

A COACHING GUIDE

Positive Intelligence

Building Mental Fitness for Peak Performance

Awareness · Resilience · Possibility

Diane Mitchell-Miller

*“Most people lead lives of quiet desperation
and go to the grave with the song still in them.”*

— Henry David Thoreau



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Positive Intelligence (PQ): An Overview

There's a quiet tension many of us carry — the sense that we're capable of more, but something keeps getting in the way.

“Most people lead lives of quiet desperation and go to the grave with the song still in them.”

— Henry David Thoreau

Over 150 years ago, Thoreau observed a truth that remains disturbingly relevant. Desperation may not look the same today, but it has evolved into a modern epidemic — manifesting as chronic stress, anxiety, feelings of inadequacy, and the relentless race for validation. We often live on autopilot, disconnected from our emotional well-being, trading purpose for performance and presence for productivity.

What is Positive Intelligence Quotient (PQ)?

Developed by Shirzad Chamine at Stanford University, Positive Intelligence helps us build mental fitness — the ability to meet life's challenges with clarity, resilience, and intention. Just like physical fitness, mental fitness can be cultivated and developed.

At its core, your Positive Intelligence Quotient (PQ) is the percentage of time your mind is serving you rather than sabotaging you. A higher PQ leads to improved performance, better relationships, and greater happiness.

Positive Intelligence reveals two key aspects of your mind:

- **Your Saboteurs:** These are the negative thought patterns (inner critics) or behaviors that hold you back. Whether it's self-doubt, procrastination, perfectionism, or the inner critic constantly judging yourself and others, these Saboteurs drain your energy and prevent you from showing up as your best self.
- **Your Sage:** This is the positive, wise part of your mind that helps you respond to challenges with creativity, empathy, and confidence. Your Sage transforms obstacles into opportunities and keeps you focused on what really matters.

Here's the transformation:

Low PQ means your inner Saboteurs are running the show, triggering stress and reactive patterns. High PQ means you're operating from your Sage self — calm, wise, creative, and grounded in purpose.

Improving your PQ helps you:

- Manage stress with more ease
- Increase empathy and improve relationships
- Overcome self-doubt and perfectionism
- Respond to adversity with clarity

Imagine you're caring for a tree. Its leaves symbolize the challenges and responsibilities you juggle daily — work demands, relationships, self-doubt, limiting beliefs, and believing you are not enough. As the days pass, you notice the leaves turning brown and brittle, some falling off entirely. Alarmed, you pour all your energy into watering the leaves — frenetically trying to fix each individual problem. Yet, no matter how much effort you put in, the tree continues to wither leaving you exhausted and distracted.

This endless cycle mirrors how we often approach life's challenges: treating the symptoms rather than the root cause. The real issue lies beneath the surface — in the roots. The roots represent your inner self — your beliefs, mindset, emotional health, and core sense of identity. When these roots are starved of attention, nourishment, and care, it doesn't matter how much you water the leaves; the tree will still struggle to thrive.

Most of us spend our lives trying to fix the leaves ... when the real work is in the roots. Positive Intelligence helps us shift our focus from the surface to the source. Instead of being consumed by external chaos or self-sabotaging patterns, it helps us quiet the Saboteurs that distract us and strengthen the Sage within us — the part of our mind that knows how to nurture those roots.

Core Components of Positive Intelligence

Positive Intelligence isn't just a concept — it's grounded in research across psychology, neuroscience, and human behavior. These core components help explain why this work is so powerful.

1. Positive Psychology

For years, we believed success leads to happiness. Positive psychology flipped that idea:

Happiness fuels performance — not the other way around. A happier brain is more creative, resilient, and capable.

Research also shows that much of our happiness is shaped internally — not by external circumstances. Yet most of our thoughts are repetitive, and many lean negative. Positive Intelligence helps interrupt those patterns and shift what's happening inside.

2. Neuroscience and Neuroplasticity

Your brain is not fixed — it can be rewired. Through neuroplasticity, repeated thoughts and behaviors strengthen certain neural pathways. The more you practice a pattern, the more automatic it becomes.

Think of it like trails in a forest: the paths you walk most often become the easiest to follow. Positive Intelligence helps you create new, healthier paths — so your mind begins to work for you, not against you.

3. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

CBT focuses on identifying and reshaping unhelpful thought patterns. Many of our reactions are automatic — we don't choose them consciously. We just find ourselves in them. Positive Intelligence builds on this by helping you notice those patterns in real time and shift out of them — so you're no longer running on autopilot.

4. Emotional Intelligence (EQ)










Emotional Intelligence is the ability to be aware of, understand, and manage emotions — both your own and others'. It's what allows you to pause instead of react, respond instead of spiral, and stay connected in challenging moments. In Positive Intelligence, EQ is what helps you recognize when a Saboteur has taken over — and gives you the ability to shift back to your Sage.

The 10 Saboteurs: Inner Critics that Undermine Mental Fitness

Positive Intelligence identifies ten saboteurs — the Darth Vaders, to borrow from Star Wars — mental habits that sabotage success and happiness.

- 1. The Judge:** The main voice we have in our head. The Judge, sometimes called the inner critic or the ego, is that voice running constant judgement in the back of your mind. Originally created to protect us from risks to primitive man, it has now become the major obstacle to our happiness. It seeks to find the bad in ourselves, our situations, and most of everyone we meet. By learning to recognize this voice — name it to claim it — we take the first step in controlling the negative messages our minds send us during the day.
- 2. Controller:** Driven by anxiety, it seeks to take control of situations and people, often creating tension and stress. The Controller feels uncomfortable with unpredictability and trusts only itself.
- 3. Hyper-Achiever:** Believes self-worth is determined by accomplishments and external validation. Often leads to burnout and lack of satisfaction, despite high achievement.
- 4. Restless:** Seeks constant new excitement, jumping from one task to another. Leads to distraction, lack of depth, and a feeling of never being satisfied or present.
- 5. Stickler:** Perfectionist, demands everything to be done “right.” Can be overly critical of self and others, causing rigidity, anxiety, and dissatisfaction.
- 6. Pleaser:** Seeks acceptance and affection by doing things for others, often at their own expense. The Pleaser may lead to resentment and lack of genuine relationships.
- 7. Hyper-Vigilant:** Constantly anxious, imagining worst-case scenarios. This saboteur leads to exhaustion and difficulty enjoying the present moment.
- 8. Avoider:** Evades conflict, unpleasant tasks, and difficult emotions. This behavior can lead to procrastination, a buildup of unresolved issues, and a lack of progress.

- 9. Victim:** Exaggerates one’s difficulties and may feel helpless or hopeless. Often used to gain sympathy but results in resentment, bitterness, and a loss of self-empowerment.
- 10. Hyper-Rational:** Relies heavily on logic, often at the expense of emotions. Leads to emotional detachment, making it hard to connect with others or understand emotional needs.

		MOTIVATION		
		Independence	Acceptance	Security
STYLE	Assert	 CONTROLLER	 HYPER-ACHIEVER	 RESTLESS
	Earn	 STICKLER	 PLEASER	 HYPER-VIGILANT
	Avoid	 AVOIDER	 VICTIM	 HYPER-RATIONAL

Free 5-Min “Saboteurs” Assessment —
assessment.positiveintelligence.com/saboteur/overview

The Positive Intelligence (PQ) Assessment is designed to help you measure and strengthen your mental fitness by identifying the balance between your positive and negative thought patterns. It focuses on uncovering your inner Saboteurs and your Sage.

When Saboteurs Become Roles We Play

When Saboteurs take over, they don’t just show up in our thoughts — they show up in our roles. In moments of stress or pressure, we often slip into reactive patterns in how we relate to others — patterns that feel automatic, protective, and familiar. One way to understand this is through what’s known as the Drama Triangle:

- Victim → “This is happening to me. I’m stuck.”
- Rescuer → “I need to fix this for everyone.”
- Persecutor → “This is your fault.”

These aren’t who we are. They are patterns we fall into when our Saboteurs are running the show. If you look closely, you can see how these roles align with specific Saboteurs:

- The Victim often reflects the Victim Saboteur — feeling powerless, stuck, or overwhelmed
- The Rescuer reflects the Pleaser — overgiving, overfunctioning, and putting others first
- The Persecutor reflects the Controller or Judge — critical, blaming, or needing control

This is what low PQ looks like in real life — reactive roles instead of intentional responses. Fred Kofman offers a powerful reframe. He invites us to shift from Victim to Player.

A Victim mindset believes: Life is happening to me.

A Player mindset asks: “What part can I play in how I respond to this?”

This shift is not about blame — it’s about ownership. It’s about reclaiming your power. And in many ways, this is exactly what Positive Intelligence is asking of us. The shift from Victim → Player is the same as the shift from Saboteur → Sage.

“What part can I play in improving this?”

This shift is foundational for conscious leadership, emotional intelligence, and personal growth.

Watch the 12-minute video [Be a Player not a Victim \(escalator scene at minute 4:45\)](#) — search on YouTube.

Saboteurs: Protectors Turned Critics

What This Looks Like in Real Life

Understanding Saboteurs is powerful — but where this really starts to matter is in the small, everyday moments.

You say yes when you really mean no → **Pleaser Saboteur**

You overwork or push yourself to prove your worth → **Hyper-Achiever**

You avoid something important or delay taking action → **Avoider**

You find yourself overthinking, worrying, or scanning for what could go wrong → **Hyper-Vigilant**

You become critical of yourself or others when things don’t go as planned → **Judge or Controller**

These patterns are incredibly common — especially for high-achieving, thoughtful individuals. And they are not character flaws. They are learned patterns. But here's the shift:

This isn't a motivation problem. It's a mental fitness problem.

And the good news is — mental fitness can be strengthened.

Saboteurs — also known as protectors turned critics — often begin as survival strategies. These thought patterns emerge in response to emotional or physical needs, helping us cope with challenges and navigate difficult situations. They are usually rooted in our instinct to seek safety, belonging, or control.

While they may have served us in the past, over time these patterns become rigid and self-defeating. Instead of protecting us, Saboteurs start to limit our growth, create stress, and undermine our well-being. Recognizing and weakening their influence is essential to fostering a more resilient and positive mindset.

When Strengths Are Sabotaged

Saboteurs often hijack your greatest natural strengths by overusing or distorting them. For example: If you identify as a Pleaser, your strength lies in empathy, care, and love — when guided by your Sage. But when the Saboteur takes over, those same gifts can lead to difficulty saying no, neglecting your own needs, and sacrificing healthy boundaries. Saboteurs don't destroy your strengths — they misuse them.

The Five Powers of the Sage (Your Inner Jedi)

Unlike the Saboteurs, the Sage embodies your positive, wise, and resilient self. This mindset thrives on curiosity, empathy, and positivity to tackle life's challenges. The Sage represents your inner leader — your true self, your inner Jedi — who channels the positive powers of the mind to achieve peak performance.

You have the power to manage your own mind — and, in turn, your beliefs, emotions, and outcomes. While insights are valuable, they alone aren't enough to create lasting change. True transformation comes from strengthening the core mental muscles that empower you to act, even in the face of challenging thoughts and behaviors.

The Five Powers of the Sage guide us to act effectively, stay present, and access our full potential.

- 1. Empathize:** Approach oneself and others with empathy and understanding. The Sage does not judge but seeks to understand and connect, seeing the good in people and situations.
- 2. Explore:** The mindset of curiosity. Rather than fearing challenges, the Sage sees them as opportunities to learn and grow, approaching situations with an open mind.

3. **Innovate:** Embrace creative solutions and problem-solving. The Sage encourages thinking outside of the box, seeing possibilities, and using obstacles as opportunities for new approaches.
4. **Navigate:** Connect with one's deeper values and purpose. Rather than reacting impulsively, the Sage carefully considers how actions align with one's core values and long-term vision.
5. **Activate:** Take calm, focused action. Rather than panicking or overthinking, the Sage mind moves forward confidently, adapting to feedback and embracing challenges with resilience.

The Five Powers of the Sage help us focus on what we can control — our perspective, emotions, and choices — even when life feels unpredictable. This mirrors the wisdom of Stephen Covey in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, where he reminds us that while we can't control the “outer weather” of life, we always have power over our “inner weather.”

He illustrates this through the Circle of Concern and the Circle of Influence:

- Outer Weather: Falls into the Circle of Concern — things we worry about but cannot control, like other people's behavior or external events. You can yell at the weather all day, but it won't change.
- Inner Weather: Resides within the Circle of Influence — your ability to choose your mindset, attitude, and actions in response to external events.

Covey ties this wisdom back to Viktor Frankl's teaching on response-ability — our ability to consciously choose our response to any situation. By focusing on your inner weather, you cultivate resilience, peace, and personal power, no matter what's happening around you.

“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

— Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*

Applying Positive Intelligence

Positive Intelligence uses “PQ reps” (Positive Intelligence Quotient repetitions) as simple, mindful exercises designed to strengthen the brain's Sage muscles, enabling individuals to shift from negative, self-sabotaging thoughts to positive, constructive thoughts. PQ reps are based on the science of neuroplasticity, which demonstrates that the brain can form new neural pathways with focused practice.

1. Practice Awareness

The first step in weakening your Saboteurs is to identify and expose them — you can't fight an invisible enemy, or one pretending to be your friend. There is power in naming

things. Don't allow negative emotions to drive the bus. Begin by noticing thoughts and behaviors associated with them, then gently shift back to a Sage mindset.

2. Creating Mindfulness through Sensory Focus

A core element of PQ reps is a brief focus on the senses — sight, sound, touch, or breath. This sensory awareness is intended to anchor attention in the present moment, distancing the mind from Saboteur-driven thoughts.

For example, a typical PQ rep might involve slowly rubbing your fingertips together with such focused attention that you can feel the ridges of your fingerprints. Other exercises may include listening carefully to surrounding sounds or focusing on a slow, deliberate breath.

3. Shifting from Saboteur Mode to Sage Mode

When a Saboteur thought arises (like “I am not good enough” or “This will never work”), performing a PQ rep can help someone step back and observe the thought non-judgmentally, diminishing its emotional intensity. Over time, the brain becomes better at recognizing Saboteur thoughts, responding to them less reactively, and shifting to a more constructive mindset — it becomes a new way of life.

4. Building Emotional Resilience and Self-Mastery

Practicing PQ reps consistently strengthens the neural circuits associated with Sage behaviors, building emotional resilience. The more one practices, the easier it becomes to recognize Saboteur thoughts before they take hold and to replace them with balanced, empowering responses.

5. Rewiring the Brain through Repetition

Repetition is key to making lasting change. Like building a muscle, performing PQ reps regularly rewires the brain to default to a Sage response rather than a Saboteur-driven reaction. Neuroplasticity research suggests that repeating these exercises consistently over weeks can lead to measurable changes in brain patterns.

6. Incorporating PQ Reps in Daily Life

PQ reps can be practiced in brief moments throughout the day, making them practical for busy lives. For example, someone might do a PQ rep while waiting in line, transitioning between tasks, or before a difficult conversation. The idea is to build a habit of checking in with oneself, using these mini-mindfulness exercises whenever negative thoughts arise, and using them preventively to reinforce a calm, present mind.

Example of a PQ Rep Practice Sequence

- 1. Noticing:** Recognize when you feel stressed, anxious, or self-critical — this often signals a Saboteur.
- 2. Pause:** Take a deep breath and choose to pause the mental narrative.

- 3. Focus on Sensation:** Rub your fingertips together, listen closely to surrounding sounds, or feel your breath going in and out. Focus fully on this sensation for 10–15 seconds.
- 4. Shift Perspective:** Once you feel calm and grounded, ask yourself: “What would my Sage say here?” or “What’s a more constructive, compassionate way to view this?”
- 5. Respond Mindfully:** Take action or respond from this more mindful, positive perspective.
- 6. Weaken Your Saboteurs — Name it to claim it:** Naming the Saboteurs and noticing them. For example, rather than saying “I’m not assertive/confident,” try saying “Oh, the Judge is back again.” With consistent practice, simply being aware of the Saboteur voices, naming them, and recognizing their presence will weaken these voices.

PI and the Enneagram

The Enneagram Assessment provides even greater clarity by helping you uncover your core motivations, strengths, and growth opportunities, offering a personalized roadmap for deeper self-awareness and transformation.

truity.com/test/enneagram-personality-test (\$29 for the full report)

- 1. Enneagram Type 1 (The Reformer) — Judge and Stickler:** Type 1s are often driven by a sense of right and wrong, which aligns with the Judge, constantly criticizing themselves and others. They also tend to be Sticklers for perfection, with a need for things to be orderly and correct.
- 2. Enneagram Type 2 (The Helper) — Pleaser:** Type 2s are motivated by a need to be loved and appreciated, which can align closely with the Pleaser Saboteur, seeking approval by helping others, sometimes to the detriment of their own needs.
- 3. Enneagram Type 3 (The Achiever) — Judge and Hyper-Achiever:** Type 3s often internalize a Judge that pushes them to constantly achieve to prove their worth. They also align with the Hyper-Achiever, driven by success and external validation, often attaching self-worth to their accomplishments.
- 4. Enneagram Type 4 (The Individualist) — Victim:** Type 4s have a deep connection to their feelings and can feel misunderstood or unique, which resonates with the Victim Saboteur, amplifying emotions and leaning into self-pity or a sense of being different.
- 5. Enneagram Type 5 (The Investigator) — Avoider and Hyper-Rational:** Type 5s are introspective and independent, often distancing from emotions. This aligns with the Avoider, as they can avoid engaging emotionally, and the Hyper-Rational Saboteur, valuing logic over emotional connections.

- 6. Enneagram Type 6 (The Loyalist) — Hyper-Vigilant:** Type 6s are focused on security and safety, aligning well with the Hyper-Vigilant Saboteur, which causes them to constantly anticipate and worry about potential threats and dangers, often feeling anxious.
- 7. Enneagram Type 7 (The Enthusiast) — Restless and Avoider:** Type 7s are driven by a desire for variety and pleasure, and can sometimes avoid discomfort. This aligns with the Restless Saboteur, always seeking new stimulation, and the Avoider, as they tend to avoid pain or anything unpleasant.
- 8. Enneagram Type 8 (The Challenger) — Controller:** Type 8s are assertive and protective, often seeking control to feel secure. They resonate with the Controller Saboteur, as they may try to control situations and people to avoid vulnerability and protect themselves.
- 9. Enneagram Type 9 (The Peacemaker) — Avoider and Pleaser:** Type 9s desire peace and often avoid conflict, making the Avoider a fitting Saboteur, as they may sidestep difficult issues to keep the peace. They can also display Pleaser traits, trying to appease others and avoid discord.

Reflection Exercise

Judgment That Isn't Serving You

- What self-judgment (or belief) do you frequently make, in 7 words or less?
- How does this judgment make you feel emotionally? What is the impact of these emotions?
- What is the source of this judgment?
- How do you know it is true? What is the lie?
- What is the truer belief?
- Who would you be without this judgment or belief?

“Happiness and freedom begin with a clear understanding of one principle: Some things are within your control. And some things are not. It is only after you have faced this fundamental rule and learned to distinguish between what you can and cannot control that inner tranquility and outer effectiveness becomes possible.” — Epictetus

In the ZONE – Survival or Thrival?

Research shows that our brains are as much as 31% more effective (creative, resilient, engaged, proactive) when in a positive and relaxed state rather than stress and negativity.

What state are you living in? What action steps can you take to live more in the green zone?

Green Zone: Flourish, Flow, Fulfillment

“Thriving State”: Feeling safe and protected allows world of possibilities

Emotional State: Calm, Connected, Creative, Confident

Neurochemical Boost: Increased dopamine and serotonin (happiness and wellbeing hormones)

Cognitive Benefits: Improved mental clarity, innovative thinking

Physical Changes: Increased brain blood flow and strengthened wellbeing

Social Impact: Enhanced trust, connection, and collaboration

Resilience: Strengthened adaptability and stress recovery

Red Zone: Fight, Flight, Freeze, or Fawn

“Survival State”: primary focus shifts to self-protection

Emotional State: Fearful, Frustrated, Frenzied

Neurochemical Shift: Increased cortisol and adrenaline (stress hormones)

Cognitive Effects: Decreased mental clarity and problem solving, rigid thinking

Physical Changes: Blood flow redirects to arms and legs, weakened immune and other systems

Social Impact: Reduced engagement and trust

Resilience: Diminished adaptability and emotional regulation

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In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."

– Viktor Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning



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Additional Resources

TED Talk – Know Your Inner Saboteurs by Shirzad Chamine: search “Shirzad Chamine TED Talk” on YouTube.