

Shrink Rap Radio #228, January 10, 2010, Positive Psychology Coaching
David Van Nuys, Ph.D., aka “Dr. Dave” interviews John Schinnerer
(Transcribed from www.ShrinkRapRadio.com by Virl Seribo)

Excerpt: *I don't know how much listeners know about positive psychology in general, but basically it's not a self help movement, it's not a fad. It is a new branch of science based on a mountain of research into how and when people function at their very best. And I think at last count, maybe a year or two ago, there were about 50,000 peer reviewed studies that are looking at what make people function optimally. And to me, that's what really separates it from, you know, Tony Robbins, or Marianne Williamson, and The Secret. It's not those things. It's grounded in science and it's a change after roughly 100 years in the medical profession from what is wrong with us to what is right with us.*

Introduction: That was the voice of my guest, Dr. John Schinnerer, who uses Positive Psychology as the underlying framework in his personal coaching practice. John Schinnerer PhD is in private practice helping individuals learn happiness by mitigating destructive emotions and fostering constructive emotions. Using positive psychology, he helps clients achieve happy, thriving, meaningful lives. He graduated summa cum laude from the University of California-Berkeley with a PhD in Educational Psychology. Dr. Schinnerer has been an executive and psychologist for over 12 years. He's president and founder of **Guide to Self**, a company that coaches clients to their potential using the latest in positive psychology, emotional management, mindfulness, and attentional control. He's hosted over 200 episodes of **Guide to Self Radio**, a primetime radio show on positive psychology in the San Francisco bay area. Dr. Schinnerer's areas of expertise range from positive psychology, to emotional awareness, to moral development to sports psychology. He wrote the award winning **Guide to Self: The Beginners Guide to Managing Emotion and Thought**, which is available at Amazon.com and other online book sellers. And he's currently collaborating with the University of New Zealand in a longitudinal positive psychology study, called The **International Well Being Study**. You can send Dr. Schinnerer an email via john@guidetoself.com. Now, here's the interview.

Dr. Dave: Dr. John Schinnerer, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio

Schinnerer: Thank you very much for having me. It's great to be here, David

Dr. Dave: Well as you know I discovered your blog as I was searching for resources to help me formulate a proposal that I was putting together for a market research conference that I was putting together in Prague this coming May. You know, you may recall, I was hoping to show how developments in positive psychology might inform marketing and market research and your blog was one place where I found someone whose thinking was running along similar lines and since then you and I have had several phone conversations and I thought you'd make a great guest for this podcast.

Schinnerer: Well thank you very much. I'm really excited to be here. This should be a fun and interesting conversation.

Dr. Dave: Yes. Well tell us how you found your way into psychology, and then eventually into positive psychology, and coaching.

Schinnerer: Well in the psychology, let's see, I had some interesting experiences when I was younger. In high school, for instance, I was student body president, captain of three varsity teams, a good, overachieving student, a little bit perfectionistic. I ran into a teacher in high school that was a little bit off balance. She became actually, my student government advisor and that's a whole another story, but basically let's say, it was very hard to hold onto my version of reality during that year because she wanted to know everything about me, every personal detail. She wanted to be with me, wanted to talk to me on the phone at night and was very intrusive in terms my boundaries. And at the time, I didn't even know what boundaries were. I was just trying to survive high school and get to college. And that's a whole hour of conversation there, but basically the biggest...she had a number of hooks in me. Primarily, the fact she had power over my grades, the awards I would get at the end of the year, and the biggest one was the threat that she would take her own life if I ever ended the relationship, which did not involve any sort of sexual activity. It was just this unusual, strange, off balance relationship. So that was one of my first glimpses into psychology and how powerful relationships can be on other people, myself included. It was also a glimpse into how powerful emotions were because I would get sick and stressed very frequently that year because I was under just a tremendous pressure and as I said before my version or my perception of reality was tenuous at times because I was, there was a lot of things going on at that time that were difficult. I met my wife at that point in time.

Dr. Dave: When you were in high school? Are we still in high school?

Schinnerer: Yes. This was senior year in high school. And so we have been together for a long time now. I think we've been married for 18 years and together 25.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Wow

Schinnerer: And then I went to college and majored in Philosophy. Went away to study at the University of Edinburgh for awhile, which was a great experience. It really kind of pushed the envelope for me in terms of my comfort level, my anxiety. And when I came back my friends had set me up in a two bedroom with a friend of mine, an acquaintance of mine who came back after the Christmas break. It was the first time seeing him in 6 or 8 months and I said...well he said to me *How was your Christmas break?* And I said, *it was great. How was yours?* He said *not so good. My dad killed himself over the break.* It turns out his dad had taken a gun to his mouth in the basement of the house when he and his mom were upstairs. He didn't leave a note, so a very destructive, difficult situation for him to deal with and I found myself spending the semester in college, sort of

trying to walk that path with him and make sense of dreams that he was having, where he would talk to his dad. You know, you can just tell his mind was trying to make sense of this horrible tragedy that befell him.

Dr. Dave: Of course

Schinnerer: And so that was one as well. And several experiences like that just sort of led me into psychology and a fascination with the human mind, with the power that thinking has over us and with the, sort of additional power that emotion has over us. Because when I went to UC Berkeley for my PhD, there was a lot of emphasis on cognitive psychology, which is basically how we think, as you know.

Dr. Dave: Yes

Schinnerer: There wasn't much mention made of emotion because it was squishy, it was hard to measure, it was unscientific at the time. And so I just kind of put my head down and put my nose to the grindstone and thought ok, I'm going to get through this, get the PhD because I'm going to need that, and that UC Berkeley name behind me...

Dr. Dave: Yes

Schinnerer: ... to get more to what really interests me which is, sort of, the power of emotion and how do we deal with that because emotion is something that I had struggled with throughout my life

Dr. Dave: You know, as I hear this story you're going to have to write your memoir at some point.

Schinnerer: Haha. Yeah, yeah. It's an interesting story. It's fun. It's been challenging.

Dr. Dave: Well that relationship with that teacher in high school. It just sounds so bizarre. There is a whole story there, I'm sure

Schinnerer: I think that was one of the driving forces. Like, okay what made this individual to up and behave in this manner where she did things tell me she loved me more than her own five children.

Dr. Dave: Oh my goodness.

Schinnerer: That's just not something you want to lay on a 17 year old student

Dr. Dave: Right

Schinnerer: But the other experience that I had was when I came out of it, when I finished part of my education at (California), I was an intern at the school psychologist in

some pretty heavy school districts: Oakland, Alameda, and Berkeley. I ended up in Fremont. I enjoyed the job where the best part of the job was talking to the students, whether it was elementary school, or middle school, high school. The best part was talking to them. I guess you could call it counseling. What I found; however, was that, you know, all these kids had very heavy stories. So they had stories filled with sadness, anger, fear, disappointment and hurt. And we know now, or we're beginning to understand that emotions are contagious. So for counselors, therapists, psychologists, you tend hear these stories, especially when you're a newbie, when you're a rookie, and you take in the emotions of other people. And no one ever teaches you ways to get those, let's call them negative destructive emotions, out. So I found myself holding onto a lot of their anger, fear and sadness and it wound up with me becoming depressed. My back went out and I was lying on the floor of my office thinking, okay this is absurd. How can I, as a psychologist, ask other people to manage their emotions and get their lives together when I can't myself? So it was at that point, it was about 1997, I started looking into what are the best scientifically proven techniques to manage negative emotions, mainly fear, anger, sadness, and their variations. And then later on I came across positive psychology, which put a big emphasis on how do you cultivate more positive emotions and why do you want to do that? And so to me that was sort of a perfect fit. So between cognitive behavioral therapy, which focuses more on thinking, together with ways to manage negative emotions and ways and the whys of how you want to create and be aware of more positive emotions, that was enough for me to kind of run out into the field and say I think okay, I think I've got a pretty good idea of what's going on here and how I can be of help to people.

Dr. Dave: Yes, and you've written a book, which I have been enjoying reading very much and people can get it at www.amazon.com, probably among other places. It's called **Guide to Self**, and I thought maybe I would ask you some questions that are kind of based on that reading.

Schinnerer: Absolutely

Dr. Dave: Well in there you talk about six areas necessary for a successful and happy life. And you use an acronym INSPIRE. Can you give us an overview of those six areas, you know, and what the letters INSPIRE stand for?

Schinnerer: Sure, and this was the result of business men approached me in 2004 and asked me if I wanted to create, sort of an executive, life coaching company. And I said sure, I'd love to let me look at the research that's out there and see what where coaching towards, I'd like to have a framework if we're going to be coaching. I want to know where we're headed. So I read 800-1000 studies and then pieced together this framework from those. And so the acronym is INSPIRE. The IN stands for *inward looking* because depending on different accounts, somewhere between 40 to 80% of our happiness, our contentment is inside our minds, in between our ears. And we know that, it depends who we talk to, let's take the conservative approach, say 40% of our happiness is within our control. Roughly 50% of it at latest estimate is genetic. So that's sort of what you're

born with. You're born with this happiness set point. 10% of your happiness is due to situation or the environment around you, so it's based on how much money you make, what car you drive, who you're hang out with, who you're married to, who your significant other is, that sort of thing. And then 40% is due to, sort of what you're aware of, what you attend to, how you think and how well you manage your feelings. And those are things that we can learn to do better. So 40% of your happiness can actually be boosted or increased. You can actually learn how to be happier. The S in INSPIRE is for *spiritual*. I differentiate spirituality from religion, which again is its own topic. But the distinction in my mind is religion is man or woman standing between the individual and the higher power.

Dr. Dave: Yes

Schinnerer: Organized religion. Spirituality is someone's direct relationship with the higher power. I've spoken to a lot of people on this subject and I don't...it's not my job to tell people who or what to believe in. I consider myself a psychologist, not a clergy or a pastor. So, I tend to be open minded about spirituality. I consider myself an open minded Christian with a little Buddhism thrown in; however, the research has shown it is important to have a belief in a forgiving, loving, kind, higher power. That a belief in the Old Testament God or some of the more punitive, vengeful, angry Gods is not as helpful in our overall well being.

Dr. Dave: Yes. Let me just put in a footnote here. First of all, I really like your definition of spiritual. I've interviewed many people on this topic and I always press people *well how do you define that?* You've given a very succinct definition. And the other thing was your mention of kind of a fusion of Christianity with a little bit of Buddhism thrown in.

Schinnerer: Yes

Dr. Dave: There's an article in my morning paper that I was reading this morning talking about how complex American religious views are. It turns out that you're in the majority. I don't remember all the percentages, but some very large percentage of people who consider themselves Christian also believe in topics such as reincarnation or astrology and so the point of the article, it's a study done by The Pew Foundation

Schinnerer: Hmm hmm

Dr. Dave: You know, they do lots of studies and evidently, just a society, we are all holding a rather complex set of beliefs. I just wanted to share that. Let's keep moving. You've got *inward looking,s piritual...*

Schinnerer: So the I in INSPIRE, the middle I, is for *intellectual* which is not the best label I could come up with, but it fits in the acronym. The I for intellectual is more about how you think about the world. Part of that is identifying gremlins, the negative thoughts

you have and the different types of gremlins so you can challenge them. And then the other part of it is finding ways to think more realistically optimistic, based on Martin Seligman's work.

Dr. Dave: Okay. You skipped P which was *physical*.

Schinnerer: Oh, I'm sorry. P is for *physical*. Again, part of my framework is your body is a gift to you and you have to take care of it, you've got to respect it. You have to stay in shape. Ideally, you'd work out 20 minutes a day, 5 days a week and you want to keep the weight off. It's pretty simple, but you know, again if you go to some of Dan Millman's work, which is not based on research, but which I admire, you're looking to keep your flexibility up as you get older, keep your strength up as you get older and keep your cardiovascular up as you get older in order to maintain the best physical body you can as you age.

Dr. Dave: Makes sense to me. I'm trying. Ha ha!

Schinnerer: Yeah, well you know we do the best we can too. Part of it is self compassion so you want to be compassionate with yourself when things like injuries come up or illness and you can't work out. And then you start to work yourself back slowly into shape when you have the opportunity.

Dr. Dave: It's true, you know, we can get, at least it's been my experience, that I can get so fanatical about being physical that I end up hurting myself and then it takes months to recover from having gotten all macho about it.

Schinnerer: Ha ha, yes! Speaking of macho, I agreed to play indoor soccer here in January with a team of men that are 40 something and we're going to be playing in a league with 21 and up and I'm a little worried about the risk of injury so I'll let you know how that goes.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, good luck with that.

Schinnerer: But I'm excited about it too. Okay, so P is *physical*, I is *intellectual*. The R is *relational* and I can't tell you how much bigger this has become in my mind over the past 3 years. You know, obviously it's important to surround yourself with the right people, with people that are supportive, non judgmental, more positive than negative. The problem is those people are hard to find. They might be, you know, 15-20% of the population. So then you've got to find ways to draw up appropriate boundaries going back to my original story with my high school teacher.

Dr. Dave: Hmm hmm

Schinnerer: How do you assert yourself and say no this is not appropriate? I'm not comfortable with this, I need to leave the situation or change the situation to improve it.

The other thing that is coming up is that our emotions, as I mentioned before, are contagious. We're seeing more and more studies come out that are showing the power of emotion such as loneliness, anger and happiness and how they are socially contagious and can pass through a social network and not only influence the people directly around you but people who are one degree removed from you. So, for instance, if I'm angry and I get angry at one of my children in the morning and they go to school with that anger, they might pass that anger on to one of their classmates. The classmate in turn might pass that anger on to someone else. And it spreads.

Dr. Dave: Wow. Both positive and negative emotions are contagious, right?

Schinnerer: Exactly. So again, all the more reason to be aware of your own emotions and cultivate more positive emotions so you can spread them and share them and also to be aware of how others are treating you and what emotions they're bringing to you.

Dr. Dave: I like talking about emotions. You have a discussion of emotions in your book and you talk about the role of positive and negative emotions play in our lives, and kind of how and why they're there. Maybe that's something that you can comment on, sort of the balance of positive and negative emotions.

Schinnerer: Sure. And so the last letter in INSPIRE is E for *emotional*. So, let's add to emotion.

Dr. Dave: Hahaha. Ok.

Schinnerer: Ok. So the first many years of my life, I spent a lot of time in what I would say were negative or destructive emotions. So, most of it was sadness. Some of it was fear or anxiety. There was some anger and irritability in there. And you know like most people, I could mask those when I was at school or at work; however, when I come home, that's usually when most people usually go (blah) and all that, sort of negative emotional energy comes out, which makes home life a rather not so pleasant place to be. And one of the things we found in the past 5 to 7 years is that; well we've known that negative emotions for a long time narrow our attention. There are action scripts have been there for millions of years that many of which are pre-thought. So in other words a bear comes out of the woods, you see the bear, you run away, then you go *Oh my gosh, I was afraid*. Anger exists to help us to remove obstacles from our path, between us and our goals. It helps us to fight social injustice. Sadness helps to keep us close to home when we suffered a loss so we can rebuild our resources. It helps us to be near loved ones at a time when we need that. So in general negative emotions help us focus our attention to a point and we're not trying to eliminate any negative emotions, we're just trying to have more of a conscious choice in how we act as a result of a given emotion. So many of us just feel anger, and we act in an angry manner and we don't realize that there's a difference, a separation between the feeling anger and how you might act as a result of that anger. Now on the flipside, positive emotions, and this just came out with Barbara Fredrickson, she's one of the greater minds that I know of in positive

psychology, she came up with a broaden and build theory of positive emotions, which basically says that positive emotions open you up. They open you up to new possibilities of thinking. They broaden your thought processes, or the thought processes available to you. So if you want to innovate, if you want to create, if you want to write, if you want to think outside the box, you want to be in a positive emotional state. And that's not necessarily something high in intensity, like a spastic joy or a manic state. It might be something relatively mellow in intensity, like contentment or relaxation or peacefulness. It could be something like awe or surprise. The build part of her theory is that positive emotions build lasting internal resources, which means that there seems to be some sort of metaphorical reservoir inside of us, actually there's two: one for negative emotions and one for positive emotions. So the more that you can cultivate positive emotions, the more you fill up you fill up your internal bucket of positive emotions that you can use down the road to share with other people. People that need a little bit of love, a little bit of guidance, support, generosity. And the other finding that she made, which is one of the most remarkable to me, is the fact that positive emotions act as a hidden reset button for the lingering physiological effects of negative emotions. We know for instance that chronic stress does things to the body like increase heartbeat, increase cortisol rate; cortisol is the stress hormone, elevates blood pressure. So what we've found is that if you're stressed out, if you're angry, if you're fearful or sad, when you go in a positive emotional feeling, it undoes those physiological effects. It brings down the cortisol rate, it brings down your heart rate, it brings down your blood pressure. And to me, that's amazing because so much of our time is spent in that chronic state of stress. And we don't even realize it much of the time. But now there's a way to undue those effects and it's as simple as putting yourself into a positive emotional space

Dr. Dave: Which we can choose to do, right?

Schinnerer: Right, and the best example I can give you of that and one that seems to resonate with a lot of people is, imagine there's a teenage daughter, a teenage girl and she's arguing with her parents and they are just locked into a drop dead, knockdown argument. Everyone's hot, everyone's angry, everyone's frustrated. All of the sudden, the phone rings, the little brother goes to pick it up and says, *sister it's your boyfriend*. And the young girl walks to the phone and says, *oh, hi Bobby how are you! I was just thinking about you*. And all of the sudden, like a light switch, her emotional state has changed from fury, rage, to contentment or being glad to have this call and it's instant. And we do have a choice over it, we just tend to give up that choice out of habit I think, and out of mindlessness.

Dr. Dave: Right. That's where mindfulness comes in, right? Being aware of choice

Schinnerer: Uh huh

Dr. Dave: I loved your alligator metaphor and how you talked, how you say it comes from Spanish. Can you run that by us?

Schinnerer: Sure. The alligator metaphor I liked. It was Jon Haidt from University of Virginia came up with the rider on the elephant metaphor where the mind, one of the ways to divide the mind is two parts: you've got the rational thinking part and the emotional feeling part and they're based on brain structures, which I don't think we'll need to go into here. But the idea is that the person riding the elephant is the thinker and the elephant is the feeling part of the mind and the goal is to get them to work together in concert. Personally, I like the alligator wrestler with the alligator because I think it's more of a battle than a person just sitting atop an elephant. And to me, the alligator has the emotional mind, sort of, is always laying in wait just below the surface of the water just as our emotional mind is always laying in wait, is always scanning the horizon for signs of danger. And both the alligator, the emotional mind, and emotions can pounce on you suddenly without warning, whenever they think the prey comes along.

Dr. Dave: And another thing that you point out is that in Spanish, alligator I guess is (pronunciation el lee gat or), which means the lizard

Schinnerer: Yes, translates into lizard. And it's the lizard brain, or the limbic system which is responsible for most of our emotions

Dr. Dave: Yeah. I just thought, oh that's really wonderful. And by the way, I want my listeners and you to know that I interviewed Jon Haidt, is that how you say it? Haidt

Schinnerer: Yes

Dr. Dave: I loved his book as well

Schinnerer: Yes. It's fantastic. The Happiness Hypothesis

Dr. Dave: Yes. I have it have it on my bookshelf and I will be referring to it along with yours

Schinnerer: And the other thing I like about the alligator metaphor is that alligators get into those death rolls where they lock their jaws onto their prey and they'll roll back and forth in this death roll where they'll try to kill their prey, and that to me has that same sort of feeling as an intense negative emotion like anger or rage or fury, where you just get locked in and over focused on what's wrong, what you're angry about and you cannot let it go. At least you think you cannot let it go

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah. So what's your advice for mastering negative emotions and fostering positive emotions?

Schinnerer: Boy, there's all sorts of tools that I have now, but typically for instance, when I see a client in the first session, I will walk them through, sort of, what emotions are, I will share with them some of what's in the book in terms, the physiological symptoms of anger, sadness, fear. So here's what you want to look out for. In anger, for

instance, your blood rushes to your feet and to your hands. And typically, your hands will be in fists because your body is preparing you to attack. Your heart rate goes up, your breathing becomes shallow, you over focus on what's making you angry. And so there's queues that you can learn to increase your awareness so you can become aware of the emotional state that you're in ideally within a third of a second because we know from research studies that you can actually interrupt that anger cycle if you can get aware of it within about .33 seconds

Dr. Dave: That's pretty fast. Hahaha

Schinnerer: Yeah it is. But as you become aware of it, it becomes second nature, it becomes automatic. So at first, you have to think about it, and it's tough. After awhile it becomes like driving a car where it's just automatic and you say, okay my heart rate's increasing, I'm getting angry, I need to take a timeout, I need to breathe deeply, I need to leave the situation, I need to tell so and so that I'd like to talk later because I'm getting heated, there's any number of things you can do. And also the more you become aware of it, and the more you do certain, there's certain exercises that I would put in the positive psychology umbrella, that reduce the overall amount of anger that you've been sitting on for many, many years, because like most of us, no one has taught us how to get rid of, how to dump that negative bucket of emotions over.

Dr. Dave: What would one of those exercises be?

Schinnerer: Well to me the biggest one, the greatest one for getting rid of anger is the practice of forgiveness. And on the face of it, it doesn't sound like much; however, when I was doing the radio show, I interviewed Fred Luskin from Stanford

Dr. Dave: Yes, I've interviewed him as well

Schinnerer: There you go. He's the director of the Stanford Forgiveness Project and he has a book out called **Forgive For Good** and he's basically broken down forgiveness into a series of steps and explains why you want to do it, what it is, what it is not and then encourages you to engage in a daily practice of forgiveness. Basically, when you get right down to it, it's quite simple. It's the idea that you want to go through a list of people that you believed have wronged you and forgive them. There's more to it than that but basically it's just running through a list of people at the end of the day and saying I forgive my mom for standing me up at the bus station today. I forgive my dad for not being around enough when I was a small child. And you go through this list of what you're angry about and it takes maybe, it might take 10 minutes in the beginning. And you forgive what's gone on in the past and after awhile your list of people and things that you are forgiving gets shorter and shorter and shorter because the things that used to bother you stop bothering you. You're not as angry about them or you're not angry about them at all anymore. And what I've found is that the process becomes shorter and shorter and shorter until all the things in the past, that I can remember anyway, have been forgiven, so they hold no power or less power over me, and then I'm just forgiving things

that happened that day. I think I may I have told you that I have four young children, so I've got lots of opportunities to practice forgiveness on a daily basis.

Dr. Dave: Hahaha, right. Well we have a number of things in common. I have four kids; I was student body president of my high school; I played varsity sports. I think there are other things that I recognize as we've been go along that we have in common. We're both psychologists. We're both interested in positive psychology. So what about the fostering of positive emotions? Do you have some advice about how people might tackle that?

Schinnerer: Yeah, there's lots of things actually. And I don't know how much your listeners know about positive psychology in general, but basically it's not a self help movement, it's not a fad. It is a new branch of science based on a mountain of research into how and when people function at their very best. And I think at last count, maybe a year or two, there were about 50,000 peer reviewed studies that are looking at what make people function optimally. And to me, that's what really separates it from, you know, Tony Robbins, or Marianne Williamson, and The Secret. It's not those things. It's grounded in science and it's a change after roughly 100 years in the medical profession from what is wrong with us to what is right with us. It's looking at what do we do well, what are our strengths, how do we cultivate more positive emotion? So there's several different, it's kind of a complex question that you ask. Some of the short answers are things like practice mindfulness, which is basically the practice of breathing deeply, focusing on your breath, and being aware of your thoughts and feelings as they pass through your head and here's the big part, the simple but not easy part: learn to observe your thoughts and feelings without judging them as good or bad.

Dr. Dave: Hmm hmm

Schinnerer: And everyone goes, oh yeah. That's kind of tough. And it does take some practice but it has huge benefits. There's 25-30 years of research on mindfulness alone in terms of improving performance at work, improving performance at school, health benefits and Jon Kabat Zinn is the one that I follow most closely in that area. Other things would be exercises in gratitude, for instance. So what are you grateful for? One of the most famous positive psychology exercises is one done by Seligman that took 50 severely depressed people. People that couldn't get out of bed and function and said we want you to do one thing each day for two weeks. And that one thing was write down three things that went well today and why they went well. And after two weeks they found that the vast majority of these 50 people had severely less symptoms of depression than when they began the study. So it was as powerful as an antidepressant and it acted more quickly.

Dr. Dave: That's a great study. I thought I knew Seligman's work and I knew about the gratitude exercise, but I didn't know about that particular testing of it with depressed people

Schinnerer: And so there's other things too, like altruism, helping out other people. And I can give you an example. It's funny, altruism can be harder than you think sometimes. You think, well I'm just going to volunteer somewhere and help out and that will do it. And that will, that's a great way to go. I was in a situation recently where my mom had hip surgery and had some complications from it. I would go over there and visit her. My parents are very high achieving, proud people. And I kept calling my dad and saying can I come over there and help you out, spend some time with mom while you're at work or whatever, and I kept getting sort of, brushed off and I think pride was getting in the way. And finally I just said okay, I'm just going to go over there without asking. And so I went over, I showed up at my dad's office and said I need a house key, I'm going to hang out with mom while you're at work. I went over, hung out with my mom for 3-4 hours and it went very well. She was very appreciative. My point is that sometimes you have to force the hand, I guess.

Dr. Dave: Hmm. You know that sort of feeds into a question that I wanted to ask you. It's something that you touched on, I think in your book. Before you discovered these tools, your life in some ways was not satisfying to you. It was in a bit of disarray so I wanted to have you take us through that and tell us how these tools have helped you in your own personal life.

Schinnerer: Okay great question. The reason I wrote this book initially was for my own benefit. I have four children, as I mentioned. My wife had always dreamed about having four. I was more of a two person kind of guy, and you know even my mom to this day says, well, you're not cut out for four kids. It's like, well maybe that's the way I was, but I can change. That's what we know. We know that the brain is plastic and changes throughout the lifespan and it changes in a matter of hours and minutes not months and years. So that's also something I throw into presentations. The brain that you come into the presentation with is not the brain you will leave this presentation with. Your brain will change in that hour long span. So I had to find a way to remain center, remain calm, remain emotionally level or balanced amidst the chaos that is my family. I've got two boys, two girls, ranging from age 3-14. It's a very busy, very active household. So first I went into, okay how do I manage the negative emotions, which is what I typically do with clients because that's normally where they're coming in. They're coming in with a point of pain, usually fear, anger, sadness related. And then I move from there to how do I cultivate more positive emotions and add that to it. So, am I thinking properly to get the best out of my life as well as. Part of it to me is things like getting exercise and that goes back to the physical part of the INSPIRE acronym. Part of it is things like what are your top five values? What are you willing to live for and die for? So just having the clarity there to help with decision making in the moment, when you start to get hot under the collar. Okay, family is one of my top values. Do I really want to be screaming at my child? No that's not really consistent with my top value of family.

Dr. Dave: Hmm hmm

Schinnerer: Having a sense of humor is key. The other one that's big is learning how to savor and appreciate the littlest things in your day to day life. And it could be a small as smile or a hug from my three year old. It could be as small as one of my sons asking to go out back to kick a ball around. Because they're not going to want to do that for the rest of their life. Somewhere along the way they're going to get older and want to hang out with their friends more than they want to hang out with me.

Dr. Dave: Definitely

Schinnerer: It might be something as simple as taking a moment to appreciate the egret that flies around the creek next door to us. Just looking at the birds and saying, *wow that's something*. I feel very blessed to be in an area where there are trees, where there are birds. So there's a number of things to it. Mindfulness has been a big part of it. Learning to ask the right questions or not to ask the wrong questions is a big part of it.

Dr. Dave: You know in the book you talk about optimism versus pessimism. How about in your own balance, did you start out as pessimistic and have been moving towards optimism or are you one of those people who was sort of born optimistic?

Schinnerer: No, my wife was blessed that way. She was fortunate to be more optimistic innately. I come from a high achieving German family that very much focused on grades and achieving and you are what you do not what you are. It was more about doing than being. Part of that was a big emphasis on critical thinking and sort of tearing things and people down or at least judging them harshly. .

Dr. Dave: Hmm

And so, I had to learn how to undo that learning, maybe 30 years of learning and learn how to be more appreciative, more be realistically optimistic, not foolishly optimistic, ways to look at the best of a situation and encourage and cultivate that rather than look for and find the worst. When I was younger I was really good at...I guess I was born with the knack of finding people's soft spots. I could read people very well, I was intuitive, I picked up on people's emotions. So in middle school I learned I could insult people and I could get at their soft spots quickly and easily. And it didn't take me very long before I realized that I didn't like people doing that to me so maybe I shouldn't be doing that to other people.

Dr. Dave: Good insight. Haha. I'm glad you had that insight. You know I'm particularly interested in the positive psychology coaching that you're doing. You're taking all this study and learning and self exploration and channeling into a practice of coaching and of course one of the intriguing questions, I think, is what do you see is the difference between coaching and psychotherapy? Because you talk about people coming in having a point of pain and I think some people would say, well *isn't that doing therapy?*

Schinnerer: Right and I think to me the difference, and it's a great question and I don't think it will be completely answered here and I think the debate will be on for many years. In my mind, given my background, I see it as sort of as a two pronged approach where you need to teach, or I need to teach people to manage their negative emotions, manage the negative thinking that they've grown up with and then also to open them up or introduce them to new ways of thinking about the world. A lot of this is about mindset and you can change your mindset through practice. And I just find that asking certain questions seems to illicit certain responses. What are you good at? What do you well? What went well for you this week? What are your strengths? What are you passionate about? And then other part, the other answer of question is I think the difference between psychotherapy and coaching, is in my practice at least, is part of the emphasis is spent with me teaching skills to my clients. So it's unlike traditional therapy in that, in therapy you're generally spending the whole session talking about yourself, focusing on what went wrong, focusing on the problem, trying to find ways around the problem. The emphasis is on the individual, the individual is doing most of the talking, or the client. In my practice, I can bring in, I have clients that come in that are young males maybe 15-25 in some situations. They don't want to be there at all. They're mad about coming.

Dr. Dave: How do they get there? Are they court referred?

Schinnerer: A lot of times it's a parent that brings them in. Or it can be court appointed. They also don't have any hope. So they also don't have a lot of hope. I had a guy last week who said I've been to see 18 therapists, I was like *wow, you counted huh?* That's a lot. But I've seen a lot of people who have been to inpatient, outpatient, psychologists, counselors, therapists. They've been to see everyone out there and they come to see me and I say *I don't know if I can help you, but I have some tools that I can share with you that if you choose to use them, have been helpful to me, have been helpful to hundreds of clients and they may be helpful to you.* So I think there's a different sort of framework in that you know I'm giving them the choice, them the power, and then saying here's some tools I can teach you that have actually been shown to work in research. There is a lot of younger people that are open to that approach. The other part is I've got hours of power point presentations that I teach from. So if I get a client coming in that is upset or, a lot of times its male clients that just come in and they don't, they are not comfortable coming in and just spilling their guts. So, what I do is, I'll show them a short, entertaining video clip that makes them laugh, I'll tell them a joke, I'll do a magic trick. And then I'll teach for awhile. And there's no pressure on them to talk until they find themselves comfortable do so.

Dr. Dave: Hmm hmm

Schinnerer: So I can just teach them for a long time, actually. And I've done this with high school students at a continuation high school where the students are coming out of juvenile hall. Some of them have ankle monitors on. Some live in group homes. There's a variety of emotional and mental disorders going on and it's a pretty tough crowd. And so I go in there once a month and I teach. And I tell them the same thing. About 80-85%

of them are open to listening. I did a mindfulness exercise with them last year for the first time and I was scared spitless. I didn't know how it was going to go. About 90% of them actively tried to do it. The principal said, later she emailed me and said *wow the campus has been so much calmer all afternoon.*

Dr. Dave: That's wonderful. You know some percentage of my listenership is composed of people who are counselors or therapists as well as students who are hoping to become counselors, therapists, coaches. What would be your advice to somebody who wants to do something kind of like what you're doing? How would they break into that?

Schinnerer: I would say, if you want to do coaching specifically?

Dr. Dave: Yeah

Schinnerer: Get a degree in some sort of counseling or therapy, like an MFT license, a Masters or PhD level degree first. Because there's always going to be this ongoing debate between what's coaching and what's therapy. And to me the two are essentially...you can't disentangle them. Because as much as I try to keep the focus on teaching or psycho educational or positive psych, human nature will bring the conversation back to what's going wrong with the quiet. So they have a very hard time not focusing on what's depressing them, what's making them angry, what's making them anxious. I think that's fair. So I think you need the ability to go both ways...

Dr. Dave: Hmm hmm

Schinnerer:...and to address both the negative and the positive, and again those are sort of misnomers. You need the ability to deal with the dark and the light side.

Dr. Dave: That makes a lot of sense to me. What do you think about licensing because people who take the psychotherapy route have to be licensed? Currently, I don't believe there is any licensing for coaches. Do you think it will go that way? Do you think it should or should not?

Schinnerer: I would like to see greater oversight over the coaching industry. Yeah, some sort of licensing body would make sense to me. Because as I said it's too vaguely defined right now. You've got a lot of people in there that may or may not know what they are doing, that may or may not have enough education and it gets complicated. You're getting into people's minds, whether you are dealing with goal setting, or getting people to perform at their optimum, you're messing with people's minds and the mind as we know is about as complex and involved as it can get.

Dr. Dave: Ok. That's fascinating. I suspect many coaches who I would put that question to would go the other way and say no, no. We don't want all that uptight structure of licensing and so on.

Schinnerer: Well yeah, I understand that point of view, I just think that it's very difficult to...for instance what if you're a coach and you have a client come in that has a personality disorder and you don't know enough to spot it?

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I think that would be a concern that many professional psychologists would have about the whole coaching movement. Well that's a whole big discussion and I'm glad to have at least been able to touch on that with you. I'm wondering as we, sort of start to wind down here, if there's any areas that you maybe haven't gotten a chance to talk about that you were hoping that you would.

Schinnerer: Oh boy, well I have a joke I can share with you. I am a big fan of humor and the idea that making people laugh and making people smile is a great way to open them up to new information and also to undue those negative effects of destructive emotions.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Okay so are you ready?

Dr. Dave: I'm ready

Schinnerer: Okay. Hahaha. Okay, so there's this psychologist running a group therapy session. And in this group therapy session, there are four mothers and each mother has a small child with her. And the psychologist looks at the mothers and says, *You are all obsessed and it shows up in your children's names.* And he points to the first mother and he says, *You are obsessed with eating. You went so far as to name your daughter Candy.* And he looks at the second mother and he says, *And you are obsessed with money and with shopping. Your daughter's name is Penny.* And to the third mother he says, *And you have a problem with alcohol. Your daughter's name is Brandy.* And at that, the fourth mother stands up, grabs her son by the arm and says, *Come on, Dick, we're getting out of here.*

Dr. Dave: Ha ha ha

Schinnerer: Now the funny part to me of that story is that I told that on the radio when I was doing the radio show and the station owner; I got great feedback from it initially. When it was rerun, the station owner called me in and said, *John we can't run this anymore. We are getting complaints* and I said, *what are people complaining about?* He said, *well it's a reference to sex in the joke.* And I said, *what's dirty about it?* And he couldn't come up with an answer. I said *look, you've got to realize that whatever's dirty in that joke is the product of what's going on in the listener's mind because I don't say whether or not that sex is taking place within a marriage or outside of a marriage. So unless someone has a problem with sex in general and finds it disgusting and aversive, there's nothing dirty in that joke.* And of course it still wasn't rerun, I think he got the

point. To me, it's a great story to illustrate just how different mindsets can interpret the same thing.

Dr. Dave: Yes, yes. Well this has been fascinating speaking with you, John. I hope to talk to you more down the line. So Dr. John Schinnerer, thanks so much for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

Schinnerer: Absolutely, David. I really enjoyed it. Thanks for having me

Conclusion: I certainly hope you enjoyed this interview with Dr. John Schinnerer and found it as instructive as I did. As you've probably figured out by now, positive psychology is one of my current interests. You've heard me make reference to past interviews on the topic and I'm sure this won't be the last and if you search at www.shrinkrapradio.com on positive psychology, you will probably find a number of interviews. As you've heard me mention, I have an upcoming presentation on Positive Psychology that I'll be giving in the Lifelong Learning Program at Sonoma State University this coming January. And as you might imagine, I'm in the process of gathering material for those lectures. I've got a nice stack of books that I'll be calling highlights from. Certainly, one of the books I'll be consulting is Dr. **Schinnerer's Guide to Self**. It's clear that he put a lot of time and study into the writing of it. It's a beautiful integration of the academic material along with practical suggestions about how to apply the insights of positive psychology into your own life. Dr. Schinnerer's assertion that there are at this point some 50,000 studies on positive psychology particularly snagged my attention. I know there has been considerable interest, but I had no idea that the number of studies was anywhere near that magnitude. I intend to follow up and see if I can track down a reference for that statistic. At any rate I recommend Dr. Schinnerer's book to you without hesitation. As I mentioned in the introduction, the book is available at www.amazon.com and other online book sellers. You might like to visit Dr. Schinnerer's website, which you'll find at www.guidetoself.com. And you can send email to john@guidetoself.com