

UNDERSTANDING THE POWER OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE THINKING

Once you replace negative thoughts with positive ones, you'll start having positive results.

—Willie Nelson

Positive thinking can be understood in terms of an 'explanatory style'. Your explanatory style is how you explain situations and events; how you interpret, make sense and meaning of how and why things do and don't happen.

When you interpret an event, a situation or circumstances in a positive way, you take a favourable view of past, present and future events, situations and circumstances. You're likely to look for the best in other people, and to view yourself and your abilities in a positive light. You're optimistic – you expect a favourable outcome for future events. You're not unrealistic though – you know that things don't always work out. But if things go wrong – when there are problems – you don't dwell on them; instead you look for positive solutions. You also look for the silver linings; you recognise that often, challenges and difficult situations have a positive aspect to them.

However, if you have a negative way of explaining and interpreting things, you resign yourself to having no control over or solutions to problems. Negative thinkers are pessimistic – they tend to see and anticipate difficulties and problems. In a variety of situations, if you think in negative ways, you may see yourself as a victim; you feel that you've been deceived or cheated and you look to lay blame when things go wrong. Even when good things happen, negative thinkers tend to notice and dwell on the negative parts – the not so good aspects – of a situation.

Let negative thoughts take a hold, and in a variety of situations, you're likely to feel overwhelmed and powerless. But if you can think positively, you'll feel able to manage and do well.

In Practice

It takes but one positive thought when given a chance to survive and thrive to overpower an entire army of negative thoughts. –Dr Robert H. Schuller

What you think and say to yourself can influence what you can and can't do, as shown by this simple exercise. Try it for yourself. You'll need another person to help.

Part 1:

- Ask the other person to stand and extend their dominant arm horizontally, at shoulder level.
- Ask them to think of a time when they failed something – a test, an exam or a job interview, for example. Then ask them to think negative thoughts about themselves: 'I'm weak. I'm stupid. I'm hopeless. I'm pathetic. I'm no good at anything. I can't do this.'
- Ask the person to continue thinking these thoughts. Tell them you are going to stand behind them and attempt to pull their dominant arm down to their side. Ask them to resist you pulling their arm down.

Part 2:

- Now, ask the person to hold up their dominant arm again at shoulder level.
- This time, ask them to think of a time when they succeeded and did well at something – passed a test or exam, achieved something at work, did well in a sport. Then ask them to think positive things about themselves: 'I do my best. I can do well. I am a good person. I am strong. I can do this.'
- Ask them to repeat the positive statements to themselves while you attempt to pull their arm down to your side. Ask them to resist the pull.

Typically, in the first part of the exercise, the person's arm is more likely to give way to your pull. Negativity overwhelms them and it's not easy for them to be strong. However, when the person's thoughts are positive, their body has the ability to resist the force that's pulling their arm down. They are more likely to stay strong and resist your pull.