WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS ABOUT CHARACTER STRENGTHS & HEALTH AND WELLNESS

• When an individual has a physical disorder, there is less of a toll on life satisfaction if they are high on the character strengths of bravery, kindness, and humor (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2006).

• When an individual has a psychological disorder, there is less of a toll on life satisfaction if they are high on the character strengths of appreciation of beauty & excellence and love of learning (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2006).

• The strengths of the "heart" (e.g., love, gratitude) are more strongly associated with well-being than are strengths of the "head" (e.g., creativity, open-mindedness/judgment, appreciation of beauty and excellence; Park & Peterson, 2008b; Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004).

• Grateful individuals report higher positive mood, optimism, life satisfaction, vitality, religiousness and spirituality, and less depression and envy than less grateful individuals (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002).

• Grateful people tend to be more helpful, supportive, forgiving, empathic, and agreeable (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002).

• Hope was a significant predictor of medication adherence among asthma patients between 8 and 12 (Berg, Rapoff, Snyder, & Belmont, 2007).

• Character strengths were associated with lower levels of sexual behaviors and sex-related beliefs among African-American adolescents. Specifically on the VIA, higher love of learning was related to boys' self-reported abstinence from sexual intercourse and boys' & girls' self-reported abstinence from drug use; higher curiosity was related to boys' & girls' belief in no premarital sex (love of learning was also significant for boys); prudence was related to reported abstinence from sexual intimacy; judgment was related to sexual initiation efficacy for girls & boys (leadership was also significant for girls; Ma et al., 2008).

• The practice of gratitude (counting blessings) is linked to fewer physical symptoms, more optimistic life appraisals, and more time exercising and improved well-being and optimal functioning (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

• Adolescent students who counted blessings reported higher levels of optimism and life satisfaction, less negative affect, and fewer physical symptoms (Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008).

The practice of gratitude is linked to increases in well-being among those with neuromuscular disease (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAY ABOUT CHARACTER STRENGTHS APPLICATIONS

• Using one's signature strengths in a new and unique way is an effective intervention: it increased happiness and decreased depression for 6 months (Seligman, Steen, Park, Peterson, 2005).

• Using one's signature strengths in a new way and three good things increased happiness for 6 months and decreased depression for 3 and 6 months, respectively. The early positive memory group and not the early memory group had similar benefits increasing happiness and decreasing depression for 3 months each (Mongrain & Anselmo, 2009).

• Random assignment to a group instructed to use 2 signature strengths or use 1 signature strength and 1 bottom strength revealed significant gains in satisfaction with life compared with a control group but no differences between the 2 treatment groups (Rust, Diessner, & Reade, 2009).

• There is a strong connection between well-being and the use of signature strengths because strengths helps us make progress on our goals and meet our basic needs for independence, relationship, and competence (Linley et al., 2010).

• The use of one's top strengths leads to a decreased likelihood of depression and stress and an increase in satisfaction in law students (Peterson & Peterson, 2008).

• Most creativity training programs work, especially when divergent thinking – the capacity to generate multiple alternative solutions as opposed to the one correct solution – is fostered (Scott et al., 2004).

• Many interventions help to increase creativity in older adults, such as cultural/art programs (e.g., music, dance, drawing), poetry, journaling, problem-solving activities, reminiscence, and psycho-educational groups (Flood & Phillips, 2007).

• In an experiment in which participants were instructed to pay attention to three novel features with something disliked (i.e., use their curiosity), the participants changed the way they viewed the activity, and weeks later they were more likely to have done the task again on their own (Langer, 2005).

• Individuals are more likely to engage in active, open-mindedness of multiple views when asked to make decisions around values/goals that are both strong and conflicting (Tetlock, 1986).

• Students are more likely to value and enjoy learning if they're achieving their grade goal, the subject matter is of personal interest, or the reasons for learning are task-oriented (e.g., markers for how they can improve; Covington, 1999).

• There are three major paths for developing wisdom: Learning from mentors and reading philosophical literature, teaching students skills and wise patterns of thinking and decision-making, and the use of direct, short-term interventions, such as imagined conversation and imagined travel (Gluck & Baltes, 2006).

• Labeling one's actions in retrospect as courageous can lead to or promote courage, or at least positive states and values that lead to courageous behaviors (Finfgeld, 1999; Hannah et al., 2007).

• Outcome-focused strategies – thinking of the person being helped, reminding oneself of the righteousness of the act, or reflecting on the obligation to act – are the most common ways individuals attempt to increase bravery/courage (Pury, 2008).

• Reinforcement of high effort on tasks results in transfer of effort to other tasks (greater persistence; Eisenberger, 1992; Hickman et al., 1998).

• Honesty, empathy, and courage – conceptualized as academic heroism – predicted academic honesty and noted as three potential routes for developing heroism and virtues (Staats et al., 2008).

• Potential pathways for increasing zest, particularly in the workplace, may be to cultivate optimism, gratitude, or savoring, emphasize good social relationships outside work, and focus on physical health and fitness (Peterson et al., 2009).

• The focus on cultivating love toward oneself and/or others was found to increase feelings of social connection and positivity toward others (Hutcherson et al., 2008), as well as positive emotions, sense of purpose, and mindfulness in general (Fredrickson et al., 2008).

• Kindness and gratitude increased among happy Japanese women who counted their kind acts (Otake et al., 2006).

• Potential pathways to build teamwork and develop successful teams comes from correlational research finding team optimism predicts outcomes for teams that are newly formed and team resiliency and team efficacy predict outcomes for established teams (West et al., 2009).

• Instructors are more likely to be perceived as fair if they present information clearly, give regular feedback, stick to the course syllabus, and give many opportunities to earn a good grade in the course (Chory, 2007).

• Moral reasoning development (fairness) is developed through stimulating and interactive peer discussions that involve moral issues, heterogeneous reasoning, and orient toward consensus or resolution of disagreement (transactive discussions; Berkowitz & Gibbs, 1983).

• The development of 2 or 3 different leadership styles (e.g., directive, participative, coaching) relates to higher leader behavioral flexibility which is an important characteristic of effective leaders (Sumner-Armstrong et al., 2008).

• Writing about the personal benefits of forgiving a transgressor lead to greater forgiveness than writing about the traumatic features of a transgression suffered or an unrelated control topic (McCullough et al., 2006).

• Viewing and working with forgiveness as a process, whether this is done

individually or in groups, is crucial for building this strength (Baskin & Enright, 2004).

• A meta-analysis of 65 group intervention conditions found that the amount of time spent empathizing with transgressors, committing to forgive, and practical strategies (e.g., anger management and relaxation) was significantly related to forgiveness outcome (Wade, Worthington, & Meyer, 2005).

• Daily self-control exercises increase a general core capacity for self-control (i.e., our self-regulation "muscle"), such as food monitoring, improving mood, improving posture, physical exercise programs, financial monitoring exercises, and the use of a non-preferred hand to do routine activities (Baumeister et al., 2006).

• Keeping a "beauty log" of writing briefly about the beauty the individual appreciates in nature, art, or morality during the week lead to a higher engagement with moral beauty and trait hope (Diessner et al., 2006).

• A combination of cognitive strategies (e.g., evaluating beliefs) and social problem-solving strategies (e.g., assertiveness training) lead to greater optimism (Gillham, Reivich, Jaycox, & Seligman, 1995).

• Visualizing and writing about one's best possible self at a time in the future leads to increases in optimism/hope and well-being (King, 2001; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006).

• Three good things (writing down three positive things that happened during the day) is an effective intervention: it increased happiness and decreased depression for 6 months (Seligman, Steen, Park, Peterson, 2005).

• Three interventions delivered online were not found to have lasting effects: The gratitude visit (benefits for 1 month), simply identifying signature strengths and using them more over the week, and writing about "you at your best." Nevertheless, if someone is looking for a quick boost of happiness, the gratitude visit is a good option. These three ineffective interventions were delivered in isolation; there might be benefits if these were combined in a multi-exercise program (Seligman, Steen, Park, Peterson, 2005).

• Four studies taken together found that prayer has a causal effect in increasing the strength of gratitude (Lambert et al., 2009).

Learning from spiritual models or exemplars reduced negative religious coping and images of God as controlling and provides an avenue for learning about spirituality (Oman & Thoresen, 2003; Oman et al., 2007).

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