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Is the feeling of well-being something a simple daily journal can help us obtain?

Introduction

Gratitude and well-being are two terms that we've all heard of, but most struggle to define. From my experience gratitude and well-being occur when I achieve a goal that feels difficult or impossible. An example of this is when I decided to climb 3000 feet. One day I went to my local climbing gym, I went there expecting to do my usual routine of bouldering, only about 15 to 20 feet at a time, but this time something struck me: I decided I wanted to be uncomfortable. I set a goal for myself: 3000 feet non-stop. The wall I chose to climb was 35ft tall, so I had to climb it 86 times. I put on my harness, I slipped on my climbing shoes, and covered my hands in chalk. When I started up the wall, I was feeling confident and strong, but around my 20th time up my forearms were burning, and my legs started to shake. I struggled to see any point in continuing. At around my 60th time up the wall my pump was gone, but my hands were bleeding, I was drenched in sweat, and I felt like I was going to throw up, but I wasn't going to stop now. On my 86th time up the wall I was shaking with excitement. I had been on the wall for two and a half hours now, and I felt as if I had ran a marathon. I had hit the last hold jump off the wall and scream with joy. friends yelling and hollering with me in excitement. The feeling of excitement and accomplishment after completing this 3000-foot lasted for days. To me, this is what gratitude and well-being is, but is it the only way to gain the feeling of gratitude? Martin Seligman's idea of the "Three Good Things" gratitude process is designed to help a person gain the feeling of

wellbeing by journaling about three good things that has happened to them that day. Martin Seligman's three good things process has positively affected my well-being through affirming positive aspects of my life and it can do the same for you.

Literature Review

To get an understanding of how gratitude and the "Three Good Things" process can affect one's well-being, I would like to look at some key terms I will be using in my research. The first term I would like to define is "positive psychology." The definition for positive psychology I'm choosing to use in this paper is "the scientific study of the strengths that enable individuals and communities to thrive" (Positive Psychology Center). This field is very much based on the idea that all people want and strive for their lives to have meaning, and for one to become the best person they can be.

The second term I would like to define is "well-being." There is no academic consensus on the definition of well-being, but according to *Well-being Concepts*, "Well-being is a positive outcome that is meaningful for people and for many sectors of society, because it tells us that people perceive that their lives are going well." After doing my own research I've come to see the definition of well-being as: a strong feeling of positive and long-lasting emotion with a positive mood, an absence of negative emotion and a strong sense of satisfaction, fulfillment, and positivity.

The next term I would like to define is gratitude. I'm going to be using "Gratitude Practice Explained" definition of gratitude which is: "Gratitude is a state of mind that arises when you affirm a good thing in your life that comes from outside yourself, or when you notice and relish little pleasures." From the research I've done I feel that this definition is the most comprehensive and agreeable.

The next topic I would like to look over is: what research suggests gratitude improves wellbeing? Dr. Martin Seligman and his three good things process is one of the strongest advocates for gratitude. Martin Seligman's Positive Psychology Progress Study shows that in patients with clinical depression the three good things process was able to decrease depression symptoms by 28% within one week and improve overall Happiness by 2%. Most patients that continued the three good things process saw a 5% improvement in happiness after one month and 9% in 6 months (Seligman 415-420). In this study, patients were advised to do the three good things process for only one week, but most enjoyed the process and the benefits it had, so most continue for much longer (Seligman 415-420).

In contrast to this, there's also some research that shows gratitude does not improve well-being or at least does not significantly improved one's well-being. In Fleming research, he had 10 volunteers take Happiness measure: The Revised Oxford Happiness Scale, Positive and Negative Affectivity measure: Positive and Negative Affectivity Scale (PANAS), Well-Being measure: Satisfaction with Life Scale, and Hope measure: The Life Orientation Test. After the ten volunteers took these tests, they performed Seligman's three good things process for one week then retook these tests (Fleming, Andrew). Fleming states "The results suggest that the 'three good things in life' exercise may increase happiness and optimism/hope. Results also showed that the satisfaction with life scale scores remained the same, a decrease in positive affect scores, and increased negative affect scores. Overall, the changes in all the mean scores were small." This study was done on ten students that all ranks normal on a happiness scale. Because of the relatively little change on all students that scored normal on a happiness chart one could argue that trying to improve one's gratitude through the three good things process might only be beneficial to a person scoring less than average on a happiness scale. One could also

argue that the benefits you can receive from doing the three good things process has to do with your perception of gratitude. Author Leslie Becker-Phelps States in her article When Gratitude Works; and When It Doesn't:

Being grateful is generally thought of as a wonderful quality. But insisting on it is less than helpful. I have worked with many patients over the years who are angry with themselves for not being grateful enough; or who say they are grateful, but that this doesn't really help them to feel good. The common denominator with both groups of people is that they focus on what they don't have. They remind themselves that they are not starving or sick. Even when a catastrophe, tragedy, or difficult circumstance really has befallen them, they focus on what else could have gone wrong but hasn't. As a result, they feel relieved at best. But this generally doesn't invite a warm sense of appreciation.

(Leslie Becker-Phelps)

For my personal experience doing the "three good things" process I would agree with Becker Phelps. The mindset of how you look at gratitude in your life can significantly affect your well-being.

Findings

Martin Seligman's three good things process can positively affect one's well-being through affirming positive aspects one's life. From my findings after personally completing the three good things process for three weeks, I would confidently say that this process can positively affect my well-being. After looking at my October 30th three good things journal entries:

1) I climbed 3000ft in two and a half hours. This went well because I convinced my friend Isaac

to do with me, so we could motivate each other to finish the 3000ft.

2) I got a lot of homework done. This went well because I committed to doing at least 4 hours today.

3) I got a really good deal on some nice clothes at a thrift store. This went well because I decided to go to the far thrift store which is cheaper.

We can see that Martin Seligman's three good things process forces one to affirm gratitude in their lives through journaling each night. According to Kyeong, gratitude can promote positive mindsets, reduce stress, and positively contribute to mental well-being. Kyeong also states that, "Gratitude has been associated with lower risk of psychiatric disorders, higher life satisfaction, and wisdom." Before starting the three good things process, I took the "General Happiness Scale" (Authentic Happiness). My results from the general happiness scale are: General Happiness: 5.5 out of 7 on Oct 30, 2018. After completing the three good things process, I then took the general happiness scale again scoring: 6 out of 7 on Nov 19, 2018. As one can see from this data, my general happiness has gone up by .5 and I feel that I can see a noticeable difference in my well-being. We also can see this positive effect of the three good things process in Martin Seligman's research. Seligman's data showing that the three good things process was able to improve overall happiness in patients with clinical depression by 2% and most patients that continued the three good things process seen a 5% improvement in happiness after one month, (Seligman 415-420). Seligman's data closely correlates with the improvements I saw in my happiness scale after doing the three good things process for 1 weeks

Conclusion

The three good things process has positively affected my well-being and has the ability to positively affect others. I will not be continuing the three good things process.

The feeling of gratitude and well-being from accomplished my 3,000 feet of climbing has personality stuck with me longer than doing the three good things process. According to Seligman's research and Fleming research it seems that the effects of the three good things process diminishes over time, so I feel continuing this process would not be any more beneficial. My main takeaway from this research is that the actions you do every day and the positive or negative outlook you have on these actions has a substantial effect on your overall well-being. If I were to continue researching this topic, some questions I would look over are: how does the three good things process affect people with mental disabilities? What can other gratitude based methods change one's well-being? Lastly, does age play a significant role in the effect the three good things process has on someone?

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