The Five Essential Elements of Wellbeing by Gallup

Career Wellbeing is the most essential of the five elements. People with high Career Wellbeing are more than twice as likely to be thriving in their lives overall.
The Five Essential Elements of Wellbeing

Much of what we think will improve our wellbeing is either misguided or just plain wrong. Gallup scientists have been exploring the demands of a life well-lived since the mid-20th century. More recently, in partnership with leading economists, psychologists, and other acclaimed scientists, we began to explore the common elements of wellbeing in more than 150 countries. This gave us a lens into the wellbeing of more than 98% of the world's population. During our research, five distinct dimensions or statistical factors of what constitutes wellbeing emerged.

The following summary is a brief excerpt on the five essential elements of wellbeing from Tom Rath and Jim Harter's, Wellbeing: The Five Essential Elements.

Contrary to what many people believe, wellbeing isn't just about being happy. Nor is it only about being wealthy or successful. And it's certainly not limited to physical health and wellness. In fact, focusing on any one of these elements in isolation may drive us to feelings of frustration and even failure.

Just think of how many people dedicate an excessive amount of time and energy to their job at the expense of their personal relationships. It might seem easier to treat critical areas in our lives as if they are independent and unrelated, but they're not. They are interdependent.

Wellbeing is about the combination of our love for what we do each day, the quality of our relationships, the security of our finances, the vibrancy of our physical health, and the pride we take in what we have contributed to our communities. Most importantly, it's about how those five elements interact.

While 66% of people are doing well in at least one of these areas, just 7% are thriving in all five. If we're struggling in any one of these domains, as most of us are, it damages our wellbeing and wears on our daily life. When we strengthen our wellbeing in any of these areas, we will have better days, months, and decades. But we're not getting the most out of our lives unless we're living effectively in all five.

These elements are the currency of a life that matters. They do not include every nuance of what's important in life, but they do represent five broad categories that are essential to most people.

The Five Essential Elements of Wellbeing

- The first element is about how you occupy your time or simply liking what you do every day: your Career Wellbeing.
- The second element is about having strong relationships and love in your life: your Social Wellbeing.
- The third element is about effectively managing your economic life: your Financial Wellbeing.
- The fourth element is about having good health and enough energy to get things done on a daily basis: your Physical Wellbeing.
- The fifth element is about the sense of engagement you have with the area where you live: your Community Wellbeing.

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Career Wellbeing

Do you like what you do each day?

This might be the most basic, yet important, wellbeing question you could ask yourself. Yet only 20% of the people Gallup has studied can give a strong “yes” in response.

Career Wellbeing is arguably the most essential of the five elements. At a fundamental level, we all need something to do, and ideally something to look forward to, when we wake up every day. What you spend your time doing each day shapes your identity, whether you are a student, parent, volunteer, retiree, or have a more conventional job. Gallup’s research reveals that if you don’t have the opportunity to regularly do something you enjoy, the odds of your having high wellbeing in other areas diminish rapidly.

The following summary is a brief excerpt on this element of wellbeing from Tom Rath and Jim Harter’s, Wellbeing: The Five Essential Elements.

Think back to when you were in school sitting through a class in which you had very little interest. Perhaps your eyes were fixed on the clock or you were just staring blankly into space. You probably remember the anticipation of waiting for the bell to ring so you could get up from your desk and move on to whatever was next. More than two-thirds of workers around the world experience a similar feeling at the end of a typical weekday.

Many of us work in a traditional organizational setting, while others work in homes, classrooms, factories, or outdoors. Some of us are retirees or volunteers. No matter where we spend our time, at a basic level, we need something to do — and ideally something to look forward to. Career Wellbeing is about liking what you do every day.

People with high Career Wellbeing wake up every morning with something to look forward to doing that day. They also have the opportunity to do things that fit their strengths and interests. They have a deep purpose in life and a plan to attain their goals. In most cases, they have a leader who motivates them and makes them enthusiastic about the future and friends who share their passion.

While you might think that people with high Career Wellbeing would spend too much time working at the expense of their relationships, our results suggest that they actually take more time to enjoy life and don’t take things for granted. This results in them loving the work they do every day.

Three Recommendations for Boosting Career Wellbeing

1. Every day, use your strengths.
2. Identify someone with a shared mission who encourages your growth. Spend more time with this person.
3. Opt into more social time with the people you enjoy being around at work.

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Social Wellbeing

“Relationships help us to define who we are and what we can become. Most of us can trace our successes to pivotal relationships.”

- Donald O. Clifton and Paula Nelson, Soar With Your Strengths

The fabric of our lives is constructed person by person. As our relationships grow and develop, so too does our wellbeing. Our lives become richer, and we learn, grow, and develop through others.

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When you reflect on the most memorable events, experiences, and moments in your life, you’ll notice that they have something in common: the presence of another person. The best moments — and most agonizing ones — occur at the intersection between two people.

We often underestimate the impact of our closest relationships and social connections on our wellbeing. However, our wellbeing is dramatically influenced by the people around us as well as by our friends’ independent network of relationships. Some of these friendships help us to achieve, while others motivate us to be healthy. Social Wellbeing is about having strong relationships and love in your life.

People with high Social Wellbeing have several close relationships that help them achieve, enjoy life, and be healthy. They are surrounded by people who encourage their development and growth, accept them for who they are, and treat them with respect. They deliberately spend time investing in the networks that surround them.

People with high Social Wellbeing are more likely to make time for vacations or social gatherings with their friends and family, and that strengthens their relationships. They report having a great deal of love in their lives, and this gives them positive energy on a daily basis.

Three Recommendations for Boosting Your Social Wellbeing

1. Spend six hours a day socializing with friends, family, and colleagues (this time includes work, home, phone, e-mail, and other communication).
2. Strengthen the mutual connections in your network.
3. Mix social time with physical activity. For example, take a long walk with a friend so that you can motivate each other to be healthy.

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Financial Wellbeing

Could it be that finding $50 on the street will do more to boost our wellbeing than having $50 cut from our utility bill, even though the amount is actually the same?

As Gallup studied a great deal of research on the topic of money and its importance in our lives, what was found challenged many assumptions. We learned that the amount of money you have — the gold standard of measuring financial health — is not the gauge of your Financial Wellbeing, let alone your life in general.

The following summary is a brief excerpt on this element of wellbeing from Tom Rath and Jim Harter’s, Wellbeing: The Five Essential Elements.

Money may not buy happiness, but it is hard to be happy if you cannot meet your basic needs. Beyond that, the actual amount of money you have has much less of an impact on your overall wellbeing than financial security and how you manage and spend your money. Financial Wellbeing is about effectively managing your economic life.

People with high Financial Wellbeing manage their personal finances well and spend their money wisely. They buy experiences instead of just material possessions, and they give to others instead of always spending on themselves. At a basic level, they are satisfied with their overall standard of living.

Their successful strategies result in financial security, which eliminates daily stress and worry caused by debt. This financial security allows them to do what they want to do when they want to do it. They have the freedom to spend more time with the people they like to be around.

Managing your finances well allows you to do what you want to do when we want to do it.

Three Recommendations for Boosting Financial Wellbeing

1. Buy experiences — such as vacations and outings with friends or loved ones.
2. Spend on others instead of solely on material possessions.
3. Establish default systems (automated payments and savings) that lessen daily worry about money.

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Physical Wellbeing

People with thriving Physical Wellbeing effectively manage their health. They exercise regularly, make good dietary choices and get enough sleep. People with thriving Physical Wellbeing look better, feel better, and will live longer.

The following summary is a brief excerpt on this element of wellbeing from Tom Rath and Jim Harter's, Wellbeing: The Five Essential Elements.

The short-term choices we make can have a long-term effect on our overall physical health. When we adopt healthy habits and make smart lifestyle choices about diet, exercise, and sleep, we feel better, have more energy, look better, and live longer. Physical Wellbeing is about having good health and enough energy to get things done on a daily basis.

People with high Physical Wellbeing manage their health well. They exercise regularly, and as a result, they feel better. They make good dietary choices, which keeps their energy high throughout the day and sharpens their thinking. They get enough sleep to process what they have learned the day before and to get a good start on the next day.

Because of their healthy lifestyle, they are usually able to do all the things people their age would normally do. When they wake up well-rested each day, they look better, feel better, and have more energy.

Three Recommendations for Boosting Physical Wellbeing

1. Get at least 20 minutes of physical activity each day — ideally in the morning to improve your mood throughout the day.
2. Sleep enough to feel well-rested (generally seven to eight hours) but not too long (more than nine hours).
3. Set positive defaults when you shop for groceries. Load up on natural foods that are red, green, and blue.

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Community Wellbeing

People with thriving Community Wellbeing have identified areas where they can contribute to their community based on their own strengths and passions. They talk with their peers about these interests to connect with the right groups and causes. Their contribution may start small, but over time, it leads to more involvement and has a profound impact on their community. The efforts of people with thriving Community Wellbeing are what create communities we cannot imagine living without.

The following summary is a brief excerpt on this element of wellbeing from Tom Rath and Jim Harter’s, *Wellbeing: The Five Essential Elements*.

Community Wellbeing isn’t the first thing people think about when they evaluate their overall wellbeing. But this element can actually be the differentiator between a good life and a great one.

At a basic level, we need to feel safe where we live and secure about the quality of the water we drink and the air we breathe. We also need to have a home that meets our needs and a community we can take pride in. When we get involved in our community and give back to society, it benefits us as well as the recipients and the entire community. This “well-doing” promotes deeper social interaction, enhanced meaning and purpose, and a more active lifestyle. Community Wellbeing is about the sense of engagement you have with the area where you live.

People with high Community Wellbeing feel safe and secure where they live. They take pride in their community and feel that it’s headed in the right direction. This often results in their wanting to give back and make a lasting contribution to society. These people have identified the areas where they can contribute based on their own strengths and passions, and they talk to others about their interests to connect with the right groups and causes.

Their contributions to the community may start small, but over time, they lead to more involvement and have a profound impact on the community in which they live. These efforts are what create communities we cannot imagine living without.

**Three Recommendations for Boosting Community Wellbeing**

1. Identify how you can contribute to your community based on your personal mission.
2. Tell people about your passions and interests so they can connect you with relevant groups and causes.
3. Opt in to a community group or event. Even if you start small, start now.

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Hope, Academic Success, and the Gallup Student Poll

by Shane J. Lopez, Ph.D.

Intelligence and aptitude are not the only determinants of a student’s academic success (Dweck, 1999) and future success in the job market. Therefore, it is important to understand the many factors that keep students on track and in pursuit of their educational and vocational goals. Hope, the ideas and energy for the future, is one of the most potent predictors of success of our youth.

**Hope and Academic Success**

Hope is not significantly related to native intelligence (Snyder, McDermott, Cook, & Rapoff, 2002) or income (Gallup, 2009a), but instead is linked consistently to attendance and credits earned (Gallup, 2009b) and academic achievement. Specifically, hopeful middle school students have better grades in core subjects (Marques, Pais-Ribeiro & Lopez, in press) and scores on achievement tests (Snyder et al., 1997). Hopeful high school students (Gallup, 2009a; Snyder, Harris, et al., 1991; Worrell & Hale, 2001) and beginning college students (Gallagher & Lopez, 2008; Snyder et al., 2002) have higher overall grade point averages. In these studies, the predictive power of hope remained significant even when controlling for intelligence (Snyder et al., 1997), prior grades (Gallagher & Lopez, 2008; Snyder, Harris, et al., 1991; Snyder et al., 2002), self-esteem (Snyder et al., 2002), and entrance examination scores (Gallagher & Lopez, 2008; Snyder et al., 2002).

Hopeful students see the future as better than the present, and believe they have the power to make it so. These students are energetic and full of life. They are able to develop many strategies to reach goals and plan contingencies in the event that they are faced with problems along the way. As such, obstacles are viewed as challenges to overcome and are bypassed by garnering support and/or implementing alternative pathways. Perceiving the likelihood of good outcomes, these students focus on success and, therefore, experience greater positive affect and less distress. Generally, high-hope people experience less anxiety and less stress specific to test-taking situations.

**Hope predicts GPA and retention in college, and hope scores are more robust predictors of college success than high school GPA, SAT, and ACT scores.**

Stuck or discouraged students may lack the energy to get things done. These students may give up when encountering barriers to goals simply because they cannot think of other pathways around the obstacles or cannot get the support they need. This often results in frustration, a loss of confidence, and lower self-esteem (see Snyder, 1994). Students with low hope experience high anxiety, especially in test-taking situations. Stuck or discouraged students do not use feedback from failure experiences in an adaptive manner so as to improve performances in the future (Onwuegbuzie, 1998).

**Hope and Findings From the March 2009 Gallup Student Poll**

The Gallup Student Poll surveyed 70,078 students in grades 5 through 12 from 335 schools and 59 districts located in 18 states and the District of Columbia. The online poll was completed on school computers during one of four March fielding options;
polls were open Tuesday through Friday during school hours. The following items, which constitute an internally consistent scale (alpha=0.76), were used to measure hope:

- I know I will graduate from high school.
- There is an adult in my life who cares about my future.
- I can think of many ways to get good grades.
- I energetically pursue my goals.
- I can find lots of ways around any problem.
- I know I will find a good job after I graduate.

Based on the Gallup Student Poll, half of American students are hopeful; these students possess numerous ideas and abundant energy for the future. The other half of students are stuck (33%) or discouraged (17%), lacking the ideas and energy they need to navigate problems and reach goals. Hope varies little across grade levels. Across participating schools, class size was negatively associated with hope (larger the class, lower the hope) and the percentage of students on free and reduced lunch was not associated with hope.

\[ \text{Grand Mean} = 4.38 \text{ (out of 5)} \]

**Doubling Hope**

Hope is malleable (Gallup, 2009c; Lopez, Rose, Robinson, Marques, & Pais Reiber, 2009) and 50% of American students need support from parents, school, and the community to build their energy and ideas for the future. Through a focused effort from people who care about the future of youth, we can double hope in America.

**References**


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