

# PART I



The Good News  
About Positivity



# CHAPTER 1

## Waking Up to Positivity

*One's own self is well hidden from one's own self:  
Of all mines of treasure, one's own is the last to be dug up.*

—FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

### TAKE 1

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The morning sun streams through your bedroom window and wakes you from a fitful night's sleep. After a long string of gray and rainy days, you appreciate seeing blue sky. But soon enough you realize the alarm didn't go off. You're disappointed because you've been meaning to wake up extra early so you can have time to yourself before the kids wake up and the morning race begins. With what little time there is, you decide to skip your planned exercise routine, spend some more time in bed, and write in your journal. You write,

*I can't believe I let myself down again by forgetting to set my alarm. How am I ever going to take charge of my days (and my life!) if I can't make this simple change? Without exercise, I'm going to feel like a slug today. Ugh. I'd better focus on why I write in this*

*journal in the first place: to think about my larger goals and connect them to what I do each day. Is this really working? Is it worth my time when I could be sleeping? What I really should be doing with this extra time is checking for fires on e-mail or reviewing my ridiculously long to-do list. Isn't our water bill past due? Where is it anyway?*

At this point you close your journal, get out of bed, go to your computer, and open your e-mail. Sure enough, you find that your co-worker, Sharon, needs input from you before she can submit her proposal, and she needs it by this afternoon. You'll be stuck spending at least part of your morning preparing forms for her. Feeling angry at her imposition, you open the next e-mail to see that the project you spearheaded received preliminary approval and you've got forty-eight hours to make a final set of revisions. "Forty-eight hours!" you say out loud. "Am I supposed to drop everything to make these revisions?" How am I going to fit this in?" The nanosecond of joy you felt on learning the good news is squashed by your concerns about clearing this last hurdle.

Just then, your daughter, who's nearly four years old, wakes up and calls, "Mummy!" You glance at the time: 6:42. You've told her time and again to wait quietly in her room until you come in for hugs and kisses at seven, and here she is, not listening, *again*. Your frustration is growing—far too many demands both at work and at home. Nobody understands how impossible your life has become with this career shift. You go to your daughter's room, snap at her about calling for you early, and then march off to make breakfast.

The whole morning is a grim race, and everybody's losing. You'd have been out the door on time had your seven-year-old son not misplaced his favorite shoes. Then starts the parental nagging: "Why can't you just wear a different pair!? If those shoes are so important to you, why don't you keep track of them better?" Now all four of you—the kids, you, and your husband—are racing around the house trying to find those @#\$\$% shoes!

Later, having dropped the children off at school—late again—you arrive at work—also late. The first person you see is Joe, your collaborator on the project that was just accepted. He’s smiling broadly. At times you appreciate Joe’s good spirits, but today his smile makes you suspicious. You think, *He’s trying to butter me up so I’ll do all the revisions!* He approaches. “Did you hear the news? We got the money! We’re set for the year!” You say, “Yeah, but did you see that list of revisions—and just forty-eight hours to make them? I’ve also got to deal with Sharon’s proposal this morning.” Joe’s smile fades as he takes a moment to figure out how to respond to your negativity.

Sound familiar? If you’re like most people, you probably recognize this kind of morning all too well: *Can’t do anything right. Can’t give myself the time I need. Can’t stick with my goal of journaling. Can’t stand that Sharon is making her emergency my emergency. Can’t fathom how I’ll meet a forty-eight-hour revision deadline. Can’t get on the same page with Joe. Can’t even teach my kids to stay in bed until 7:00 a.m. Can’t get through the morning “race” without yelling and fussing. Can’t get the kids to school on time. And if I can’t get myself to work on time—how in the world am I going to meet all these demands?*

We all know negativity; it looms large and is easy to spot. Negativity pervades your self-talk and your judgments. It bleeds into your exchanges with your kids and your colleagues, eroding goodwill between you. Making matters worse, unchecked negativity breeds health-damaging negative emotions—anger, contempt, and depression—that seep into your entire body. You can feel your simmering bitterness eating away at your stomach, raising your blood pressure, and turning your shoulder and neck muscles to stone. Even your face feels hard and tight, which may be why others steer clear if they can. What’s more, you move through your day as if you have blinders on. You find fault and blame everywhere. You see no solutions. Everything is painfully

predictable. Negativity comes on fast and strong, hitting like a sledgehammer. And none of us is immune to it.

So what about positivity? Compared to negativity, positivity seems pale and weak. It's hardly the mirror image of negativity. Positivity seems so puny that at times we don't even notice it.

But what if positivity matters?

And what is positivity anyway?

Let's start with what it isn't. Positivity doesn't mean we should follow the axioms "Grin and bear it" or "Don't worry, be happy." Those are simply superficial wishes. Positivity runs deeper. It consists of the whole range of positive emotions—from appreciation to love, from amusement to joy, from hope to gratitude, and then some. The term is purposely broad. It includes the positive meanings and optimistic attitudes that trigger positive emotions as well as the open minds, tender hearts, relaxed limbs, and soft faces they usher in. It even includes the long-term impact that positive emotions have on your character, relationships, communities, and environment. Although some of this may sound like the vocabulary of greeting cards, the term *positivity* points to vital human moments that have now captured the interest of science. And the new scientific discoveries about the importance of positivity are stunning.

Your mild and fleeting pleasant states are far more potent than you think. We know now that they alter your mind and body in ways that can literally help you create your best life.

So let's roll back time and do a retake on that same morning of yours, this time with positivity. Rest assured that no matter how good you are at negativity, you're also capable of positivity. As you read, keep in mind that, like negativity, positivity goes beyond self-talk. Although subtle, it too infuses your mindscape and outlook, heart rhythms and body chemistry, muscle tension and facial expressions, and your resources and relationships.

TAKE 2

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You wake up to morning light streaming through your bedroom window, feeling well rested. You notice your alarm didn't go off. You're disappointed because you meant to wake up extra early so you could have time to yourself before the kids wake up. You look out the window and think, *Oh well, at least it looks like the weather's going to be beautiful.* Your disappointment melts. *I've got a little time to myself.* You decide to skip your planned exercise routine and go straight to your journal. You write,

*My body must have known I was oversleeping and woke me up so I can take care of myself. I'll need to be creative about fitting in today's exercise . . . I know, I'll go over to the park during work and take a power walk. This new journal has been so important to me. It gives me the space to reflect on what's working well in my life—to feel grateful for all I have. It helps me keep perspective on my larger goals—making a difference with my work, helping me be more loving to my family.*

You spend the next ten minutes writing about why you work:

*Yesterday I met a woman who benefited from last year's community project. Seeing her face light up makes me all the more certain that I picked the right career to switch to. It may keep me extraordinarily busy, but it's so clearly worth the effort when I see the difference I make in the organization's success and my colleagues' lives.*

Just then your youngest daughter, who's nearly four years old, wakes up calling for you. You glance at the time: 6:42. You've been asking her to wait quietly in her room until you come in for hugs and kisses at seven. You wonder what she needs. You get up, go to her room, and give her a long good-morning hug and kiss. "I've

missed you, Mummy,” she says. You lie down beside her to snuggle and talk until seven.

The morning routine is always tight on time, but you’re finding that when you come to it calm and well rested, it goes much better. You can even make a family game out of finding your seven-year-old son’s misplaced shoes: “Whoever finds them gets to be the middle one in a big family hug!” Now all of you are racing around the house—laughing—trying to find those shoes. You spot them on top of the refrigerator. The refrigerator! You all laugh about how they might have gotten up there, and you get the added bonus of being in the center of all those loving arms. You savor the cozy moment, knowing that all too soon your kids will be older and will find this family ritual too corny.

After dropping your kids off at school, you arrive at work. The first person you see is Joe, your collaborator on the proposal you submitted a few months back. He’s smiling so broadly that you can’t help smiling yourself. “Hey, good morning, Joe—what’s up?” He says, “Did you hear the news? We got the money! We’re set for the year!”

You raise your hand and slap him a high five, and say, “We make a pretty great team, don’t we?” From the previous year’s experience, you suspect you might be facing some last-minute revisions. You invite Joe to join you on your power walk to plan out the revision process . . .

**A**t this point you may be thinking, *Not so fast!* It’s not fair to compare the morning on positivity to the morning on negativity. Not all the same bad stuff happened. After all, Take 2 left out the bad night’s sleep, Sharon’s last-minute request, and being late for school and work. I’d agree with you on the not-so-fast statement. Let’s slow down to consider how and why positivity made a difference.

Before we dig in, take a moment to notice that some bad parts of the two mornings were identical: your alarm didn’t go off, your daughter woke up early, your son misplaced his favorite shoes, and you’re facing a tight deadline for revisions. Positivity can’t prevent all bad

things from happening to you—just some of them. Let’s see which. Along the way I’ll point out several key differences between the two takes. These differences illustrate six vital facts about positivity.

**Fact 1. Positivity feels good.** My guess is that simply reading the second take was enough to make you feel noticeably better than you felt reading the first. Whereas the first was dark and heavy, the second was light and buoyant. This first fact may seem almost too obvious to mention, but it’s essential. It’s the sparkle of good feelings, after all, that awakens your motivation to change. You begin to yearn for more “good days” like this. The sheer obviousness of this first fact often blinds us to subtler facts about positivity. Yet when we unwrap the glittering gift of positivity—as we’ll do in chapter 2—to take a first look at its inner workings, we’ll find even more reason to marvel. What’s more, not all positivity is alike. In chapter 3, I’ll describe the forms positivity can take, ranging from joy, gratitude, serenity, and interest, to hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe, and, last but not least, love. Each of these ten forms of positivity can change your life—and your future.

**Fact 2. Positivity changes how your mind works.** Positivity doesn’t just change the contents of your mind, trading bad thoughts for good ones; it also changes the scope or boundaries of your mind. It widens the span of possibilities that you see. In Take 2, you benefit from positivity’s broader mindscape several times. First, you readily see a way to fit your missed morning exercise into your day later on. Second, in your journal, you maintain your focus on your larger goals. Third, you see past your daughter’s early waking to be more forgiving. Fourth, you quickly spy the lost shoes in the most unusual place. Fifth, you connect with your colleague, Joe, and trust his smile. Sixth, you come up with a way to dovetail exercise and planning in your busy schedule by inviting Joe to join you on your power walk. The way positivity broadened your outlook may be subtle—even imperceptible—

but it was pivotal to the unfolding events of the morning. In chapter 4, we'll see how mind expansion happens.

**Fact 3. Positivity transforms your future.** Although good feelings will forever be fleeting, over time, positivity literally brings out the best in you. An underlying assumption within the second version was that this day's emotional climate was not a rare occurrence. It followed a long stretch of days—perhaps even weeks or months—that were also rich in positivity. As your positive emotions accrued, they built up your resources, leaving you better off on this particular morning than you would have been without them. In Take 2, you benefit from positivity's capacity to build multiple resources. Your repeated experiences of positivity built up at least one physical resource (you slept better); at least one mental resource (you were more mindful of current circumstances); at least two psychological resources (you were more optimistic and resilient); and several social resources (you had better connections to family and colleagues). Each of these resources, built through repeated experiences of positivity in your recent past, contributed to your having a better morning in the second rendition. In chapter 5 I'll share with you how positivity can change your future for the better.

**Fact 4. Positivity puts the brakes on negativity.** In a heartbeat, negativity can spike your blood pressure, but positivity can calm it. It works like a reset button. In Take 2, you benefit from this effect at least twice. While at first you were disappointed that your alarm didn't go off and that your daughter woke up early, your positivity quickly flushed this negativity out of your system. This left you in a better position to move on and make the best of the new circumstances you faced. It turns out that positivity is the secret to becoming resilient. In chapter 6 I'll reveal the science behind this secret.

**Fact 5. Positivity obeys a tipping point.** The most stunning and practical fact to emerge from the science of positivity is that its effects are nonlinear. This is not science-as-usual. There's no single arrow

shooting from cause to effect. Arrows abound. And they bend, loop, and shoot from both ends at once. In traditional linear science, proportionality rules. No matter where you start, if you change the input by a certain amount, outputs change in proportion. Not so in nonlinear science. Where you start makes a huge difference. Effects that are virtually nonexistent at one starting point grow disproportionately large at a different starting point. A tipping point is that sweet spot in between where a small change makes a big difference.

Take 1 and Take 2 feel like different worlds altogether. They differ in more than just degree precisely because they sit on opposite sides of a tipping point. If you look back closely at Take 1, you'll see that positivity did make an appearance: at first blush you appreciated the morning sun, the good news about your project, and your colleague's smile. Yet it hardly seemed to matter; negativity carried the day. By contrast, in Take 2, positivity came around often enough to tip the scales toward extraordinary outcomes. Your morning was not just a little better, it was dramatically better. You felt alive and growing. You valued the contributions you made at home and at work. With each successive good moment, you moved upward and outward, not downward and inward. The two sides of this tipping point feel—and are—radically different. This book provides a prescription—indeed, a precise ratio—to tip your life to the flourishing side. In chapter 7 I'll describe the new, nonlinear scientific discoveries that lie beneath this prescription.

**Fact 6. You can increase your positivity.** If reading about these two mornings resonated with you, it's because the potential for life-draining negativity lies within you, just as does the potential for life-giving positivity. You have more say than you think about which you feel and when. The treasure of your own positivity is waiting. You can tip the scales to unleash your life's potential to flourish. That's why I devote the entire second part of this book—chapters 8 through 12—to helping you learn how.

**P**ositivity can make an enormous difference in your life. This book unpacks that difference to reveal how and why positivity carries

such potency. With positivity, you see new possibilities, bounce back from setbacks, connect with others, and become the best version of yourself. You even sleep better. How do I know this? In part, because like you and everyone else, I've experienced similar days in my own morning routines. In addition, though, I've dedicated my career to examining positivity in people's emotional lives.

While a poet seeks new metaphors to express ideas about human emotions, I'm a scientist, and I seek new ways to quantify them. Far from a dry, abstract exercise, I've found that a scientific approach to emotions reveals hidden, and perhaps universal, truths about the core nature of being human. If you've ever wondered *Why do we feel emotions?* or *What difference does it make if I look on the bright side?* I can tell you. The latest science shows how our day-to-day emotional experiences affect the very course of our lives.

My science is psychology. You might be surprised to learn that even though the science of psychology dates back to the close of the nineteenth century, for most of its history, emotions were a taboo topic, considered too slippery to be legitimate targets of study. My mentors were the first to begin the modern scientific study of human emotions. I represent the second generation of scientists working in this area. Nearly all previous efforts within the science of emotions centered on negativity—depression, aggression, anxiety, and all the ills that negative states like these can produce in people's lives. I took a different path. I've made a career out of studying the positive side—joy, serenity, interest, love, and the like. This is still rare within the science of emotions. My most widely cited scientific contribution is my “broaden-and-build” theory of positive emotions. The theory describes not only how positive emotions evolved for our human ancestors, but also the value they hold for modern-day humans. My expertise in positive emotions put me at the forefront of the new field of positive psychology at its inception in 1999. Since then, I've been recognized as one of the world's leading voices on emotional positivity.

Yet at one level, we are all already experts on emotions. We each experience them day in and day out—sadness and joy, anger and grati-

tude, and more. They are as common and natural as breathing. And positive emotions seem especially familiar to us. Indeed, if you're like most people, you feel good more often than you feel bad. Even though positive emotions infuse the prayers we say, the books we read, and the movies we watch, words like *love, joy, gratitude, serenity, and hope* are more than literary terms. They are also scientific terms that can be defined and measured with precision. I've tested these vital human states to reveal what they can do to improve people's lives.

Frankly it was hard for me to start this book. The new discoveries about positive emotions are so compelling that it was difficult to pull myself away from the laboratory and from writing scientific articles to write this book. Yet I felt called to do so. You need to know the news about positivity. It's important news about *you*.

The promise of this book: You will never look at feeling good the same way again. You'll understand and appreciate the potency of positive emotions in ways that will prove to be astonishingly useful. There's a side of positive emotions that you don't yet know. Once your eyes are opened to this side—the scientifically tested side—you'll have a fuller understanding of yourself and your potential. With this more complete self-knowledge, you'll function more fully and be empowered daily. Positivity presents an opportunity to step up to the next level of existence: to broaden your mind and build your best future.

I began investigating positivity for the simple reason that it was largely uncharted territory and I've always loved intellectual frontiers. While this spirit still guides my work to some degree, something changed a few years back. My decades of data collection were taking shape and showing me far more than I'd ever imagined or hypothesized. What I was seeing was no less than a prescription for life and how to live it. This stunned me. It still does.

These days my work is also guided by my aim to test the viability of this prescription. Is it for real? As a scientist, accepting things on faith—or on mere hints within the data—is not in my bones. My mission is to unearth, test, and then share the hidden value of positivity.

I've written this book because I suspect that you want to know what the latest science has to say about how positivity can improve your life.

Positivity can uniquely revitalize your worldview, your mental energy, your relationships, and your potential.

If you crave more life in your life, this book is for you.