

# Learned Optimism Summary

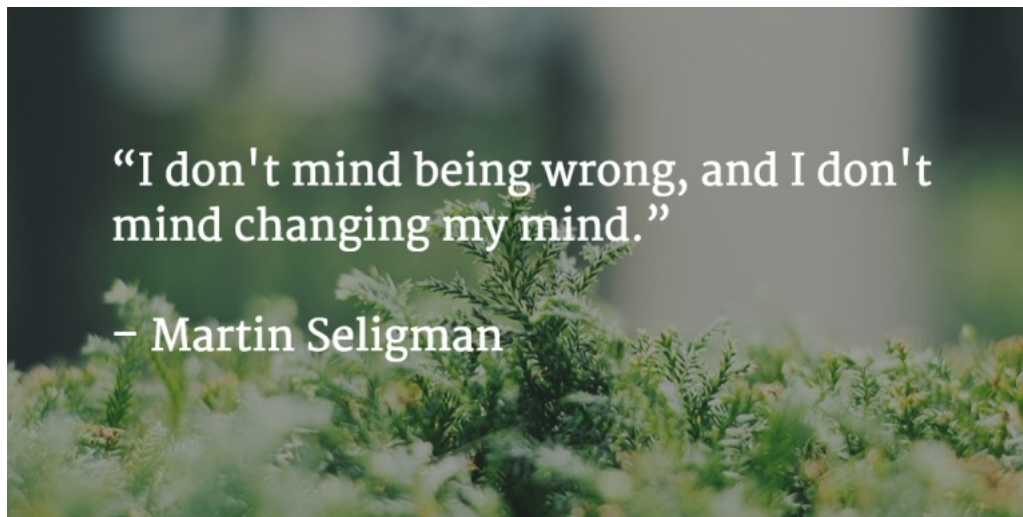
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 [fourminutebooks.com/learned-optimism-summary](https://fourminutebooks.com/learned-optimism-summary)

**1-Sentence-Summary:** *Learned Optimism* digs into why optimists are healthier, happier, and more successful people than pessimists, how both are learned attitudes and what you can do to become an optimist yourself.

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



Do you see some people in your life who just seem to have everything fall into their lap? Who master life as if in cruise control mode, where everything works on autopilot and is super easy?

I know I do.

Martin Seligman, the father of positive psychology, has spent decades of research trying to find out why some people maneuver through their lives so easily.

His answer: **They're optimists.**

He calls optimism and pessimism *explanatory styles*, they are the way in which we explain bad events in our lives.

There are 3 characteristic points of view when looking at problems, in which optimists and pessimists differ.

**1. Optimists see problems as temporary, pessimists as permanent.** Sticking with the example from Mindset, if optimists spill their coffee they won't say "I *always* spill my coffee and ruin my clothes.", but rather "I spilled my coffee *this time*, but I won't spill the next one."

**2. Optimists see problems as specific to a situation, pessimists make them a general case.** Being on a team assignment where one person doesn't deliver their part, a pessimist is likely to say: "This team sucks." and write off the entire team as lazy. An optimist would say: "One person is not very helpful, but I'm sure the rest of the team will do great work."

**3. Optimists see problems as externally caused, pessimists blame themselves.** When getting a divorce, both people will think one of them is the major cause. An optimist will always attribute the failure to an external source, in this case, their former spouse ("He never wanted kids anyway"). The pessimist is likely to blame herself ("I never made time for her that's why she left me).

Luckily, both styles are acquired and **can be learned.**

Until now your explanatory style has been shaped primarily by your **parents** and your **teachers** in school.

Have you ever heard a teacher yell at someone for chatting in class? That's good, because it's an external problem they point to. "You have to listen more closely next time." is a much better statement than "You're just a bad reader." because the latter makes the student internalize the problem.

One of the advantages of **being an optimist is being healthier.**

What's more, optimists are likely to take good care of their bodies, because they believe that their choices will make a difference. Pessimists are prone to junk food and no exercise, as they believe it won't matter.

On the other hand, **pessimism can likely be a cause of depression.** Believing that nothing you do will change anything can of course make you depressed. A study where people had to press buttons to make noises stop found symptoms of depression in them whenever the experiment was rigged so that the buttons had no effect.

**Talent at work is just as overrated as talent in professional sports.** The University of Pennsylvania usually assesses their freshmen according to their SATs, high school grades and achievement test. When they let Seligman segment the new students into optimists and pessimists, it turned out that the optimists exceeded expectations, where pessimists fell behind.

**That same optimism will also carry you through a successful career**, as Seligman's study with Metropolitan shows. He hired people for them who underperformed skill-wise, but showed great optimism. The new employees outperformed even those with better skills.

So what can you do to become an optimist as quickly as possible?

Use the ABC technique by Albert Ellis.

It works like this: When facing a crisis, you note 3 things about it.

*What's the **A**dversity?*

For example you just got fired.

*What is my **B**elief about this?*

For example you believe you did a horrible job and that's why you were let go.

*What is the **C**onsequence of my belief?*

For example you feel depressed and can't get out of bed for 2 weeks.

Go through your recent, negative self-talk and **try to record 3 ABCs**.

Be sure to pick major challenges and differentiate between thoughts and feelings. Telling yourself you're a bad golfer or that you have bad memory is a belief, crying or getting angry are the feelings that follow from your belief.

**How you decide to deal with a negative event determines almost entirely how much it will affect you.** That's why it's important to start recording your ABCs and seeing where you can change your beliefs.

Once you've recorded a few negative beliefs, **start challenging them**. Ask yourself if they're really true, whether there's another explanation and if they're true, what that implies.

Then you can start labeling your thoughts into two categories: **useful and not useful**. Whenever you notice a thought is not useful to you, then you should probably not pursue it any further.

Start thinking of negative events as temporary, specific and external, record your ABCs and know that your attitude is learned – you can change it at any time.

This way, you'll be well on your way to becoming a true optimist.

## **Learned Optimism Review**

This is probably my favorite summary on Blinkist. [Learned Optimism](#) is so packed with actionable advice and great insights, it's hard to condense it any further.

I'm a big fan of positive psychology and this book intersects a lot with [Mindset by Carol Dweck](#), but is much more encompassing.

This is the first book summary I would recommend anyone read as soon as they sign up for Blinkist.

**Who would I recommend the Learned Optimism summary to?**

The 23 year old soccer player whose coach always makes excuses why their team loses, the 19 year old graduate who's worried that her resumé is not perfect and anyone who keeps complaining about what's in the newspaper.

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