

# Positive Psychology Coaching Course Syllabus

## COURSE OVERVIEW

The course in Positive Psychology Coaching covers the fundamental principles, theory, and techniques of Positive Psychology Coaching through a combination of lectures, demonstrations, case studies, readings, personal reflection, and optional student-to-student coaching sessions.

### Classes cover the following topics:

**Positive Psychology Coaching:** The essential principles and techniques of applying Positive Psychology in a coaching context.

**Coaching Session Fundamentals:** Structuring initial consultations, judging when coaching is appropriate, defining coaching goals and session plans, and exploring clients' strengths stories.

**Essential Techniques of Positive Psychology Coaching:** Understanding, experiencing, and practicing the techniques at the heart of effective coaching.

**Appreciative Inquiry:** Helping clients to focus on what works in order to inspire ideas, confidence, and motivation for change.

**Asking Powerful Questions:** Generating questions that help clients to achieve greater understanding, and to make progress toward their goals.

**Exploring Stories:** Listening to clients' stories, and helping them to explore them to generate insights, narrative coherence, and goal clarity.

**Empathic Listening:** Practicing the essential art of truly listening to our clients, and addressing challenges to both our empathy and our attention.

**Coaching for Self-Compassion:** Helping clients to achieve greater well-being and goal progress by treating themselves with self-compassion.

**Solutions Focus:** Shifting clients' focus from problems to solutions, and helping them to develop paths to solutions that work.

**Coaching for Positive Change:** Putting it all together to structure coaching relationships that help clients to effectively identify, pursue, and achieve their goals for positive change.

**Building a Positive Psychology Coaching Practice:** Introduction to building a thriving practice by applying the principles of Positive Psychology to practice development, including marketing, communication, and client development.

## OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

**The course is designed to engage students with the material in four primary ways:**

- Reading assignments on the research that underpins effective Positive Psychology coaching.
- Live lectures, demonstrations, case studies, and Q&A focusing on the practical application of Positive Psychology research in the coaching context.
- Journal prompts intended to encourage students to reflect on how they can best apply the material in their own lives and work.
- Optional peer coaching sessions during which students practice the essential techniques of effective coaching by both coaching their partners and providing candid, structured feedback on the coaching they receive from their partners.

**At the end of the course, students will be able to:**

- Communicate the principles and benefits of Positive Psychology Coaching.
- Employ the techniques and tools at the heart of Positive Psychology Coaching.
- Practice the steps of structuring effective coaching sessions and productive coaching relationships.

## TECHNOLOGY

The course uses very user-friendly technology, so students are able to easily connect to live online sessions. Presentation materials will be available in advance of each class session. Recordings will be posted following each session for students who are unable to join live or who would like to review the material again.

## SCHEDULE

---

### Class

- 1: Introduction to Positive Psychology Coaching
  - 2: Coaching Session Fundamentals
  3. Appreciative Inquiry
  4. Asking Powerful Questions
  5. Exploring Stories
  6. Empathic Listening and Coaching for Self-Compassion
  7. Solutions Focus, Part One
  8. Solutions Focus, Part Two
  9. Putting It Together: Coaching for Positive Change
  10. Building a Thriving Positive Psychology Coaching Practice
-

## TIME COMMITMENT

To get the most from the course, we estimate that most students will put in approximately two hours of preparation per week, plus the 90-minute class session itself and, for those who choose to participate, the hour-long peer coaching session.

## PEER COACHING SESSIONS

Students who choose to participate in the peer coaching program will meet by phone weekly in pairs for one hour to practice the techniques demonstrated in the most recent class and to offer each other candid, structured feedback intended to enhance skills and self-awareness.

## ASSIGNMENTS

Relatively brief weekly reading assignments will consist of material from the Positive Psychology and coaching literature. Weekly journal prompts will be aimed at deepening students' engagement with the material and helping them to enhance their personal and professional development as coaches.

## REQUIRED READING

Lyubomirsky, Sonja. *The How of Happiness: A New Approach to Getting the Life You Want*. New York: Penguin, 2008.

Dweck, Carol S. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. New York: Random House, 2006.

Neff, Kristin. *Self-Compassion: Stop Beating Yourself Up and Leave Insecurity Behind*. New York: William Morrow, 2011.

Szabó, Peter, and Daniel Meier. *Coaching Plain & Simple: Solution-Focused Brief Coaching Essentials*. New York: W.W. Norton &, 2009.

Theeboom, T., Beersma, B., and van Vianen, A. "Does Coaching Work? A Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Coaching Individual-Level Outcomes in an Organizational Context." *The Journal of Positive Psychology*. Web 13 Sept 2013. (PDF provided.)

## OPTIONAL ADDITIONAL READING

Haidt, Jonathan. *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*. New York: Basic Books, 2006.

## CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION

Students who complete the full course will receive a personalized Certificate of Completion signed by the course instructor and the leaders of the WholeBeing Institute.

### **CLASS 1: Introduction to Positive Psychology Coaching**

This class introduces the essential principles and techniques of applying Positive Psychology in a coaching context. It also includes an overview of the course, and an orientation to the optional peer coaching sessions.

The pre-class assignment is to watch the video: Introduction to Positive Psychology (online access provided).

### **CLASS 2: Coaching Session Fundamentals**

This class focuses on the fundamentals of effective coaching sessions. Topics include structuring initial consultations, judging when coaching is appropriate, defining positive coaching goals, and setting session agendas. It also introduces the skill of exploring clients' strengths stories.

Pre-class assignments include a journal prompt, optional peer coaching, and the following reading:

Lyubomirsky, Sonja. *The How of Happiness: A New Approach to Getting the Life You Want*. New York: Penguin, 2008. Chapters 1 – 3.

### **CLASS 3: Appreciative Inquiry**

This class covers the theory, benefits, and application of Appreciative Inquiry. It includes techniques for helping clients to discover and marshal their strengths, pleasures, values, and resources, as well as the importance of modeling and promoting a growth mindset.

Pre-class assignments include a journal prompt, optional peer coaching, and the following reading:

Dweck, Carol S. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. New York: Random House, 2006. Chapters 1 – 3.

### **CLASS 4: Asking Powerful Questions**

This class further addresses Appreciative Inquiry and expands our investigation of coaching questions to other types of powerful questions. It also addresses the question common among coaches: "How do I know what to ask?"

Pre-class assignments include a journal prompt, optional peer coaching, and the following reading:

Neff, Kristin. *Self-Compassion: Stop Beating Yourself Up and Leave Insecurity Behind*. New York: William Morrow, 2011. Chapters 1 – 3.

### **CLASS 5: Exploring Stories**

This class focuses on the essential coaching skill of helping clients to tell and mine their personal stories in ways that allow them to gain helpful insights, enhance narrative coherence, generate grounded positivity, clarify their goals, and increase their self-efficacy.

Pre-class assignments a journal prompt, optional peer coaching, and the following reading:

Lyubomirsky, Sonja. *The How of Happiness: A New Approach to Getting the Life You Want*. New York: Penguin, 2008. Chapters 4 and 6.

### **CLASS 6: Empathic Listening and Coaching for Self-Compassion**

This class covers the essential coaching skills of empathic listening and coaching for self-compassion. Topics include the benefits of each, as well as techniques for bringing them to our coaching relationships.

Pre-class assignments include a journal prompt, optional peer coaching, and the following reading:

Neff, Kristin. *Self-Compassion: Stop Beating Yourself Up and Leave Insecurity Behind*. New York: William Morrow, 2011. Chapters 6 – 8.

### **CLASS 7: Solutions Focus, Part One**

This class introduces the essential coaching skill of Solutions Focus. It covers the theory and benefits of the approach, techniques for orienting coaching discussions around solutions rather than problems, and an in-depth exploration of a powerful way to begin a solutions-focused discussion.

Pre-class assignments include a journal prompt, optional peer coaching, and the following reading:

Szabó, Peter, and Daniel Meier. *Coaching Plain & Simple: Solution-Focused Brief Coaching Essentials*. New York: W.W. Norton &, 2009. Chapters 1 – 3.

### **CLASS 8: Solutions Focus, Part Two**

This class offers further investigation into the essential coaching skill of Solutions Focus. It includes a step-by-step process for helping clients to progress from developing a vision of a solution to creating a plan for making that solution a reality and making sustainable, practical progress toward a better future.

Pre-class assignments include a journal prompt, optional peer coaching, and the following reading:

Szabó, Peter, and Daniel Meier. *Coaching Plain & Simple: Solution-Focused Brief Coaching Essentials*. New York: W.W. Norton &, 2009. Chapters 6 and 7.

Optional additional reading:

Haidt, Jonathan. *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*. New York: Basic Books, 2006. Chapter 1.

### **CLASS 9: Putting It Together: Coaching for Positive Change**

This class moves from the theory and practice of specific techniques to the overall structure and development of effective coaching relationships. It covers a six-step process to help clients to identify, pursue, and achieve their coaching goals.

Pre-class assignments include a journal prompt, optional peer coaching, and the following reading:

Lyubomirsky, Sonja. *The How of Happiness: A New Approach to Getting the Life You Want*. New York: Penguin, 2008. Chapters 8 and 10.

### **CLASS 10: Building a Thriving Positive Psychology Coaching Practice**

This class offers an approach to building a thriving coaching practice by applying the principles of Positive Psychology and sound business thinking to practice development, including marketing, communication, and client development.

Pre-class assignments include a journal prompt, optional peer coaching, and the following reading:

Theeboom, T., Beersma, B., and van Vianen, A. "Does Coaching Work? A Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Coaching Individual-Level Outcomes in an Organizational Context." *The Journal of Positive Psychology*. Web 13 Sept 2013.