# CHANGE YOUR LIFE WITH POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

**CHARLOTTE STYLE** 

# Praise for Change Your Life with Positive Psychology

"Change Your Life with Positive Psychology is smart, punchy and refreshing. I love all the brilliant insights, exercises and quotes. Pick up this book and enjoy it as you would a cold drink on a hot summer day."

Dr. Ilona Boniwell, founder, European Network for Positive Psychology

"We all want to become the 'best of ourselves' and Charlotte's passionate and inspiring introduction to Positive Psychology is a great place to start. After reading this book you will have the keys to a flourishing, happy life."

Nina Grunfeld, founder, Life Clubs

"This book is more than an introduction to the main ideas within positive psychology; it is a wonderful resource if you are looking to live a happier and more fulfilled life. Clear, succinct and readable, it encourages you to make small adjustments to your life that can really make a difference."

Dr. Anthony Seldon, author, historian and Head of Wellington College

## Using strengths to express values

Strengths are the psychological characteristics through which we honour and express what we **value** in our life; how we actively integrate who we are with what we value. Often we love a *context* because we have the opportunity to engage in, and use our strengths in support of, what we value. If for instance the emotional need or value is to show courage, the 'context' in which we find this need or value can vary. In the case of courage it might be mountaineering, joining the army, performing or being an entrepreneur. No matter the context, we will **flourish** if it provides the opportunity to use our character strengths.



Here is an example of how different character strengths can meet the same value. All the following people love risk or adventure in their lives because they value courage, and are happy when they are meeting this need because the character strengths they use when facing adventure and risk are natural to them.

- When facing risk and adventure a mountaineer gets the chance to be brave, curious, ingenious, show perseverance or self-control.
- A soldier can show valour, leadership, teamwork, loyalty or courage.
- The performer can also show courage, enthusiasm, passion or self-control.
- The entrepreneur can use courage, originality, optimism, enthusiasm, creative thinking or diligence.

All of the above characters love to be courageous but do so in different ways. They all need risk and adventure but the way in which they express courage can vary widely in activity and context because they hold different character strengths and talents.

We **love** to use our strengths; they are not skills any more than courage is a skill. The character strength is how we express what we value and need emotionally in our life: 'values in action' (Seligman's 'VIA') are at the heart of most of our intrinsic goals.

# What do we mean by values?

Values are the way we prioritise what we **need**; they are learned rather than innate. What we give most value to governs the choices we make. Values guide both our choices and actions. They are how we prioritise needs that govern what we value and make us different from each other. We can become blocked when one value clashes with another, because it indicates a clash of needs. Your values reflect your emotional needs and noticing the strength of feeling you give to a value, or the response you feel when a value is threatened, can indicate a priority need. Most values are easily identified, such as honesty, respect, trust, integrity, love or courage. We will look much further at the connection of needs to what we value in Chapter 7. However, it is important to know what you value and need when thinking about setting goals, because the goals you are most likely to achieve will be those that are congruent with what you value and which allow you an opportunity to use your natural character strengths.

Your values therefore effect and prioritise your choices and goals; without a hierarchy of needs we could not make choices.

Can you think what might be your top five 'values'? What can you not live without? If you answer family, what values are represented in family life that meet your most important needs? Another way to find your values is to notice what you most hate and cannot bear to be around; your values are missing or threatened in this circumstance. Chapter 7 goes into this more fully.

Finding what we value is important because it gives us a context within which we can use our strengths. When we are 'in our skin,' our strengths AND what we value are in harmony.

The words and meanings can get in the way when some concepts are interchangeable. Love is a value to many people as it is something they can't live without and love can also be the activity as well as the characteristic signature strength that honours the value. However, love can also be expressed through gratitude, forgiveness, courage, loyalty, passion, kindness, integrity, etc.

Not all positive psychologists working with strengths are doing so from such a value-laden perspective. The Clifton strength-finder<sup>66</sup> holds a much longer list of strengths that are more slanted towards business 'skills'. And at www.cappeu.com, the Centre for Applied Positive Psychology,<sup>67</sup> you can take a very comprehensive test for a small fee. This is a great tool as it is less hierarchical than Seligman's VIA and allows you to hold many top strengths, as well as highlighting the strengths you don't use enough and those you could pay more attention to.

brilliant exercise
Stop for a minute and list your five top strengths:

For each of the following areas of life in the table below, list a positive moment or activity and the character strength you were using at the time.

Then think of a goal (small or large) that you would like to achieve in each area, and describe the strengths you will use to achieve it.

Area of life	Good moment/ positive activity	Character strength	Goal	Character strength
At work				
With family				
In your living environment				

With friends		
With significant other		
When having fun		
Looking after your health		
Personal growth/ learning		
Economically		
Spiritually/the wider world		

- Notice any part of your life that could do with some attention and try to think of an imaginative way to use your strengths in that area.
- Notice if you are not using one of your top strengths.
- Can you think of a new way of using your top strengths to support or change something in your life for the better?
- Decide to do three things this week in different areas of your life that will excite you.

# brilliant insight

Remember variety – using your signature strengths in a **new** way has a lasting effect on increasing happiness and reducing symptoms of depression.<sup>68</sup>

Why not list your strengths in the first column of the following table and think of new ways of using them in different areas of your life.

Top character strengths	Area of life	Area of life	Area of life
1 e.g. kindness			
2			

Top character strengths	Area of life	Area of life	Area of life
3			
4			
5			

# Three importants points to remember about using your strengths

### 1 Use your top character strengths

If you are not using your signature strengths enough you will not feel as good as when you do! Find new ways to use your strengths; try using your strengths in all areas of your life. If your top strength is critical thinking, judgement or open-mindedness, do you apply this strength to your emotional life as much as your working life?

# 2 Notice and pay attention to those character traits at the bottom of your list!

Using only your top strengths, indulging your passions, can lead to neglecting what is hard. If kindness and generosity are at the bottom of your list and creativity and love of learning at the top, try using your top strengths to develop those at the bottom. Start to get creative about being kind, or if you have a top strength that is bravery and valour – dare to be kind! Sarah found that the worst part of her day was walking home from work in the dark – bravery was at the bottom of her list. By using creativity, her top strength, she thought up different ways to go home and creative tasks to fulfil on the way home to distract her from her apprehension and it has now become a fulfilling part of her day and she is much braver as a consequence.

# 3 Beware of becoming one dimensional

It is also worth noting that an overdeveloped strength can be a weakness. Being overly preoccupied with the strengths you are good at can get out of balance. Too much kindness, an overly developed sense of fairness or too much self-control is not healthy and can prevent you flourishing as much as not using your top strengths. A truly flourishing life is one that contains many strengths.

Now that you have a clearer idea of what you care about and what you are best at, how can your strengths and values become part of your goals?

### Goals

What are goals? Goals are anything we set ourselves to do. All human action is to some extent goal directed, from getting up in the morning and going to work, to running a marathon, writing a letter or being a good parent. A goal is anything we wish to get done either in the short term or over a lifetime. Goals are also how we meet our most basic needs.

Your actions and goals respond to your most basic needs

We looked at the six basic needs that psychologist Carol Ryff believes are essential to our psychological well-being in Chapter 2 and research by other psychologists<sup>69</sup> has found the following four basic needs to be the most satisfying to us when they are met.

- **Self-esteem**. Liking yourself and feeling good about who you are and your abilities. Goals that build your self-esteem will be the most satisfying to you.
- **2** Competence. Able to function in your environment (environmental mastery). You need to have the skills and ability to achieve what you want you need competence.