See for [the original Dutch text](https://leadingdoctors.nl/de-3-van-kiki-ik-wens-u-een-nieuw-jaar-vol-positieve-emoties/) and publication in the Newsletter of Leading Doctor’s.

**In this "3 from Kiki," I want to spread positivity**. I've become fascinated—scientifically captivated, even—by the importance and power of positive emotions. These emotions are fundamental building blocks for our happiness, well-being, relationships, resilience, and health.

In the quest to understand what enables individuals to flourish, psychologists have embraced positive emotions such as joy, contentment, interest, love, pride, gratitude, hope, admiration, relief, and enthusiasm. Positive emotions *signal* that we feel good. But there's more. Researchers have demonstrated that positive emotions can also *produce* optimal well-being. Moreover, the impact isn't just fleeting—"I feel happy now"—but extends into the long term. Great news!

**How does it work?** American psychologist Barbara Fredrickson has dedicated her life to explaining this positive phenomenon. She is the founder of the *Broaden-and-Build* theory, which she elaborates on in her highly cited article (*24,000 times!*) “*The Role of Positive Emotions in Positive Psychology*.” In summary, Fredrickson argues that positive emotions open our minds to think more broadly and act more flexibly (*broadening*), creating more space for the development of new behaviors, knowledge, skills, and relationships (*building*). People become more creative, for example, more open to new experiences and feedback, and feel more connected to others. Over time, this makes us stronger—physically, cognitively, and socially. In psychological terms, we build "personal resources," and the evidence for this is compelling.

If you're intrigued by the neuroscience behind it—including the neurotransmitters, neural networks, and hormones involved—you'll appreciate Rebecca Alexander et al.'s comprehensive review *The Neuroscience of Positive Emotions and Affect: Implications for Cultivating Happiness and Wellbeing.* Admittedly, this isn’t light reading for me, but it's so well-structured that I enjoy revisiting it. I’ve learned, for example, that not all positive emotions are the same (compare "pleasure" to "gratitude"; see hedonia vs. eudaimonia), that the happiness levels of people in their twenties and sixties are surprisingly similar, and that the size of our social networks positively correlates with longevity and stress resilience. That sparks positive feelings for me!

**Are positive emotions good for healthcare organizations?** Absolutely. Research shows—as highlighted in an article (see references) by American psychology professor Ed Diener, also known as Dr. Happiness—that positive emotions positively impact employees, teams, and organizational performance. Evidence increasingly supports that employees experiencing positive emotions have more self-confidence, believe more in success, set more ambitious goals, are more creative, and are more engaged. These are valuable qualities for organizations. Creativity, for instance, drives innovation, performance, and growth. Engagement leads to greater employee commitment to the organization, reducing turnover—a crucial factor in today’s tight labor market.

Positive emotions also help with managing stress at work. Gratitude, as a positive emotion, has been shown to be an effective antidote to burnout; it negatively predicts emotional exhaustion and cynicism.

Interestingly, the type of positive emotion experienced matters for specific organizational outcomes. The emotion of “interest,” for example, is associated with job satisfaction, “gratitude” with satisfaction with leaders and colleagues, and “pride” with feeling empowered.

Since healthcare is fundamentally a team effort, it's good to know that positive emotions also contribute to better collaboration, decision-making, and relationships, fostering more trust and less conflict, as Fredrickson predicted in her *Broaden-and-Build* theory. Positive employees foster positive clients; positive leaders inspire more positive employees— this works both ways! Perhaps this is linked to the finding that positivity is contagious.

**In conclusion** Research shows that cultivating and developing positive emotions is beneficial for yourself and your (work) environment. Where to start? In her TedMed talk [*The Positive Effects of Positive Emotions*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PU0QOKIPU9o), Jennifer Stellar offers practical tips. Enjoy watching!

I wish you very positive holidays and, beyond that, a wonderfully positive 2025.

**Kiki Lombarts**
Amsterdam, December 20, 2024

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