

## Positive Thinking Reexamined: The Reality of the Role of Negativity & Emotions in the Pursuit of Goals

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**Abstract :** Introduction: Goals have become synonymous with the quest for the good life and the pursuit of happiness, with coaching and positive psychology gaining popularity as an approach in recent decades. And yet mental health is on the rise and the leading cause of disability, wellbeing is on the decline, stress is leading to 50-60% of workday absences and the need for action is indisputable and urgent. Purpose: The purpose of this study is to better understand two things we cannot see, but that play the most significant role in these outcomes - what we think and how we feel. With many working on the assumption that positive thinking and an optimistic outlook are necessary or valuable components of goal pursuit, this study uncovers the reality of the 'inner-game' from the coaches perspective. Method: With a mixed methods design using a Q Method study of subjectivity to 'make the unseen seen'. First, a wide-ranging universe of subjective thoughts and feelings experienced during goal pursuit are explored.. These are generated from literature and a Qualtrics survey to create a Q-Set of 40 statements. Then 19 participants in professional and organisational settings offer their perspectives on these 40 Q-Set statements. Each rank them in a semi-forced distribution from 'most like me' to 'least like me' using Q-Sort software. From these individual perspectives, clusters of perspectives are identified using factor analysis and four distinct viewpoints, have emerged. Findings: These Goal Pursuit Viewpoints offer insight into the states and self-talk experienced by coaches and may not reflect the assumption of positive thinking associated with achieving goals. The four Viewpoints are 1) the Positive View, 2) the Realistic View 3) The Dreamer View and 4) The Conflicted View. With only a quarter of the Dreamer View, and a third of the Positive view going on to achieve their goals, these assumptions need review. And with all the Realistic View going on to achieve their goals, the role of self-doubt, overwhelm and anxiousness in goal achievement cannot be overlooked. Contribution: This study offers greater insight and understanding of people's inner experiences as they pursue goals and highlights the necessary and normal negative states associated with goal achievement. It also offers a practical tool of 40 'Clarity Card' Q-set statements to help coaches and coaches explore the current state and help navigate the journey towards goal achievement. It calls into question whether goals should always be part of coaching, and if values, identity, and purpose may play a greater role than goals

**Keywords :** self-talk, mental health, inner critic, inner coach

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