in importance ("My husband picked up my favorite ice cream for dessert on the way home from work today"), but they can be important ("My sister just gave birth to a healthy baby boy").

Next to each positive event, answer the question "Why did this happen?" For example, if you wrote that your husband picked up ice cream, write "because my husband is really thoughtful sometimes" or "because I remembered to call him from work and remind him to stop by the grocery store." Or if you write, "My sister gave birth to a healthy baby boy," you might pick as the cause "God was looking out for her" or "She did everything right during her pregnancy."

Writing about why the positive events in your life happened may seem awkward at first, but please stick with it for one week. It will get easier. The odds are that you will be less depressed, happier, and addicted to this exercise six months from now."

Seligman outlines a number of awesome positive psychology exercises that we scientifically \*know\* boost happiness. This one's big. Let's get the ball rolling now.

What went well today and why?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

This is why: \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

This is why: \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

This is why: \_\_\_\_\_

Now, how about a commitment to doing this every night for a week?!

## DEALING WITH IT

*"Self-discipline outpredicts IQ for academic success by a factor of 2."*

~ Martin Seligman

"Think about Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill, two severe depressives. They were both enormously well-functioning human beings who dealt with their "black dogs" and their suicidal thoughts. (Lincoln came close to killing himself in January 1841.) Both learned to function extremely well even when they were massively depressed. So one thing that clinical psychology needs to develop in light of the heritable stubbornness of human pathologies is a psychology of "dealing with it." We need to tell our patients, "Look, the truth is that many days—no matter how successful we are in therapy—you will wake up feeling blue and thinking life is hopeless. Your job is not only to fight these feelings but also to live heroically: functioning well even when you are very sad."

Amen to that.

Seligman offers this wisdom in the context of sharing his own challenges with pessimism, telling us that "Strong biological underpinnings predispose some of us to sadness, anxiety, and anger" and that it is likely that these traits "can only be ameliorated, not wholly eliminated."

That's really important. We've gotta realize that, for many of us (me included), we're never

*"By some estimates, depression is about ten times more common now than it was fifty years ago."*

~ Martin Seligman

going to totally get rid of the unpleasant thoughts and feelings. (Can you believe that someone as successful as Seligman still wakes up some mornings hearing voices that tell him he's a failure and that his life is not worth living?! Yep.)

As we realize the fact that those gremlins are gonna be there throughout our lives, our job becomes, as Seligman puts it: *"not only to fight these feelings but also to live heroically: functioning well even when you are very sad."*

Powerful stuff.

Reminds me of the wisdom from [Constructive Living](#) (see Notes), where [David Reynolds](#) tells us: *"The mature human being goes about doing what needs to be done regardless of whether that person feels great or terrible. Knowing that you are the kind of person with that kind of self-control brings all the satisfaction and confidence you will ever need. Even on days when the satisfaction and confidence just aren't there, you can get the job done anyway."*

Here's to living heroically and doing what needs to be done regardless of whether we're feeling great or terrible!!!

## MORE ABC'S

*"First, students learn the ABC model: how beliefs (B) about an adversity (A)—and not the adversity itself—cause the consequent (C) feelings. This is a point of major insight for students: emotions don't follow inexorably from external events but from what you think about those events, and you can actually change what you think."*

The ABCs of effective living. We talk about this ALL. THE. TIME.

—> *"beliefs (B) about an adversity (A)—and not the adversity itself—cause the consequent (C) feelings."*

Those ABCs are the first thing students at a school in Australia learned from Seligman and his team who introduced "positive education" into the curriculum. If you're an educator, I HIGHLY recommend you get the book just to see how they integrated this wisdom into a school environment. It's super inspiring.

Back to you. How are *your* ABCs? Are you blaming an adversity for your emotional state? Or, do you realize it's your beliefs about that challenge that are determining how you feel?

As always, let's step between stimulus and response and CHOOSE a more empowering set of beliefs about what's going on!

## CHARACTER AND 10,000 HOURS

*"In the nineteenth century, politics, morality, and psychology were all about character."*

~ Martin Seligman

*"Ericsson has argued that the cornerstone of all high expertise is not God-given genius but deliberate practice: the amount of time and energy you spend in deliberate practice. Mozart was Mozart not primarily because he had a unique gift for music but because from toddlerhood, he spent all his time using his gift. World-class chess players are not faster of thought, nor do they have unusually good memories for moves. Rather they have so much experience that they are vastly better at recognizing patterns in chess positions than lesser chess players—and this comes from the sheer amount of their experience. World-class piano soloists log 10,000 hours of solo practice by age twenty, in contrast to 5,000 hours for the next level of pianist, and in contrast to 2,000 hours for merely serious amateur pianists. The prototype of deliberate practice is one of Ericsson's graduate students, Choa Lu, who holds the Guinness World Record for the amazing number of pi he memorized: 67,890! The advice that follows is straightforward: if you want to become world class at anything, you must spend 60 hours a week on it for ten years."*

*What determines how much time and deliberate practice a child is willing to devote to*

*"As Nietzsche tells us, good philosophy always says, "Change your life!"*  
~ Martin Seligman

achievement? Nothing less than her character."

Seligman dedicates a chapter to "Grit, Character, and Achievement" where he describes the work done by one of his students, Angela Lee Duckworth. It's brilliant. Click [here](#) or Google "Grit + Duckworth + TED" to watch a great TEDx talk on grit—which is essentially intense passion + intense persistence. It's the stuff greatness is made of. :)

Here's how Seligman puts it: "If we want to maximize the achievement of children, we need to promote self-discipline. My favorite social psychologist, Roy Baumeister, believes it is the queen of all the virtues, the strength that enables the rest of the strengths. There is, however, an extreme trait of self-discipline: GRIT. Indeed, Angela went on to explore grittiness, the combination of very high persistence and high passion for an objective."

P.S. For more goodness on the hard work required to achieve greatness, check out the Notes on [Mindset](#), [The Talent Code](#) and [Talent Is Overrated](#).

## OPTIMISTS VS. PESSIMISTS

*"We estimate that being in the upper quartile of optimism seems to have a beneficial effect on cardiovascular risk roughly equivalent to not smoking two packs of cigarettes daily."*  
~ Martin Seligman

"We wanted to find out who never became helpless, so we looked systematically at the way that the people whom we could not make helpless interpreted bad events. We found that people who believe that the causes of setbacks in their lives are temporary, changeable, and local do not become helpless readily in the laboratory. When assailed with inescapable noise in the laboratory or with rejection in love, they think, *It's going away quickly, I can do something about it, and it's just this one situation*. They bounce back quickly from setbacks, and they do not take a setback at work home. We call them optimists. Conversely, people who habitually think, *It's going to last forever, it's going to undermine everything, and there's nothing I can do about it, become helpless readily in the laboratory*. They do not bounce back from defeat, and they take their marital problems into their jobs. We call them pessimists."

Seligman wrote an entire book on the difference between optimists and pessimists called *Learned Optimism* ([see Notes](#)) where he describes the relationship between learned helplessness and explanatory styles: "*Learned helplessness is the giving up reaction, the quitting response that follows from the belief that whatever you do doesn't matter. Explanatory style is the manner in which you habitually explain to yourself why events happen. It is the great modulator of learned helplessness. An optimistic explanatory style stops helplessness, whereas a pessimistic explanatory style spreads helplessness.*"

The (very) good news is that we can LEARN to be optimistic.

Seligman puts it this way: "*Unlike dieting, learned optimism is easy to maintain once you start. Once you get into the habit of disputing negative beliefs, your daily life will run much better, and you will feel much happier.*"

While [Sonja Lyubomirsky](#) puts it this way in her great book *The How of Happiness* ([see Notes](#)): "*All that is required to become an optimist is to have the goal and to practice it. The more you rehearse optimistic thoughts, the more 'natural' and 'ingrained' they will become. With time they will be part of you, and you will have made yourself into an altogether different person.*"

Here's to getting our optimism on!!! :)

## MEASURING GDP VS. WELL-BEING

"Gross domestic product measures the volume of goods and services that are produced and consumed, and any events that increase that volume increase the GDP. It does not matter if those events happen to decrease the quality of life. Every time there is a divorce, the GDP goes up. Every time two automobiles collide, the GDP goes up. The more people who scarf down antidepressants, the more the GDP goes up. More police protection and longer commutes to

*"But what is wealth for, anyway? The goal of wealth, in my view, is not just to produce more wealth but to engender flourishing."*

~ Martin Seligman

work raise the GDP even though they may lower the quality of life. Economists, humorlessly, call these "regrettables." Cigarette sales and casino profits are included in the GDP. Some entire industries, such as law, psychotherapy, and drugs, prosper as misery increases. This is not to say that lawyers, psychotherapists, and drug companies are bad, but rather that GDP is blind when it comes to whether it is human suffering or human thriving that increases the volume of goods and services.

This divergence between well-being and gross domestic product can be quantified. Life satisfaction in the United States has been flat for fifty years even though GDP has tripled.

Even scarier, measures of ill-being have not declined as gross domestic product has increased; they have gotten much worse. Depression rates have increased tenfold over the last fifty years in the United States. This is true of every wealthy nation, and, importantly, it is not of poor nations."

I included this passage here b/c, frankly, I never knew what went into the GDP calculation; my hunch is you might not have known the details either.

This is all part of a much longer chat we don't have the space to go into here but Seligman concludes the book with a chapter called "The Politics and Economics of Well-Being" where he talks about the opportunities of "Positive Business" and the need to find a better way to keep score of how we're doing on a national and global level that combines both wealth AND well-being. He calls it the "New Prosperity." Powerful stuff.

The bottom line: We need to make the cultivation of well-being an integral part of every aspect of our lives and culture—from business and media to government and education!

Here's to being the change and changing the world in the process,

B

**Brian Johnson,**  
*Heroic Philosopher CEO*

## About the Author of This Note

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Brian Johnson is the Founder + CEO of Heroic. He's spent half of the last 25 years as a Founder/CEO and the other half as a Philosopher. Brian loves integrating ancient wisdom and modern science to help YOU become the best, most heroic version of yourself so we can create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by 2051. Learn more at [heroic.us](http://heroic.us).

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[Authentic Happiness](#)

[Learned Optimism](#)

[The How of Happiness](#)

[The Happiness Hypothesis](#)

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