

# Book review on how full is your bucket

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



## **Positive Psychology**

Donald O. Clifton, a pioneer in positive psychology, and his grandson, Tom Rath, developed the " bucket" and " dipper" theory of happy emotions based on Clifton's research and those of others. Using the metaphor of a bucket and dipper, the authors purport that our sense of well-being is determined by every interaction, which either fills our bucket or drains it. Their main claim is that when using positive psychology in everyday interactions, anyone can experience a happier life – it's a matter of choice. Whether a co-worker, spouse, child, friend, student, acquaintance or even a stranger, all can benefit – including ourselves when applying this principle.

Using research-based statistics, this bestseller describes how, positive reinforcement improves marriages, families, education, friendships, work environments and even longevity. Using the dipper and bucket metaphor, the authors show us how to increase positive interactions in our lives, why this is so important and how to improve the world around us by filling other people's buckets.

## **Evidence**

### Cultural Differences

Rath and Clifton imply that this theory works for everyone. However, these authors may have missed a big cross-section of people from different cultures and how culture impacts behavior as well as communication. In McAuliffe's book, *Culturally Alert Counseling: A Comprehensive Introduction*, using positive psychology should include the awareness of counselors regarding the importance and impact of culture on communication. In his

first three chapters, this author provides rationale for the psychotherapy profession to deal with an individual's cultural background. Rath and Clifton didn't include culture in their discussion or among research cited, though studies directly related to culture and happiness exist. For example, in a study consisting of more than 6,000 students from 43 nations, Eunkook M. Suh and Shigehiro Oishi examined happiness on an international scale. They looked at different cultures' views on what creates well-being and happiness. The study presented three main findings: "(1) People living in individualistic, rather than collectivist, societies are happier; (2) Psychological attributes referencing the individual are more relevant to Westerners; (3) Self-evaluating happiness levels depend on different cues, and experiences, from one's culture" (Eunkook, 2002). This reinforces McAuliffe's expanded position on culture (from two categories to six) and shows that culture plays an important role in shaping happiness; a point that the authors missed when generalizing their theory for the masses. Yet, it's a consideration that counselors must include in their practice when interacting with clients. Interestingly in the introduction, Rath credits his grandfather as the one who noticed the field of psychology studying "what is wrong with people" and that for the next five decades, he studied "what is right with people." However, according to an APA (American Psychological Association) report written by Marcela Kogan, Clifton pioneered work recognized by APA in 2002, which cited him as the "Father of Strengths Psychology." However, the positive psychology movement was founded in part by Martin E. P. Seligman, former APA President, and focused on enhancing what's good in life rather than fixing what's wrong. A goal for the movement was to develop positive

psychology techniques for all people. According to APA, Seligman is credited with giving this movement the national spotlight – not Clifton or Rath- although the Gallup organization is mentioned as a co-sponsor (Kogan, 2001).

Through research and even personal stories, the authors encourage us to use more bucket filling – though not ignoring negative life events – with the key being to provide meaningful recognition where individuals are felt appreciated on a personal level. Here again, culture plays a role since it entails understanding the individual’s background and communication in order to determine what would be meaningful. McAuliffe emphasizes that communication is key for therapeutic relationships because culture and language are the core of communication (McAuliffe, 2013).

## **Chapter Summaries**

Collectively, the six chapters explain the theory and research that backs the theory. In chapter one, demonstrating that “ Negativity Kills” shows the treatment of 1, 000 American POWs received during the Korean War. In this chapter, the authors illustrate the kind of psychological torture suffered by American Prisoners of War (POW). Their captors used extreme mental tactics, barbaric atrocities that denied them emotional support that comes from interpersonal relationships. Their captors constantly and ruthlessly drained the POWs’ buckets with relentless negativity that resulted in “ a 38% POW death rate – the highest in U. S. military history” (U. S. Senate Report). The second chapter, “ Positivity, Negativity, and Productivity” showed the result of your bucket when it’s full of positive interaction, negative interaction and how both impacts productivity. In an educational study

conducted by Dr. Elizabeth Hurlock, elementary students were praised, criticized or ignored. “ Praised students improved by 71%, those criticized improved by 19%, and students provided with no feedback improved a mere 5%.” (Rath, 2005). The findings support the theory that praise is an effective way for encouraging improvement and was included among Clifton and Rath’s research

Chapter 3, “ Every Moment Matters” explains why a 5: 1 ratio of positive-to-negative should exist for all the 20, 000 daily interactive moments – that we should have more positives grounded in reality.

Throughout chapter 4, “ An Overflowing Bucket,” the touching autobiography of the author regarding his trials and how positivity helped him weather them. With Rath’s personal optimism, coping with a rare disorder called the Hippel-Lindau disease which caused unexpected tumors in the brain, pancreas and other body parts, even he benefitted from bucket filling. This empowers us in the belief that we can overcome obstacles, regardless of how difficulty or great they seem.

Chapter 5, “ Making it Personal,” explains how every attempt to fill someone’s bucket should be individualized, since there’s no one way to appease all. Therefore, we must individualize each attempt by catering to the person's character. Therefore, the recognition has to be personal, specific and meaningful, as well as deserved – not superficial. It needs to convey to others that their contributions are valued and important. When done properly, this type bucket filling contributes to a better workforce as well as happier marriages.

And finally in chapter 6, “ Five Strategies for Increasing Positive Emotions,”

we are given “ the how to” - specific strategies for implementing this principle to increase positive emotions in our lives and the lives of others.

These five strategies include:

1. Prevent bucket dipping
2. Shine a light on what is right
3. Make best friends
4. Give unexpectedly
5. Reverse the golden rule

At the back of the book is an unexpected surprise for readers. Purchased copies (not library loans) provide a special access code to the Strengths Finder Assessment. This assessment tool evaluates us using online technology to determine our top five strengths. There is also a picture-book version for kids that was produced by Rath and Mary Reckmeyer.

Even though there are few pages, few words per page, large print used and many pages with little content, it doesn't lack depth. Instead, this book provides advice that is clear, crisp and concise – a powerful message in a very little book.

The key concepts in How Full is Your Bucket that connect to this course as it relates to psychotherapy include: Moving from traditional counseling to multicultural counseling, which is all inclusive (i. e., race, ethnicity, gender, religion, spirituality, class, sexual orientation). Defining issues pertinent to major ethnic groups (i. e., African Americans, East Asian Americans, European Americans, Latino Americans, Middle Eastern Americans, Native Americans, Southeast Asian Americans, South Asian Americans) that counselors should consider during communication with clients. While Clifton and Rath provide positive psychology for the masses, McAuliffe provides positive psychology that focuses on establishing a culturally alert practice for counselors.

In summary, this book is organized around an invisible metaphor where the authors show us how to significantly increase positive moments in life and reduce negative moments. It's a "how-to" guide for improving self-esteem, relationships and health; and there's some applicability for the psychotherapy profession when interacting with clients. Perhaps not all cultures can benefit from Clifton and Rath's book; but nonetheless, using the principle of positive psychology is a great starting point for inner peace, world peace and the foundation for interacting with everyone – positively of course.

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