

## Positive Leadership: *Improve effectiveness and happiness*

### [Leadership Excellence](#)

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**WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE A BETTER LEADER? Would you like to be happier?** If so, you're in luck. The scientific study of happiness and the systematic study of leadership are converging.

Although leadership and positive psychology are relatively new fields of scientific inquiry, *the study of leadership and happiness is as old as civilization itself*. For thousands, of years, historians have chronicled and analyzed the exploits of leaders such as Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar and philosophers have debated the merits of the Confucian prescription of filial piety and Aristotle's view of the good life.

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While scientific inquiry of leadership is an expansive field today, its beginnings date back to 1948 with Ralph Stogdill's work on the *trait theory* of leadership. The same progression is seen in the study of human happiness based on the emerging field of positive psychology, starting with Abraham Maslow (*A Theory of Human Motivation*, 1943) which proposed the hierarchy of needs. In a later book, Maslow coined the term *positive psychology*. In 1998, when Martin Seligman, then President of the American Psychological Assoc., fed up with the pessimism of psychology and its focus on what is *wrong* with people, proposed a new branch of psychology that would focus on *how people can adapt and excel*. Research in *Positive Psychology*, proposes that people can become happier by embracing behavioral changes in how they act and think that will allow them to thrive.

For example, suppose you are in a leadership position but you are not feeling very happy. However, you have the good fortune of knowing Dr. Pangloss, a psychologist who has dedicated her practice to researching and implementing *positive psychology* to help patients. At your appointment you ask, "Dr. Pangloss, tell me just *one thing* I can do to become a happier person!" The advice is simple: "Workout at least three times a week for 30 to 40 minutes; in a few weeks your level of endorphins will rise and you *will* feel happier."

You heard that working out makes for better health, but you are intrigued that research also shows that it will contribute to your happiness. The next day, the CEO of your company arranges for you to meet a friend, a highly touted *leadership guru*. After Dr. Faust regales you with his model of leadership and the painstaking research that led to it, you bring him down to earth by asking, "Could you tell me just *one thing* I can do to be a more effective leader." You hear familiar advice: "Workout at least three times a week for 30 to 40 minutes and your energy and resilience will rise and you'll be a more effective leader." At this point, you suspect that there is a conspiracy between Pangloss and Faust. It's true, however, that

you have put on some weight and your energy has ebbed, as has your workout regimen. You consider the consequences of energy loss in leadership decisions.

Dr. Pangloss and Dr. Faust concur on other prescriptions to improve *leadership effectiveness* and *personal happiness*:

- **Develop a sense of purpose.** True: “If you don’t know where you are going, any road will get you there.” Purpose provides anchors for vision and action, tempers the effect of disappointments, and enables you to celebrate success.
- **Keep your life and business strategy simple.** According to Leonardo DaVinci, “Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.” Having fewer but richer and more focused outlets for our energies is an effective business strategy and a boon for your personal pursuits.
- **Express gratitude frequently** to all with whom you come in contact. Make it a habit. The benefits of gratitude (the *G-factor*) lead to improved health, better sleep, and more vibrant relationships and more loyal team members.
- **Build stronger relationships** with your colleagues, friends and family to gain new understanding, capture innovation, and enjoy the journey.
- **Take setbacks in stride.** Don’t become too attached to success—or to failure. There is a lesson to be learned at every peak and valley. Finding and realizing that lesson helps build *resiliency* and *tenacity* at work or in *relationships*.
- **Live a healthy and active life.** Exercise and healthy eating habits enable you to make more effective decisions.

*Happiness* and *leadership* are intertwined— things that make you *happier* also make you a *better leader*! This congruence between *happiness* and *leadership* could usher in a new era of *happier, more effective leaders*. **LE**

**ACTION: Be a more positive, energetic leader.**

### **About the author**

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