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*Training Accomplished Professionals
to Become Extraordinary Coaches*

**Ben Dean of [MentorCoach](#)[®] interviewing Steve Coxsey about his course
[“Positivity Intelligence: Holding Darkness and Light in Coaching”](#)**

BEN: Hi everybody. This is Ben Dean with MentorCoach and this afternoon I'm here with one of our most senior members of the MentorCoach trainer team. In fact, a member of the MentorCoach trainer team hall of fame, Steve Coxsey. Steve is an extraordinary coach and person, and he is here to talk about the course he is teaching for our Positive Psychology Coach certification program. It's called Positivity Intelligence: Holding Darkness and Light in Coaching. Steve is a Certified MentorCoach, an ICF Professional Certified Coach, and a Licensed Professional Counselor in Texas. Steve has been intrigued by positive psychology since his college years in the '80s long before it became mainstream and has deeply integrated positive psychology into his coaching for years. So he is very happy to be a co-founder of the Positive Psychology Coach certification program along with Gayle Scroggs. So Steve, welcome to the call.

STEVE: Thanks Ben.

BEN: Just to get everyone oriented, for starters, where in Texas do you and your family live?

STEVE: We live right smack dab between Dallas and Fort Worth, which is the northern part of Texas.

BEN: And do you still have dogs in your home?

STEVE: We do. We do. We have a retired racing Greyhound that actually never retired because she's a little lazy, and we have a Whippet Italian Greyhound mix, so it's like a Greyhound but a third the size, and then a little poodle mix.

BEN: To get started, tell us about your experience with positive psychology that has led you to design and teach a positive psychology coaching course.

STEVE: I was positive psychology fanboy before it was cool when I was going through my undergrad and then graduate training in psychology. I gravitated towards humanistic psychology, people like Maslow, like Carl Rogers, even Karen Horney. I just enjoyed their view of the wholeness of people, of meaning and purpose and connection, and having a full rich life that wasn't really there in the heavily clinically oriented things or the behaviorally oriented things that I was learning in a lot of coursework. When I was introduced to the formal field, and my introduction happened when I started training through MentorCoach, I was really, really overjoyed that there was this formal entire field looking at people's overall development towards meaning and purpose and accomplishment, and especially wellbeing. So I've been reading and following along and going to seminars and trainings and taking coursework from a lot of luminaries in positive psychology for more than a decade now, including the background I had in the positive psychologists from past decades. I just love the positive psychology framework for coaching. They're so beautifully compatible.

BEN: Tell us about co-designing the Positive Psychology Coach certification program.

STEVE: That was a series of wonderful collaborative conversations that I got to have with my very good friend and our colleague Gayle Scroggs. We brought in limited conversations with other people, as well, just talking about where is the field of positive psychology right now? What really matters in positive psychology that's benefiting people? And most importantly, what about positive psychology can become the anchoring, the framework, for more masterful, for richer coaching? So we drew on Marty Seligman's PERMA model. We brought in a little of the neuroscience that's showing up in a lot of ways, and added sort of the latest things around goals and motivation and just really brought the nuggets that I think are the richest parts about how to work with clients in ways that boost their wellbeing, and their achievement, and their sense of purpose in life, and in connected rich relationships and just... I'll slow down so I don't go on and on too much because I love this stuff.

BEN: Oh, absolutely

BEN: How does the Positivity Intelligence course itself fit into the Positive Psychology Coach certification program?

STEVE: Well, in one way it's straightforward. In another way it's a bit sneaky. The straightforward way is when we look at Marty Seligman's PERMA model, which is part of our framework but not all of our framework, P is positive emotions in the PERMA acronym and R is positive relationships. The information about the benefit of positive emotions and the richness of positive relationships really starts with Barbara Fredrickson and her research. When I was learning about the value, the amazing benefits of boosting people's experience of positive emotions and positive relationships, I thought this is amazing and wonderful, and yet. And yet most people aren't in a positive emotional state or in positive relationships all the time. How can we make it happen more intentionally? And so that's where this course is a little bit sneaky, because it draws in some neuroscience to understand the benefits of positivity and how to create it over time, and it draws on social emotional intelligence and social emotional learning as a skillset for boosting that.

BEN: What's the basic idea or concept behind this course?

STEVE: It really starts with something that I learned from Dan Siegel, who's a psychiatrist and neuroscientist who looks at overall mental health and wellbeing and says he believes that positive emotions are the experience of a mind that's becoming organized and integrated and working well. The distressing emotions are a sign that there's chaos or disruption or disorder going on in a person's experience. So that happiness, serenity, joy, these things show up when the person is more integrated and more fully functioning. Think Abraham Maslow and self-actualizing. Moving in that direction moves towards positive emotions and then that lends itself to a positive, integrated, harmonious relationship. With the idea that if we can help people become more organized and integrated in themselves and more organized and integrated in their relationship, they'll have more positive emotions and more positive experiences in relationships. Then the answer becomes, how do we boost that? It's through application of the social emotional intelligence skills to manage distressing emotions in order to experience the positive ones more richly, and to manage the complications and intricacies of relationships so that there's more positive experience and attunement and richness in those relationships.

BEN: Is this a hyper-academic course with a lot of reading to do?

STEVE: Well, since I'm teaching it, no. I am a bit of a psychology nerd and I do have, as probably many people listening will have, stacks of books, and you know, I make the stack higher before I read through it. A lot of things about psychology, positive psychology, neuroscience, et cetera. So I love to drink it in, but when I'm teaching people, especially about coaching, I want it to be tangible. I want it to be practical. I want to render the complicated idea into the simple, clear metaphor or analogy, the way of grasping it, so that it can become applied. I'm happy to talk theory with people, but I can't hold my own with some of the top researchers, but I love listening to them. I would bore myself if it was academic.

BEN: Who is this course designed for? And by that, I mean, who will benefit from taking this course?

STEVE: Although it started with an idea of bringing this material and this framework to coaches within the ICF coaching model, and I think that clearly people who are learning or even have learned – and even if they're masterful in the ICF coaching model – I really believe that this framework will add richness to coaching. I think this framework would work well for people who are doing facilitating of team meetings, people who are doing consultation but where they have to look at managing relationships with other people and bringing teams together through training. I think even therapists could benefit from this, because they already have the pieces in their toolbox. They've just not had them gathered together in this framework if they haven't read these particular materials, or maybe even had this sort of conversation about pulling it together. So I think anyone who's really guiding, mentoring, in a helping profession with other people's development, professional or personal, could benefit from this.

BEN: How useful would this be to a coach in training who wants to begin to integrate positive psychology into their coaching?

STEVE: I really believe that while the ICF core competency model is really rich – and it's recently been updated, too, so that the core competencies are even more relevant – I believe that what is missing in the world of coaching when we look at the ICF model is a theoretical framework, a how and a why. And in conversations with colleagues who also love positive psychology, we really adamantly believe that positive psychology research, the application, the interventions and applications, really provide this rich framework of understanding how and why coaching is beneficial. So I think providing that framework to just-starting-out coaches, to those who are moving towards certification, to those who've been certified and moving forward and wanting to become more masterful. I think it's helpful along the whole spectrum to have this sort of framework that says, "Here are the theories around positive psychology and here's how you apply it, and when we go to that next level, here's how you apply it within the coaching relationship." It makes it, I think, very approachable for coaches.

BEN: Do students need to have some certain level of coach training and experience before taking this course?

STEVE: I would think they would need to be in the beginning training. If they have no concept of coaching some of it might be confusing, but if they are coaching students and they're beginning coach training, I think it would be great for them. There will be aspects of talking about how it fits within a coaching session and how this might be brought in, and if someone is brand new or never heard of coaching, they might have to stretch their imagination further. But if they're learning the basics or have learned the basics and are beginning to move forward, they've got enough background to grasp it.

BEN: How long are your classes for this course?

STEVE: I have designed it in 90-minute modules, so there will be eight modules, 90 minutes each, to give the 12 hours of training. And that's so that we can have time for richer discussions and then also time for the how-tos of application and talking through how to apply things in coaching, and even answer questions about, "Well I tried it and it turned out this way. What could I do different?" Maybe even some of those conversations.

BEN: If people have questions, can they stay after class and get some time with you for ask specific questions about the class?

STEVE: My pattern that I developed when I was teaching Foundations before is to just stay on. I was going to say stay online, but you know, the last couple times was teaching by webinar, by Zoom, and I'll be teaching this course by webinar. After the course is officially over and people need to leave for the day, they can leave. I will stick around for usually up to half an hour if there are questions or conversations to have. Sometimes it winds up only being 10 or 15 minutes and sometimes it's 20 or 25, but I always like to carve out that.

BEN: But as long as people have questions or want to linger and just listen, you'll be there for up to half an hour after every class?

STEVE: Absolutely. Absolutely.

BEN: That's actually pretty generous.

BEN: What makes this course different from other positive psychology coaching courses out there?

STEVE: I think it's the layered approach. As I've talked about this concept to fellow coaches and people in the positive psychology world and describe it, I get this response of, "Wow," and, "I hadn't thought of that before," or, "That's really putting some interesting things together." So it's the alignment of, we know the benefits of positivity, so let's look at neuroscience and understand what's happening that's creating the experience of positivity and creating those benefits. And then once we know how it works in neuroscience, we go to the toolkit of social emotional intelligence to be able to manage the system of the relationship, or the system even of the self, in order to shift what's happening so there's more positive experience and more benefit. And again, I'll get lost maybe on it, but I really believe, looking at the system, moving into integration and organization is where you get positivity. And then, how do we promote that? How do we promote that as often as possible?

BEN: What does the word "intelligence" mean in the title, Positivity Intelligence?

STEVE: Kind of pulling from what Dan Goleman did in the '90s with emotional intelligence, where he brought the idea that the ability to know your inner thoughts and be aware of your emotions and then use them effectively and in relationships, that's an intelligence, a capacity that helps you be more functional and adaptive. So it refers to a capacity that helps you be more functional and adaptive, but it really is meant to imply you don't just passively experience positivity. You are actively managing, actively encouraging, actively promoting positivity as an adaptive function for resilience, for achievement, for wellbeing.

BEN: Part of the title is “Holding Darkness and Light in Coaching.” Why is that in the title and how does that apply to the course?

STEVE: I thought it might sound a little intriguing, so I'm hoping it piques people's interest.

BEN: Absolutely.

STEVE: But part of my thinking, early on positive psychology would get knocked as maybe being happy-ology, and there was a lot of research around what is happiness and how do we boost it. But it's gotten so rich in recent years that it's overall about wellbeing and achievement and performance and so forth, and the understanding that it's not just pursuing upbeat experiences or happiness. If you only try to approach life by looking for positive thoughts and positive feelings, it doesn't work. You have to acknowledge there is struggle. There is distress. Life is difficult. Life is challenging. In order for us to experience positivity, we have to be able to turn to and be open and accepting of difficult and distressing things. So this is about how to do that.

STEVE: And also, as coaches, we have to develop our presence, our ability to be there and hold a space for a client. If they're struggling, if they're upset, if they're distressed, we need to be comfortable with their discomfort. So it includes skills on how to do that so that we can help them move towards positivity, not by ignoring the difficult things, but by being open and managing them.

BEN: Now, a practical question. What will the homework be like?

STEVE: Oh, so the homework will include some reflective experiences. You know, apply things in coaching with your clients, or if you need a partner we'll partner people up with students to do some skills, and reflect on it, journal on it. It's going to include taking a skill or an activity into a coaching conversation or coaching-like conversation, depending on where we are in the course. Trying it out, coming and reporting out on what happened, so that we can discuss how things went and how to make them better. It will be encouraging application of the skills and, most especially – and this is not too much of a sidetrack – but in the new updated core competencies for the ICF, they have a reflective process by the coach as a core competency. So the coach is developing through a reflective process on a regular basis. I'm encouraging that in some of the homework. After you try something out, reflect on, what did you learn? How did it go? What could have gone better? What do you want to change? Design thinking, and reflection, to really anchor the learning.

BEN: What practical takeaways can students expect to walk away with?

STEVE: My hope is that there will be a clear understanding of how a skill will benefit a client in a coaching session, how to apply it, and enough knowledge of that so the student in the class is willing to try it out in a coaching session. And has enough of that reflective, design thinking experience that they'll know, even if it doesn't go great, I can reflect on it and make it better. So that they'll wind up with a collection of these applications of positive psychology tools that help promote positive relationships, and manage distressing relationships, and promote positive emotions, that they can actually incorporate within a session as the coach, and then even hand to a client if the client needs a particular tool.

BEN: Is this course open to any coach or any person anywhere who feels like it's appropriate for them? You're not setting limits on who you will allow in this course, correct?

STEVE: I do not have any prerequisites for this course.

BEN: So for somebody from another coach training school, or somebody from an entirely new discipline, that's fine?

STEVE: Yes.

BEN: Here's a question just for MentorCoach. For those in MentorCoach who are focused on becoming a Certified MentorCoach and getting an ICF credential, there are ICF CCEs for this course, but they want that certification. How does the course fit in with the ICF core competencies and PCC markers?

STEVE: This is going to be an ongoing exercise through the course. I have already gone through and mapped elements of the material that I'll be training, especially the social emotional intelligence skillset, and then aspects of the benefits of positive emotions and positive relationships, and I've done my mapping to the current core competencies and then the updated core competencies and the PCC markers. And it will be an ongoing activity for the class to reference that document. Don't consider me the authority on it because I don't have the standing to say this is the absolute right answer, but I'm wanting to encourage people to work with the material and say, "Okay, how does it help me express this core competency? How does it help me to align with this PCC marker when I'm using this skill or this approach or this attitude in coaching to promote the relationship or to promote positivity?" So we'll be regularly looking back at that and discussing it together, and I'm hoping people will challenge my thinking and improve my thinking on it because that's the goal, for all of us to grow.

BEN: And this is an aside and not something Steve would say, but he is absolutely short of Anne Durand herself the most skilled person in MentorCoach in integrating and understanding the PCC markers, so that's a real gift he brings to this class.

BEN: You said this will be taught as a webinar. In case somebody listening hasn't been in webinars, do students like being able to see you and see each other?

STEVE: People seem to just love the webinar platform because it allows students to see one another. The students have the choice while they're listening. They may turn off their camera for a while, but really when we're interacting, it's helpful if the students will turn on their camera. I'm on camera unless I happen to put up a document, which would only happen occasionally. I'm going to be on camera. I'm going to be interacting with people and there to look for faces and look for questioning looks and try to respond to what's going on. People just love this added quality of interaction. It's another layer of connection.

BEN: And just to anybody not that experienced with webinars, if on a particular day you can't call in through your computer or an iPhone or an iPad, you can call in on your phone. Or if you're in a car, you can call in on a cellphone.

BEN: How can people get in touch with you?

STEVE: The best way to reach me is through my email. So it's Steve@ThrivingEdge.com. Thriving Edge is my coaching business. ThrivingEdge.com.

BEN: Final question. If your wildest dreams come true, what will happen for students in their coaching

as they go through this class?

STEVE: Well, since the underlying key of what seems to create the positivity experiences is, I believe, organization and integration in relationships and in the mind, my dream is that students will feel themselves as coaches and their skillset and their competency as coaches and their capacity as coaches becoming more coherent, feeling more organized, feeling more natural, feeling more directly impactful, because they'll feel it all coming together as they move from competency towards mastery.

BEN: Okay, and I just want to say again to everybody listening, based on years of experience with Steve as a trainer, you will be in very good hands with him. He's an amazing teacher, and Steve, thank you so much for a wonderful interview.

STEVE: Thank you very much, Ben. I appreciate your kind words.

BEN: Okay. Have a great weekend.

STEVE: Thank you. Bye bye.

BEN: Bye bye.