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# **For Immediate Release**

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**First Positive Psychology Summit –The Gallup Organization To Convene Top Behavioral Scientists – September 9-12**

LINCOLN—August 16, 1999 -- The First Positive Psychology Summit will convene September 9-12 at the Gallup International Research and Education Center in Lincoln NE. Sixty of the world’s most renowned behavioral scientists will gather to advance this emergent science’s agenda. Themed, “Measuring The Wellsprings of A Positive Life”, leaders of this scientific initiative will share views and current research in addressing how positive psychology can build an understanding and support for those human behaviors that allow individuals and communities to flourish.

# One of the movement’s founders, Martin E.P. Seligman, past president of the American Psychological Association and Donald O. Clifton, Chairman of the Gallup Organization will gather the most astute psychologists and sociologists working in this arena. The immediate objective of the initiative is to stimulate an urgency in the behavioral sciences to shift to a dual model that studies what is *right* about people and seeks to harness that insight while complementing traditional psychology’s focus on healing negative human behavior. The Gallup Organization has been studying successful people in the workplace, analyzing the human behaviors contributing to performance at excellence, for thirty years. Occupational and clinical psychology converge within the Positive Psychology Initiative.

As Martin Seligman explains, “Many factors on a global and national scale are driving this re-evaluation within the psychological community. To improve the nation’s mental health, we need two branches of social science: One branch that alleviates and prevents disorder and another branch that promotes well-being.

Social and behavioral scientists can articulate a vision of the good life that is empirically sound while being both understandable and attractive. They can show what actions lead to well being, to positive individuals, and to flourishing communities. Psychology can help document what kind of families result in the healthiest children, what work environments support the greatest satisfaction among workers, what policies result in the strongest civic commitment.

Yet we have scant knowledge of what makes life worth living. Psychology has come to understand quite a bit about how people survive and endure under conditions of adversity. But we know very little about how normal people flourish under more benign conditions. Psychology has, since World War II, become a science largely about healing. It concentrates on repairing damage within a “disease model” of human functioning. This almost exclusive attention to pathology neglects the flourishing individual and the thriving community. Positive Psychology intends to change the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also understanding and building positive qualities.

The field of “Positive Psychology” at the subjective level is about positive experience: well being, optimism, and flow. At the individual level it is about the character strengths—the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future-mindedness, and high talent. At the group level it is about the civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship: responsibility, parenting, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic.

The purpose of the first Positive Psychology Summit, sponsored by The Gallup Organization, concerns the articulation and measurement of character strengths and the civic virtues.

Subjective experiences, like happiness, are an important component of a positive life, but not the only component. Suppose we had a hypothetical experience machine that could provide a lifetime of pleasurable virtual experiences. Would we choose to stay plugged into such a machine? Presumably we would also want to have the personal traits that make such experiences possible, to have real connections to other people and to the world, to actually engage in certain activities and not merely have the experience of doing these things. So what are the characteristics and ways of being that constitute the fulfilling life? This was the question that animated a meeting in Grand Cayman of eminent senior social scientists. They proposed the following tentative list of characteristics thought to be important contributors to a positive life.

I. Relationships and connections.

 1. Love and Intimacy: meaningful relationships, including friendships; loving and being beloved. We know these ties improve not only longevity but also the quality of life. How do these ties develop? Given the great emphasis on individuality and competitiveness in the way we rear children, how can we do a better job inculcating relational skills?

 2. Satisfying work. Next to relationships, work is perhaps the most necessary component of the quality of life. How do children learn occupational attitudes in a rapidly changing labor market? What working conditions are necessary for employee satisfaction and commitment?

 3. Helping Others. There is increasing evidence suggesting that people who are altruistic, who care for others and are supportive, report significantly higher happiness and overall quality of life. Yet popular wisdom emphasizes "Taking Care of Number One" as the end-all strategy for a good life. What are the roots of altruism? What are the best practices to support it?

 4. Being a good citizen. Active participation in the public arena appears to be on the decline. Yet many would argue that taking part in the "vita activa" of the community offers the best opportunities for the development of individual potentialities. Certainly it is a prerequisite for the ongoing health of the community. What personal qualities predict and support such involvement? What conditions militate against it?

 5. Spirituality: connection to a deeper meaning of reality. In all known cultures, a feeling of personal relatedness with the cosmos appears to have been necessary to mobilize the hopes and energies of the populace. Is this no longer necessary in the 21st century? What new forms might spirituality take?

 6. Leadership. The recognition and support of youth with leadership potential is essential for the continued growth of a culture. Yet we have very few mechanisms in place to accomplish this purpose. What can we do to enable potential leaders across a wide spectrum of fields to show what they can do?

II. Individual Qualities

 7. Principles and integrity. A good life ends with a feeling of integrity -- that the person has lived up to his or her dream. Yet many forces in our society conspire to compromise our principles in favor of the "bottom line". How do children learn to abide by principles? How do adults manage to do it?

 8. Creativity. Many of our institutions -- schools, jobs -- are organized in such a way as to stifle originality and imagination. Yet these qualities not only improve individual lives, but are indispensable to the growth of society. We shall look at best practices in various institutions to develop guidelines for preserving original thinking.

9. Perseverance. The other side of the coin of originality is perseverance. Creativity requires both. It is impossible to accomplish anything important without acquiring a certain amount of self-discipline. Current child-rearing practices are woefully short on this trait. How can we best provide young people with a lifetime of tools in self-discipline?

 10. Courage. Of all the qualities people admire in others, courage tends to be on top. People who can face obstacles with equanimity, who are not devastated by the fear of death, who are willing to run risks for their principles are likely to lead a good life, and to serve as models for others. Is this a trait that can be learned?

 III. Life Regulation

 11. Purposive Future-mindedness. Great differences exist between individuals in the degree to which considerations of the future affect their present behavior. For example, Asian students are usually more happy when they are doing something they see as related to their future goals, while Caucasian students are significantly more unhappy in such circumstances. How do we learn to defer immediate gratification?

 12. Individuality. Ideally, a well-lived life should lead to the unfolding of all the person's potentialities in an integrated, complex personality (provided such a person is also linked to others according to the ties specified in Section I. above). What turning points, at different stages of one's life, are most important in this process of development?

 13. Self-regulation. Several models of optimal life-long development emphasize the importance of self-regulation as a key to a good life. This involves some of the issues already discussed (e.g. perseverance), but it brings to the fore the role of reasoned intelligence in guiding one's decisions.

 14. Wisdom. Lately research has focused on wisdom as the capstone of a good life. Much has been learned about the pragmatics of wisdom in everyday life, but again almost nothing is known about how such a trait develops in childhood and adolescence, and how it is supported in adulthood.

The Summit to be held in Lincoln, Nebraska, September 9-12 at the headquarters of Gallup, represents our attempt to flesh out and propose ways of measuring these positive individual characteristics. The long term outcome of the Summit will be a mapping of these Wellsprings of a Positive Life and the ways in which social scientists can assess psychologically whether an individual, a community, or a nation is suffering, merely enduring, or flourishing.”

Some relevant scientists to contact:

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