



# The Positivity Institute

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## RESOURCES

### **BEST POSSIBLE SELF EXERCISE**

#### **How to Use the Best Possible Self Exercise:**

Previous research has persuasively shown that writing expressively about oneself and one's feelings has numerous benefits for health, emotional adjustment, and well-being (see Smyth, 1998, for a review). In this exercise, you will visualise and write about your "best possible future selves."

Possible selves have been defined as personalised representations of goals (Markus & Nurius, 1986) and comprise all of the futures that a person can envision for herself – that is, her "most cherished self-wishes" (Allport, 1961).

Writing about one's possible selves thus can enhance self-regulation because it provides an opportunity to learn about oneself, to gain insight into and restructure one's priorities, and to understand better one's motives and emotional reactions. Writing about one's life goals may also be beneficial because it can reduce goal conflict (Pennebaker, 1998), as well as bring greater awareness and clarity to one's priorities, motivations, and values (Emmons, 1986, Little, 1989; Omodei & Wearing, 1990). Thus, this exercise may serve to integrate life experiences into a meaningful framework and allow you to gain a feeling of control. Finally, imagining success at one's life goals can boost psychological well-being (King, 2001), improve performance (Pham & Taylor, 1999), boost psychological adjustment (Rivkin & Taylor, 1999), and bring to bear a variety of benefits associated with positive thinking (Fordyce, 1983; Taylor & Brown, 1988). Ultimately, all of these benefits are hypothesised to increase and sustain your happiness level.

The following has been adapted from the specific instructions utilised in the research:

*Project yourself forward into the future. Imagine that everything has gone as well as it possibly could. You have worked hard and succeeded at accomplishing all of your life goals. Think of this as the realisation of all of your life dreams. Reflect on how well you are utilising your strengths, how you have developed qualities in yourself that you are proud of and how you are living your values on a daily basis. How would you be thinking, feeling and behaving? Visualise yourself satisfied with who you are and how you are living your life.*

