

**THE 33 CHILEAN MINERS TRAPPED UNDERGROUND IN THE ATACAMA DESERT.  
A POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY CASE STUDY**

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**ABSTRACT**

To bury suddenly a group as deep as 2,300 ft. underground and leave people trapped and completely isolated in order to study human behavior in such a dramatic situation is ethically prohibited. However this was the real situation faced by 33 miners of San Jose copper mine in the Atacama Desert on August 2010, a tragedy worldwide known. The author volunteered as member of the Rescue Team, so he was a privileged witness of the way miners not only thrive but flourish in face of adversity. The case shows that the core premises and concepts of positive psychology about human being really operate. The key role a positive vision of future plays in tragedy (V. Frankl), the role of positive emotions to broad and build personal resources (B. Fredrickson) and the importance of positive relations to build a high performance team (M. Losada) are highlighted. The case proposes that the 33 miners rescue was successful because miners self-rescue themselves first during the initial 17 days when they had no external support and nobody knew whether they were alive or dead. Emotional regulation, resilience, self-leadership, hive emotions, strengths and leadership appear as natural basic assets individuals and groups have.