

## WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA? POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Ah – for years we only had negative psychology; then some elderly professors from the land of unjustifiable optimism conjured a vision of humanistic psychology. Their mission was to find the roots of happiness and how to enhance it. Various religionists jumped on this sky-wagon, leaving cynics (like me) on the ground. My two concerns: one, happiness is heritable. Some people are relentlessly sunny; others slide readily into misery. Two, happiness is environmental. People with status, wealth and resources have more of it. Between these two, what space is there for psychologists to redeem our spirits? Actually, quite a lot, for the great contribution of positive psychology, exemplified in Jonathan Haidt's wonderful book *The Happiness Hypothesis*, is to show how our thoughts and feelings coexist. How we think about our experience and process our emotions can be managed, but usually not head on. The mind is slippery and goes where it will, so one needs smart strategies, disciplined practices and controlled inputs to experience being happy. Lots here for managers.

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