



JAN FORD MUSTIN, PH.D.  
PSYCHOLOGIST

**Positive Psychology: A New Millennium, New Possibilities  
for  
NSIDE MD Magazine**

by

**Jan Ford Mustin, Ph.D.  
Psychologist**

As we enter a new millennium, we are faced with a confluence of events and dynamics that ready us for a Positive Psychology, a psychology that helps us foster excellence. While the term “psychology” dates to the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century from the root words “psyche” and “logia” (study of the soul), over the years it has assumed a distinctly negative orientation towards mental illness. Since World War II, psychology as a discipline has been fueled by federal funds to provide healing services to veterans of the war and has taken a distinctly reparative approach within the medical or disease model. The Bible of our discipline, the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV), classifies these mental disorders as if it comprised the last word on the variety of human experience. While psychology has made great gains in alleviating suffering in a variety of mental, behavioral and emotional areas, this narrow focus on the disease model has been at the expense of our learning more about those qualities that contribute to other aspects of being human, including vibrant health, creativity, meaning and fulfillment.

I remember well as I was completing my doctoral studies at the University of Texas that one of my favorite books was *The Myth of Mental Illness* by Thomas Szasz, M.D. I found it refreshing to consider a thoughtful and scholarly challenge to our bias towards pathology that many have attributed to “physics envy” among professionals in the mental health field. Even at that time, I found myself a maverick in the profession with my affinity for the positive and life-affirming practices and philosophies of pioneers Alfred Adler, Carl Jung, and the very generous vision of “Third Way” psychologists Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow. Now, three decades later, it is most encouraging that we are finally embracing this quest for “the study of the soul,” what makes us human, transcendent and great. The recent Millennial Issue of The American Psychologist was dedicated to Positive Psychology.

As a clinical psychologist in private practice I have always held firm to the belief that my clients are capable of overcoming and transformation and that their lives are filled with meaning. I have approached even the most adverse challenges from this positive perspective, helping them pivot from an orientation of disorder or disease and to one of curiosity and learning. I find that one need not turn a blind eye to a real condition or disorder in order to reframe it as an opportunity. I have seen literally thousands of clients make distinct, even

profound and positive changes when they work within a teleological or goal-oriented model, as opposed to a repair or deficit-oriented one. Believing firmly in Marshal McLuhan's adage, the medium is the message, I took the name of Peak Performance Institute for my practice several years ago.

This new century affords us the technology with which to bring a positive and preventive approach to health care across disciplines as the personal computer and the Internet facilitate and speed this progression at an astonishing rate. Advances in our understanding of neurochemistry and neurobehavioral medicine are making it possible for the public to be self-educated and to demand of professionals the very latest in self-care and personal and professional enhancement. Our fascination with the extreme makeover phenomenon transcended plastic surgery long ago. As a culture, we now nurture our children into gifted and talented programs, world-class competitions and high self-esteem. Elite athletes and corporate giants set the pace for reaching their personal best through mental fitness training and personal or executive coaching. The consumer demands a Positive Psychology and the response is the burgeoning of innovative and integrated approaches to helping people reach their goals.

My own practice of Positive Psychology integrates rocket science with tradition providing more data-based sources of information and input than I ever would have thought possible. We create a Peak Performance Profile for each client to help them shift their paradigm from deficit-oriented to possibility-oriented; whether they are doing remedial work or not, the focus is on the positive. Our neuroscience component includes Peak Performance Training labs where clients see their own brain maps on giant screens and train their brains playing video games without a joystick. With the Quantitative Electroencephalogram (QEEG), they are able to train a variety of mental and emotional conditions such as ADHD, anxiety or depression in a non-invasive manner. The clients presenting with depression or ADHD are also interested in their golf games or to growing more profitable companies. Our positive perspective on their goals is the key.

Positive Psychology, with its roots in the seminal work of the father of psychology, William James, is still in its infancy. Nonetheless, I find it deeply rewarding and gratifying that the trend towards inclusion of other professions, faith in the intelligence of the individual client and belief in the ultimate rightness of this positive approach, is taking grip at this time. The "vertical distance" of condescension between practitioner and patient is yielding to the horizontal relationship between professional and consumer, fostering greater responsibility on the part of the client and humility and wonder on the part of the psychologist.

Dr. Jan Ford Mustin, Ph.D. is the Clinical Director of the Peak Performance Institute in Austin, Texas and has practiced Positive Psychology for over twenty-five years. She is the author of *Removing Your Roadblocks to Love, Happiness and Success* and is a popular speaker and broadcast personality on both radio and television. For more information about the Peak Performance Institute please visit the web site at [www.mustin.com](http://www.mustin.com) or [www.peakinstitute.com](http://www.peakinstitute.com).

Copyright 2007. All rights reserved by Mustin & Associates