
Book Review / Compte rendu

Niemiec, R. M. (2018). *Character Strengths Interventions: A Field Guide for Practitioners*. Boston, MA: Hogrefe. ISBN: 978-0-88937-492-8, 299 pages.

Compte rendu de lecture de Niemiec, R. M. (2018). *Character Strengths Interventions: A Field Guide for Practitioners*.

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ABSTRACT

Character Strengths Interventions: A Field Guide for Practitioners is a clinical handbook that provides a solid conceptual foundation in strengths-based practice in positive psychology. An authority in the field, Dr. Ryan Niemiec guides the reader through the basic concepts, specific challenges, and the actual implementation of a plethora of strategies into clinical practice. Niemiec encourages practitioners to develop simple practices to build a true positive psychology approach to life. His practice is firmly situated in research with applications that practitioners can readily apply. Niemiec provided a guidebook that will be dog-eared by both novice and seasoned practitioners.

RÉSUMÉ

Character Strengths Interventions: A Field Guide for Practitioners est un manuel clinique qui fournit une base conceptuelle solide pour la pratique de la psychologie positive fondée sur les points forts. Le Dr Ryan Niemiec, autorité en la matière, guide le lecteur parmi les concepts de base, les défis particuliers et la mise en application d'une foule de stratégies utiles à la pratique clinique. Il encourage les praticiens et les praticiennes à développer des pratiques simples susceptibles de favoriser une véritable approche de psychologie positive dans la vie. Sa pratique est fermement enracinée dans la recherche et comporte des cas d'utilisation que les praticiens et praticiennes peuvent appliquer directement. M. Niemiec propose donc un manuel qui saura guider aussi bien les praticiens novices que les plus chevronnés.

Dr. Ryan M. Niemiec is well situated to provide a practical field guide that is grounded in scientific evidence for educators and mental health clinicians who want to root their practice in positive psychology. Among his many roles (licensed psychologist, certified coach, workshop leader, and faculty at several universities), Niemiec has been the Education Director at VIA Institute on Character since 2009. His contributions to the field have been acknowledged by the American Psychological Association, the International Positive Psychology Association, and numerous other organizations and associations. Niemiec has authored several books aimed at integrating positive psychology and mindfulness into mainstream psychology. *Character Strengths Interventions* effortlessly bridges science and practice by providing the reader with a theoretical understanding of character, the empirical evidence supporting the interventions, and the practical means to carry them out.

Niemiec organizes the material in such a way that both novice and seasoned mental health clinicians will benefit from starting at the beginning. In Chapters 1 and 2, he explains the concepts (including a “common language” for what is good in humanity) and provides research underlying the best practices with character strengths. Niemiec clearly defines and situates 24 character strengths in up-to-date research. Most importantly, he provides a conceptual understanding of character strengths beyond simple facts and strategies. In Chapter 3, Niemiec presents six integration strategies that guide practitioners to build self-knowledge to support their practice; he labels this the “aware-explore-apply model” (other models are described in the appendix). In Chapters 4 and 5, Niemiec tackles challenges upfront by presenting some “missteps” that are common with strength-based practice and provides specific ways to overcome them. In Chapter 6, he gives a summary of each of the 24 character strengths in the form of handouts that can be passed on directly to clients. Chapter 7 prepares the practitioner for implementing the 70 strategies outlined in Chapter 8. Finally, in the afterword, he lists many other useful resources.

Niemiec wants you to translate knowledge into action. He supports this goal throughout the book with several short task-oriented sections. He embeds strength-based practitioner tips into the content with practical tasks to shift your mindset to see the world through a virtues lens; these tips encourage the practitioner to live the practice. He provides “snapshots” that further explain by relating it to real-world experiences. Tables make it easy to cross-reference research with specific outcomes and with strategies. Throughout the book, he uses tables to summarize material, making it easy to check for specific information. This book will be dog-eared with tabs and corners turned down to allow the practitioner to quickly identify the information they want.

Niemiec packs a lot into one book by attempting to straddle the divide between a traditional handbook that acts as a reference for theory and research and a practical clinical manual that outlines course and sequence. The danger in doing so is that the reader may not start with the information that is most relevant to their circumstance. Niemiec does address this relatively well in Chapter 4: Behavioural Traps, Misconceptions, and Strategies. However, the clinician may fail to see the relevance in the content before reaching this troubleshooting chapter. It may have been prudent to locate this chapter even earlier in the book. Deep in the appendix, he offers a useful checklist for strength-based practitioners; again, easily missed for the less perseverant reader or perhaps the overwhelmed clinician.

For this book to be useful, a positive mindset needs to be embraced; this may be difficult to reconcile for some clinicians who work with more severely disordered clients. As with many books that focus on strength-based approaches, there is a lack of specific direction on how to translate this information into a clinical practice that serves a diverse clientele that may be struggling with more severe issues. Of lesser concern, Niemiec provides several reproducible handouts that are difficult to photocopy due to the smaller size of the book.

Niemiec provides a true field guide that is firmly grounded in research. He shows dedicated practitioners how to integrate what we know into practice immediately.

This book is a definite gem for practitioners wanting to develop their knowledge or for those already well versed in positive psychology who want to build their practice. What you need to know is at your fingertips.

About the Author

Birdie Bezanson is on leave from the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board in Nova Scotia and currently holds an assistant professor position in the Department of Psychology at Acadia University. Dr. Bezanson works with child and youth who have been affected by trauma. A positive psychologist at heart, she utilizes mindfulness and strength-based strategies in teaching, therapy and life.

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