

Lesson 1

Optimistic Thinking and How It Helps You at Work

Want to know how the top leaders in industry gain leverage over others? They tend to view situations from an optimistic perspective, as this helps motivate them to take risk and pursue their dreams, which can lead to greater success. If you're thinking now that you're a half glass empty kind of person, and see the negative side of things, fear not, as the skill of optimistic thinking can be learned.

"25% of optimism is inheritable... which means 75% is up to you"

Whilst there are factors outside your control, such as socioeconomic status and inherited levels of optimism, there's much potential for improvement, in fact, near to 75% of optimism can be learned and developed. Some people are naturally optimistic and aren't these the people that you're more drawn to? Seem to get those 'just out of reach' promotions? Are invited out more by colleagues? Are in senior management?

If you find yourself wasting hours of each day 'going through the motions,' without taking time to savour positive or enjoyable experiences at work, practising optimistic thinking and realising there are actions you can take, can make so much difference to your life.

Studies have found that optimistic thinking can lower levels of fatigue and emotional exhaustion. This allows your imagination to flourish and helps you achieve your work-based goals and succeed in your professional life, and it improves your ability to think creatively and solve problems.

The key to 'looking on the bright side' is to find purpose in work and life in general. By doing this, your sense of life fulfilment grows, and you're better armed to view the 'glass half full.'

Whilst optimism can lead to happiness and vice versa, optimism is so much more. Wrongly, some believe that optimists see only the positive side of life and ignore stressors at work and at home, when in fact, they approach difficult and stressful situations with greater resolve and productivity, and this leads to reductions in the harmful physical symptoms of stress on the body and mind. Optimists tend to view poor outcomes as temporary and avoid blaming themselves for things that go wrong.

Considering science has proven that optimistic thinking leads to improved cardiovascular health, a stronger immune system, a higher income and stronger relationships, do you need any more convincing that a change in perspective is worth a shot? Experts have also found that optimism is a trait that can be learned and therefore taught. The good news is, that we have plenty of exercises for you to practise optimistic thinking to help you flourish from the benefits it brings.

Optimistic Thinking Can Re-Wire Your Brain

Did you know that positive emotions are linked to left-side activity in the brain, whilst negative moods, such as anger and depression are seen more on the right-side of the brain? The exciting thing is, that by purposefully changing your thought processes you can actually re-wire your brain! A study using a mindfulness intervention over an eight week period, with people with more right-brain activity, showed a shift in emotions to the left. Participants responded feeling more energised, happier and less anxious.

Improving Optimistic Thinking at Work

There are things you can do to bring highlights to your day, create inspiring memories, and plan future events that give you that 'Eureka' moment, and once you're in the habit of thinking this way, it will not only become routine, but a habit that you won't want to break. We're not proposing that you think idealistically, imagining a work life that's impracticable or impossible, but simply that you'll be able to acknowledge good times and know that you can be an agent of change and in charge of lifting yourself out of the boredom, being able to absorb the happier moments more easily. Naturally you'll still experience times at work that are boring, as that's life, but you'll be able to handle these more easily once you're able to notice the highlights.

Have a go at recording all the tasks you undertake at work that you like to do in the table that follows, categorising them into routine, achievement, physical, or social. Recall something that went well at work during your lunch break, for instance, a friendly catch up with a colleague, a successful presentation, a task that gave you a sense of achievement.

PLEASURABLE WORK TASKS

ROUTINE	ACHIEVEMENT	PHYSICAL	SOCIAL

Reflect on the positive event and savour the moment. Jog your memory:

#1. -What were you doing?

#2. -Who were you with?

#3. -Where were you?

#4. -When was it?

#5. -Did you tell anyone else about the experience?

#6. -How did it make you feel on a Likert Scale of 1 – 10, where 10 is 'The Best' and 1 is 'Not at all Good'?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 'Not at all Good' 'The Best'

Homework for the week

Have a go at recording all the tasks you undertake at work that you like to do, using your own table, or the one previously shown, categorising them into routine, achievement, physical, or social.

Next, savour the positive moments using the prompts as listed in 1 to 6 above.