

# Think positive

## Don't let negativity rule your life

People are needy. We constantly crave approval – be it from our parents, bosses, friends, or strangers. The fascinating thing is that when we receive the approval we thirst for, we tend to shrug it off almost immediately.

Negative comments, however, stay with us. They eat at us, keep us up at night, and occupy our thoughts to a degree that is out of proportion to the positive influences around us. Negativity is far more powerful than most people realise, which is why it is important to understand its true hold on us if we are to move past it or use it to our advantage.

Allowing negativity to get a grip on you does not mean that you are weak. Humans respond to negativity in a more powerful way than positivity as a part of our basic psychology. The term for this is “negativity bias”, and studies have proven that our brains react to negativity swiftly, with more energy, and hold negative events in our long-term memory more effectively than positive events.

A study by Dr. John Cacioppo, a professor from Ohio State University, proved this by testing the response of participants to neutral, positive and negative images. He studied electrical activity in the brain when showing subjects the images, and concluded that there was far more electrical activity when negative images were shown.

Likewise, we are bombarded by negative stories through news networks and the Internet. The news you see on television is not an

accurate reflection of all that is happening in the world. It is, instead, a reflection of all the bad things happening in the world. Some studies suggest that 90 per cent of story leads are negative, because networks know that negative news brings in more viewers.

An online site, outbrain.com, decided to test this idea in the online world. They ran a test between April and July of 2012, analysing the click-through rates of 65,000 story titles on the Internet. The negative headlines had a staggering 63 per cent higher click-through rate than the positive stories.

Since negativity has such a strong hold on us, how can we live without being mired in pessimism and doubt?

One answer is to recognise the power of negativity and put it in its proper perspective. As a professional speaker, I am constantly bombarded with feedback through evaluation forms, online feedback and client analysis. Most of the time, the feedback is extremely positive, and I am grateful for it.

But once in a while, I will receive negative feedback from a participant. More than eight years ago, I facilitated a major community referendum. The day was a hit, and we got the results we were looking for. Ninety-eight people were involved, and I received 97 glowing reviews.

The only negative came from a woman who was 93 years old. She thought I was a bit young to facilitate the event, despite the fact that

I had a decade of experience at that point. I let the comment go, as it was beyond my control to change, but it still stands as the one review I remember. Negativity is truly powerful.

The truth is that I did better than average that day. In speaking, we loosely follow something called the “five per cent rule”, meaning that no matter how good you are there will always be five per cent of the world who won't like you. Wasting your time and mental energy trying to win over the small percentage of those who don't like you or your work is futile. Instead, try to let it go and enjoy life.

Negative comments stand out because they are novel, unique, and say something different. It is hard to ignore them, and as such we tend to give them a disproportionate amount of importance. Seeing the big picture, and recognising that you are on the right track enables you to stay grounded and remember all the good things that you are achieving.

Another way is to minimise negativity where possible. Negativity is impossible to avoid completely, so spending more time in a positive frame of mind will not only make your days more enjoyable, but it will also make your life simpler, happier, and keep you from overanalysing things.

Unplug: once in a while, get outdoors, go do something positive. Marvel at the night sky, spend time with your kids, go for a run or do whatever makes you happy.

I watch less news than I used to,

avoid spending time with negative acquaintances when possible, and try to keep moving forward with my projects and professional ideas. This doesn't mean I am blocking out the realities of life – if something important is happening in the world, I know about it – but it does allow me to spend more time with a smile on my face.

The key is to recognise that negativity affects us, and it is critical to understand, minimise, and filter negative messages so that you can tackle life in the most effective way possible. If you are told something negative, listen to it, see if there is something to learn from it, but then move on. Avoid giving it more power than it deserves.

For a change, try giving extra power to positivity. When someone says something nice to you, hold on to it. Embrace it, thank them and draw energy from it. Life is too short to let negativity win.

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