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Harold Taylor

# **A Positive Attitude Gets Positive Results**

HAROLD TAYLOR

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# **A POSITIVE ATTITUDE GETS POSITIVE RESULTS**

A Positive Attitude Gets Positive Results

1<sup>st</sup> edition

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Harold Taylor, owner of TaylorInTime, has been speaking, writing, and conducting training programs on the topic of effective time management for over 40 years. He has written over 20 books, including a Canadian bestseller, *Making Time Work for You*, originally published in 1981.

He has developed over fifty time management products that have sold in 38 countries around the world. His time management newsletter, now in electronic format, has been published for over 35 years and he has had over 250 articles accepted for publication in various magazines.

A past director of the National Association of Professional Organizers, Harold received their Founder's Award in 1999 for outstanding contributions to the organizing profession. He received the CSP (Certified Speaking Professional) designation in 1987 from the National Speakers Association. In 1998 the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers inducted him into the Canadian Speaking Hall of Fame. And in 2001, he received the Founder's Award from the Professional Organizers in Canada. The award has been renamed the "Harold Taylor Award" in his honor.

Prior to his speaking and writing career, Harold held management positions in industry for twelve years at Canadian Johns Manville and American-Standard and was a teaching master in the business division of Humber College in Toronto for eight years. He has been an entrepreneur for over fifty years, incorporating four companies during that time.

His first company, Harold Taylor Enterprises Ltd., established in 1967, was a multiple association management company that also published four magazines and a line of greeting cards, and sponsored public seminars and management training programs. Since 1981, when he incorporated the time management company, Harold Taylor Time Consultants Inc., he has personally presented over 2000 workshops, speeches, and keynotes on the topic of time and life management.

Harold lives in Sussex, New Brunswick, Canada. He writes e-books for Bookboon.com (31 to date), publishes a weekly blog article at his website (also posted on Facebook & Twitter), a free quarterly time management newsletter for his 2000 plus subscribers, sends out regular tweets, and speaks to seniors and other groups on "growing older without growing old" in addition to "time and life management." His website is [taylorintime.com](http://taylorintime.com).

# INTRODUCTION

During my career as a time management trainer and facilitator, I have learned that some people feel that they have little control over their time. They believe that their lives are completely controlled by external events. Those people will likely gain little, if anything, from attending time management seminars or reading books on the subject. Not because their lives are controlled by others, but because they think they are. Attitude is an important consideration when attempting to improve a person's time management skills.

The most important part of any time management program is not the list of ideas or techniques issued to the participants. It is the portion that convinces the individuals that they do, in fact, have choices. That they can control certain aspects of their job and life, and that they are the ones responsible for initiating that control.

If people are convinced that time management training will not help them, it will not. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Great ideas can be within their grasp, but they will not even reach for them because they are convinced that they will not do a bit of good.

There was an experiment conducted long ago that involved a large pike swimming around in a tank surrounded by minnows which he gobbled up as he became hungry. Then a glass partition was introduced, separating the pike from his food. Every time he would grab for a minnow, he would only succeed in banging his snout against a glass wall. Soon he came to realize that going after the fish was futile, and he stopped trying. Then the glass partition was removed, and the minnows could swim about in the tank as before. The pike knew better than to try to eat them, however, and slowly starved to death amid all that food.

The pike's reality was in his mind, but it prevented him from taking advantage of all that food. Similarly, many people have an incorrect view of reality that results in failure to take advantage of opportunities that may be obvious to others. If they believe they have no control over their lives, they are right.

Feeding time management techniques to someone who will not use them is futile. You must first show by example how they do have a degree of control over their lives. The ideas, techniques and systems are secondary.

Although my prime interest in attitude was the impact it had on improving time management practices through a positive approach to change, its usefulness is far greater. A good attitude is not only important because it motivates you to make changes and apply different ideas to your job and life. It also improves your working relationships, encourages coworkers and

others, reduces stress, improves your leadership skills, accelerates personal growth in your career, and even impacts your health and well-being.

Your attitude is more than just your personality. It involves positive thinking, a sense of humor, happiness, mindfulness, and more. And it is not just something you have or do not have. It can be developed and improved by the power of your mind. This book will tell you how.

David Rock, author of *Your brain at work*, says that one of the most common concerns he hears from organizations is that the more technical their people are, the worse their social skills seem to be. And the 2018 Labor Day survey indicated that 49% of Americans are dissatisfied with their jobs. Employees who are unhappy at work slack off in hard to detect ways and are less likely to generate their share of new ideas. There is a need for a more positive outlook on the part of all members of an organization.



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# 1 THE NEED FOR A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

## 1.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF ATTITUDE ALSO TO TOC

Matthew Lieberman, in his book, *Social: why our brains are wired to connect*, mentions a poll that asked past employees which they would prefer, a raise or a better boss. Two-thirds answered that they would prefer a better boss to a higher salary. A good attitude on the part of the manager is an essential requirement if the manager is to be a leader as well.

Dennis Shackel, in his book, *Five seconds at a time*, says that a successful leader recognizes and teaches followers that attitude is so much more important than either skills or knowledge. As proof, he told of an exercise he used in his workshops, which involved asking participants to write down all the characteristics of a good leader that they could think of. He then asked them to write down K, S, or A beside each characteristic, indicating whether it involved either knowledge, skill, or attitude. (A widely used classification system of human behavior.) The percentages tended to average out to 2% knowledge, 4% skill, and 94% attitude. Attitude included such things as perseverance, commitment, courage, optimism, gratefulness, confidence, and hope.

*"I don't produce thoughts; my thoughts to produce me."*

- Charles S. Jacobs

Dennis Shackel claims that attitude is a more critical quality than knowledge and skill combined and gives emphasis to the claim that successful leadership requires effective thought choices. You can control your attitude by controlling your thoughts.

Research indicates that optimism helps you to advance in life, regardless of your age. It stands to reason that the more positive you are about your future, the more you can handle life's setbacks. Optimists also earn greater pay and work longer and harder than pessimists. An insurance company tested their sales agents for optimism and discovered that those who scored in the top half in optimism sold 37% more insurance than those in the pessimistic bottom half.

Charles S. Jacobs, in his book, *Management rewired*, says the most effective managers, according to neuroscience, are the ones who do the least in the traditional sense of management. Unfortunately, those who are promoted to management are usually the high achievers in an organization who find it difficult to back off from what made **them** a success. They adopt a one size fits all method when it comes to working and managing.



## 1.2 PESSIMISTS SELDOM PROSPER

Dr. Edward Creagan in his book, *How not to be my patient*, refers to research indicating that pessimists have a 19 percent shorter lifespan than optimists. Bernie Siegel in his book, *Love, medicine and miracles*, mentions research that reported a ten-year survival rate of 75 percent among cancer patients who reacted to the diagnosis with a fighting spirit, compared with a 22 percent survival rate among those who saw their situation as hopeless. A positive attitude could save your life.

*"Acting positively flows from thinking positively."*

- Jo Owen

You have a choice of saying that the glass is half empty or that it is still half full. And saying it out loud makes a bigger impression on your mind, as does writing it down, repeating it to yourself, and telling it to others. When my late wife was told that the survival rate beyond 5 years for her stage of ovarian cancer was 5%, she immediately said something to the effect that, "Then I will just have to buckle up my faith and my positive attitude, and aim for that 5% window." The doctors obviously did not share her optimism, but she survived for over ten years. Optimism and a positive attitude do payoff.

A negative attitude can cause stress and lower the body's immune system. One Harvard study showed that those with the most negative attitudes at 25 suffered the most illnesses in their forties, fifties, and sixties. Another study involved 69 women with breast cancer who were asked three months after their surgery how they viewed their disease and how it affected their lives. 5 years later, 75% of those who had responded positively and with a fighting spirit were still alive compared with less than half the other patients. There is little doubt that attitude can have either a negative or positive impact on your health, productivity, and well-being.

Bad attitudes are frequently the result of bad experiences, such as working in a company that does not support your individual beliefs or values, or for a boss with whom you cannot relate, or working at a job that you dislike. But bad attitudes can change to good attitudes when there is no cognitive dissonance - no conflict between your own beliefs, values, goals, and purpose, and those of the company, your boss, or your coworkers.

## 1.3 ACTION IS THE KEY TO CHANGE

Someone who claims, "I'd be a positive thinker, but it probably wouldn't make any difference," is not a positive thinker. Attitude can make the difference between success and

failure. What other resources do we have that are any greater than the next person's? We all have the same number of hours in a day. Our physical abilities are similar in most cases. Among our associates or competitors there is not that much variation in our experience or education. The big difference is our **attitude**. Do we have that desire to succeed? Dr. Maxwell Maltz, author of the book, *Psycho-cybernetics*, maintained that you may never realize your full potential unless you assume you have it. His simple formula was to assume it is possible, rehearse doing it, and do it! All the brain research seems to indicate that this simple formula is basically true, except that the process the brain goes through cannot be described in those simple terms.

*"Life is a gift, and it would be a tragedy if we received such a gift and failed to unwrap it."*

-Kevin McCarthy

You must act the way you want to feel. Smile. Take a front seat at meetings. Make eye contact with your customers and associates. Visualize success and play the part. Act confident and you will **be** confident.

There is nothing mysterious or supernatural about the power of positive thinking. Our motivation to strive towards a goal is determined by the product of our desire to reach the goal and the strength of our belief that a particular action will lead to the achievement of that goal. This is an accepted theory of motivation. And the **belief** that our efforts will result in achievement is positive thinking.

If our belief is strong enough, if we think positively, we will be motivated to work hard towards our goal. But there is a catch. Positive thinking by itself will not achieve goals. There is effort involved as well. You cannot wish things to happen. You must make them happen. But if you think positively, you will be motivated to work towards your goal despite fears and temporary setbacks. With a positive attitude you **will** remain in control.

You will not allow other people to control your emotions and reduce your effectiveness. After all, if someone refuses to buy your product, for example, or criticizes you personally, it is not their refusal or the criticism that affects you. It is your **reaction** to their refusal or criticism. Do not allow others to control how you feel. Take the positive approach. Think about the dozens or hundreds of people who **do** buy your product and think you are great. And get on with your job.

## 1.4 HOW DO YOU DEVELOP A POSITIVE ATTITUDE?

Tell your brain what you want. Feed your brain positive information. Studies in neuroscience prove that we can change our brains just by **thinking**. One example is the placebo effect. It is not the sugar pill or saline solution that does the healing; it is your **belief** that it will cure you that prompts the healing. According to Joe Dispenza, in his book, *Evolve your brain*, “what we think about, and where we focus our attention is what we neurologically become.”

*“A man is what he thinks about all day long.”*

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

Your brain already has fixed beliefs and habits formed over a lifetime of experiences and environmental influences. If the result is negativity, you can change this by managing your brain. If you were your brain, this would be impossible since you would already have your “mind” made up.

But you are **not** your brain. You are “the mind within the brain,” as the title of A. David Redish’s book about how we make decisions and how those decisions go wrong, suggests. **You** (including your consciousness) are your mind. The mind resides within the prefrontal cortex of the brain according to Joe Dispenza, and whether it is without substance (perhaps being energy) is yet to be confirmed scientifically. But one thing is certain. You are able, through focused thought, to change the neurological make up of your brain and make physiological changes to your body.

The key is **focused** thinking. That is why meditation helps. Joe Dispenza, in his book, *You are the placebo*, mentions that the most difficult part of mentally healing his six broken vertebrae was a continual loss of attention. He believes we spend too much attention and energy thinking about what we do **not** want, instead of what we **do** want.

So, when you feed your brain with those positive thoughts mentioned earlier, accept the fact that it may be difficult concentrating on what you want; but you will become more focused with practice.

Not only can your mind influence your brain and your brain influence your body, your body can influence your brain as well. Sian Beilock, in her book, *How the body knows its mind*, explains how Botox injected into frown wrinkles can help cure depression. It not only eliminates the frown lines, but also the ability to frown. Botox contains a neurotoxin that paralyzes muscles in which it is injected. Physicians believe that not being able to express negative emotions reduces negative feelings.

## 1.5 MAINTAINING A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Action is the essential ingredient of goal achievement and success. Action relies on the brain. Healthy brains are wired to continuously set, act on, and achieve goals. But just as you manage your business efficiently to make a profit, you must manage your brain efficiently to maximize the use of your time.

*"You have to expect things of yourself before you can do them."*

– Michael Jordan

Your brain can outperform the greatest computer ever manufactured by man. But just as a man-made computer relies on the users to operate them efficiently, so does your brain rely on you.

Like man-made computers, your brain can pick up viruses. Not a coronavirus, but viruses in the form of negativity, depression, or anger. Your brain can become overloaded and sluggish and even crash. It can have inefficient or outdated programs installed so that it fails to operate at full potential. Or it can be physically abused and mistreated by such things as excessive alcohol, drugs, physical trauma, or lack of sleep or proper nutrition.

**You** are not your brain. You must believe that to control it. Visualize yourself as the **mind** – the user – controlling the brain. You can program it to be enthusiastic, happy, positive, focused, and attentive, flexible, persistent, resilient, and so on. Or you can program it to be negative, cynical, and despondent.

Richard Davidson, in his book, *The Emotional Life of Your Brain*, suggests that every day for a week, do these three exercises.

1. Write down one positive characteristic of yourself and one positive characteristic of someone you regularly interact with.
2. Express gratitude regularly. Pay attention to times you say, "thank you."
3. Compliment others regularly. Keep an eye out for opportunities to do so, such as a job well done at work.

He claims that likely you will find that positive emotions stick around a little longer and your sense of optimism and possibility swells.

## 2 AVOIDING A NEGATIVE ATTITUDE

### 2.1 ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE, ELIMINATE THE NEGATIVE

If you were around in the late 40's and 50's you would recognize this heading as the name of a song made popular in 1945 by Johnny Mercer and the Pied Pipers. You can still listen to it on [YouTube](#). It might help get you in the right mood.

Neurologists tell us that we tend to remember the negative things that happen to us better than the positive things - except when it involves emotional events that really make an impression, such as your wedding day.

Exposure to nonstop negativity can disrupt learning, memory, attention, and judgment according to Robert Sapolsky, professor of neurology and neurological sciences at Stanford University. Researchers have linked negative emotions to increased risk for illness, and positive emotions to health and longevity.

*"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act by a habit."*

- Aristotle

June J Pilcher, a psychologist at Clemson University, says the human brain is more attentive to negative events – probably because of a survival mechanism keeping us alert for life-threatening situations. According to the March/April 2016 issue of Scientific American Mind, this was demonstrated in two studies published in 2015 in the Journal of Psychosomatic Research.

### 2.2 NEGATIVITY – THE FATAL ATTRACTION

Negativity is more common than you may think. Robert Leahy in his book, The worry cure, claims that 38% of people say they worry every day, and more than 19 million Americans are chronic worriers.

If you let it, your brain will take any thought about your health or financial problems or job insecurity or a disagreement with your spouse and create worse case scenarios to worry about. According to an article in Scientific American Mind, research shows that "the more we dwell on negative thoughts, the more the threats feel real, and the more they will repeat in our skulls, sometimes uncontrollably."

Trying to put a negative thought out of your mind only tends to make it hang on that much longer. It is like trying to ignore a song that replays repeatedly in your mind. Or trying **not** to think of a pink elephant. Back in 1987, Daniel Wegner, a psychologist at Harvard University, conducted an experiment in which he asked volunteers to talk about any topic, and at one point interrupted the monologues and told the speakers **not** to think of a white bear. They were told to ring a bell if they **did**. Not surprisingly, on average, the bell rang six times in the next 5 minutes.

*"When we are experiencing a negative emotion, we're not likely to notice any positive possibilities and openings."*

- Mark Bowden

You can blame this knee jerk reaction to start worrying on your core brain. Our instinctive behaviors, such as checking our iPhones when we hear a beep and glancing out the window when we hear a noise outside, is a product of the inherited survival instincts of our core brain. Sometimes referred to as our "primitive brain" or "reptilian brain," it consists of a brain stem and adjoining parts that sit on top of our spinal column. It is essential for survival since it controls our heart rate, breathing, hunger, and anything else we need for survival.

The core brain is programmed to keep us alive. And in doing so, at times it causes us to react first and think later. Michael Gazzaniga, in his book "Who's in charge? Free will and the science of the brain," gives the example of an encounter with a snake. The core brain takes a non-conscious shortcut through the amygdala, which keeps track of everything. If a pattern associated with danger in the past is recognized by the amygdala, it sends an impulse along a direct connection to the brainstem which activates the "fight or flight" response and rings the alarm. You automatically jump back before you realize why. If you are asked later why you jumped, you would say you thought it was a snake. But you jumped before you were **even conscious** of the snake. That is what I call a quick reaction!

But it is instinctive to react to **anything** that could inconvenience or endanger us. Since your core brain is concerned with your survival, when the truth about something is unknown, the safest reaction is to fear the worst. So, if you get an e-mail from the boss asking to see you in the morning, your **first** reaction is to wonder **what you did wrong** rather than you are about to be offered a promotion. You mull over the past events in your mind to see what it could have been that you did wrong.

According to Mark Bowden, in his book, Tame the primitive brain, negative emotions can cause us to block off potentially positive experiences. It is no surprise then, that research has shown that it takes nine positive comments from a boss to make up for one negative comment. When you talk to your employees or anyone, for that matter, choose your words

carefully. Neurologically speaking, hurting words and physical hurts are registered in the same pain centers of the brain. That is why Sian Beilock in her book, *How the body knows its mind*, says that a daily dose of Tylenol diminishes the hurt feelings that often accompany being socially teased, spurned, or rejected.

*"It is choice, not chance, that determines your destiny."*

- Jean Nidetch

Since your brain remembers negative events, which are usually more emotional than normal happenings, do not be surprised if that employee or family member never seems forget that time you lost your temper and yelled at her in anger. Another reason you should be in control of your attitude. When you are in a bad mood, it might be wise to warn someone **before** you lash out. Or better still, do not agree to meet anyone, or listen to their ideas, or schedule a performance appraisal, if you feel upset about something.

## 2.2 RESIST THOSE NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

Negativity is the default setting for your primitive or core brain, since that prepares you for the worst, and you must appeal to your executive function – those brain-based skills located in the prefrontal cortex, to think logically about the situation. Do not let your core brain have the last word.

The tendency is to focus on the negative. And that has been my experience. As a professional speaker and seminar leader for over 50 years, whenever I spotted a bad rating or negative comment on one of the evaluation sheets, it would ruin my evening. Despite the number of good ratings and favorable comments, if there were one or more negative ones, they would sap the joy out of my experience. I loved speaking, but my brain would keep reminding me of those few negative comments.

That is, until I finally accepted the fact that you cannot please everyone, and that evaluations simply reflected on my seminar or my speech and did nothing to attack me as a person or question my value. Whenever I start feeling self-doubt or question my own abilities, I intentionally recall the successes, the good ratings, and the one time only when I received a standing ovation. It is OK to have your ego boosted now and again to offset the bruises it has taken in the past.

Negative thinking leads to dwelling on problems. Thinking positively focuses on opportunities. A happier, healthier lifestyle is more important than ever, and along with it, an attitude

that tends to stress-proof your life. It is important to get sufficient sleep, daily exercise, and social support. But it is equally important to be aware of the good things that happen to you – those positives amid negative events.

## 2.3 PERSISTENCE CAN OVERCOME NEGATIVITY

Someone once said that if it were not for optimists, pessimists would not realize how miserable they were. But there are more advantages to optimism than uncovering the pessimists. Optimism appears to be a prerequisite to success. A sunny outlook appears to melt problems and cause setbacks to slip right by. Most failures are caused by quitting, and people with rosy outlooks do not quit easily. Ninety percent of all failures come from quitting.

*"Through neuroplasticity, the more you experience negativity,  
the more negative you become."*

– David Perlmutter

Martin Seligman, a psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania, claims that the link between optimism and performance is basically persistence. And persistence gets results. Take the example of a salesperson who persists in making one more call each day. That is 5 extra calls each week - 250 additional calls each year - resulting in a significant increase in sales.

But to persist, the person must be optimistic about the outcome of those extra calls. If the salesperson adopts a pessimistic "what's the use" attitude there will be no motivation to put forth the extra effort. Research has shown that optimists get more done and are more successful than pessimists. If you asked a pessimist about this, they would simply insist that they were being realistic. You must be **realistic** when setting goals; but be **optimistic** when working on them.

The world is filled with people who have succeeded because they refused to quit. In the field of writing, for instance, Thor Heyerdahl, author of *Kon Tiki*, was turned down by 20 publishing houses before his book was finally accepted by Rand McNally. Lawrence Sanders' *Peter Principle* was turned down by 17 publishing houses before it was finally accepted. The author of *Little Women* received a letter from a well-known Boston publisher. "Stick to your teaching Miss Alcott. You will never be a writer." Other "rejects" include *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, *Love Story*, *The Godfather*, *Exodus*, and *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*. Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen were rejected by 33 publishers before their *Chicken Soup for the Soul* was finally accepted. But the authors were optimistic and persisted.



## 3 PUT A POSITIVE SPIN ON IT

### 3.1 REFRAMING IN ACTION

Reframing is expressing a concept, idea, or product differently. When we change our point of view on any given situation, the facts remain the same, but a deliberate shift is made in how we see it. We are reframing when we see a problem as a challenge and can imagine positives coming from negative situations. We can choose to move our experience from a negative frame to a more hopeful one.

Reframing is the general change in a person's mindset, whether it be a positive or negative change. Someone who is basically an optimist, creative, and has a sense of humor, is usually quite adept at reframing. But like most things, the more you do it, the better you become at reframing.

*"An optimistic attitude is acquired, not inherited, and most people can achieve it. "*

– Alan Loy McGinnis

When you paint a picture in someone's mind, it is all in the way you frame it. Marketers do not say the food product is 10% fat; they say it is 90% fat free. It has been proven that people rate a hamburger as tastier and less greasy if it is labeled 75% lean rather than 25% fat, according to Wray Herbert's book, *On second thought*. The way you word something makes a difference. We do know, for example, that grocery items advertised at four for two dollars outsells those sold for 50 cents each. Nothing has changed except the buyer's perception.

Studies of queueing show that we are much more patient when we are given an idea of how long will be waiting in a lineup instead of wondering whether it will be 5 minutes or 2 hours. So, at long lines in Disneyland, estimated wait times are posted at various spots. They pad these estimated times, so you always get to the next posting ahead of schedule and you are happy that you reach the head of the line more quickly than you had expected. This is also a form of reframing.

Neuromarketers have tested various vouchers for a car wash. One had 8 blank circles that had to be stamped before getting a free car wash. They made up another voucher with 10 circles instead of eight, but with 2 of them already stamped. This latter one was more effective. They were still required to purchase 8 car washes before receiving a free one, but two of the ten circles were already stamped so the customer was already a fifth of the way

there! That motivated them to continue. 34% used it for all 8 car washes compared to 19% of those using the one with only 8 blank circles.

Martin Lindstrom, author of the book, *“Buyology,”* claims that neuromarketing isn’t about implanting ideas in people’s brains or forcing them to buy what they don’t want to buy – it’s about uncovering what’s already inside their heads. Seth Godin, in his book, *All marketers are liars*, sees frames as “the words and images and interactions that reinforce a bias someone is already feeling.” He even sees euphemisms as a form of framing. So, garbage collectors could be called sanitary engineers, and committees could be called task forces. People might be reluctant to serve on a committee since they have a reputation of being involved in a series of boring meetings where they take minutes and waste hours, whereas a task force appears to be a more important, action-oriented body that gets results.

*“I know from long experience that what people say they do and what they actually do are different.”*

-Paco Underhill

Neuromarketing is thriving today as more and more research uncovers more and more ways of understanding, **and** influencing what people buy.

Researchers have argued that describing fuel efficiency in terms of gallons per mile, as opposed to miles per gallon, would give a better sense of how much a car saves in gas and emissions. But perhaps reframing it would not be as impressive. What is true when buying a product is also true when you are selling yourself or someone else on an idea. What you believe is frequently what you get.

### **3.2 REFRAMING THE CONCEPT OF TIME MANAGEMENT**

There is little doubt that Frederick Winslow Taylor, the father of scientific management, had a great influence on how we manage today. Except that we do not have to design a shovel that allows our workers to move the ideal amount of twenty-one and a half pounds of coal into a blast furnace using the one most efficient swing of their arms. Thanks to technology, those types of jobs have been eliminated.

But Taylor’s approach to work eventually invaded the office under the name of efficiency, and workflow, and time and motion study. When I graduated from college in 1956, I walked alongside those individuals with clipboards and stopwatches as they set time standards for every task. And it led to my eventual career in time management some twenty years later.

In those early days of time management training, when I tried to explain how to work most efficiently and effectively, I was confronted with resistance, and the belief that their companies were only attempting to get more work from them. I could not deny that because it was true. But there was more to it than that. It also made the jobs easier for the workers and provided information and skills that they could apply during their lifetime, both at work and in their personal lives. And the more profitable their companies became, the better it became for the workers both in terms of salary and job security. And the worker would become more valuable to their company or any future employer.

But bad experiences in their past had already implanted a negative vision of time management in their minds. A negative attitude can minimize any gains made in training. It prompted me to reframe the description and intent of time management. I no longer described it as a process that allowed one to get more things done in less time, but a way to get **fewer** things done, but things of **greater importance**, in the time available. The focus was on **prioritizing**. And rather than a one size fits all philosophy, I maintained that the only time management system that would work effectively for them was one that they either developed themselves or adapted to their own needs. We are all individuals with different personalities, work habits, work environments, and personal and organizational goals. So, we cannot all do the same things in the same way. Some of this philosophy is evident in my book, [Time to be productive](#), published by Bookboon.

*"The higher you go in an organization, the more your soft skills come into play, and the more important your attitude - the way you think and feel and behave in the presence of others."*

– Swartz, Chisholm, and Brown, authors, Neuroscience for leadership.

I encouraged people to design their own planners as I had done - ones that allowed them to schedule personal time as well, and so I included evening hours and weekends in the planner. I promoted drawing up personal policies as well as corporate policies and suggested their personal values should not conflict with corporate values, and vice versa. What is good for the individual is also good for the company. I would rather have a motivated individual working for me for only one year than an unmotivated individual working for me until his or her retirement. And this was during a time when having worked for three different companies within five years labeled you as a "job hopper," and was viewed as a liability when seeking employment, rather than the asset it is today.

In other words, I reframed time management so it would be seen in a more positive light, a win-win strategy that would help both the company and the individual. I found that

people were more receptive to the ideas when we talked of personal policies and personal goals, along with corporate policies and corporate goals. We talked about life balance, what to do when the boss won't delegate, how to say no when you are overwhelmed, along with working smarter, not harder, how to prioritize, why we should not rely on To Do lists, how best to get organized, and so on.

It pays to put a positive spin on situations that on the surface might appear negative. And this could apply to meetings, performance reviews, report writing and anything else that recur on a regular basis.

### 3.3 REFRAMING IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Positive people are reframing all the time as they actively seek to find more positive ways of interpreting stressful situations or problems. The more they are involved in lifelong learning, reading, and studying in other fields of interest, the more creative they become, and more adept at reframing.

The mother who kept her child from pulling ornaments off the Christmas tree by putting the tree into the playpen instead of the child, was reframing the situation. And the researcher who told individuals exhibiting impulsivity that it was a sign of creativity was reframing a negative personality trait. Those individuals performed better on creative tasks than others who had not been told this, showing that reframing can lead to new behaviors.

*"Optimists know how to keep themselves motivated and approach their problems with a can-do philosophy."*

– Alan Loy McGinnis

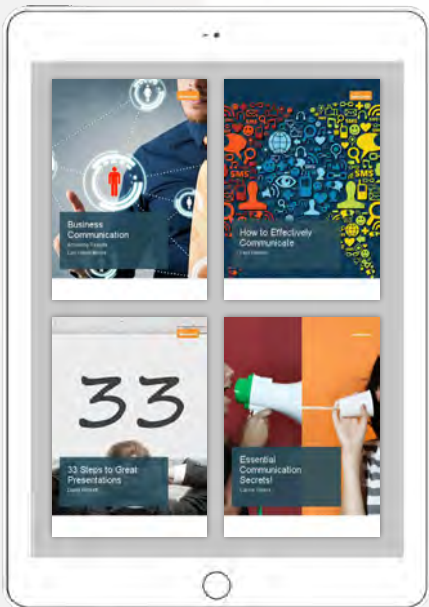
Reframing can turn lemons into lemonade. Consider Procter & Gamble's ivory soap, the result of an accident during production when air was mixed into the soap mixture. The air made the soap lighter than water and it floated. They marketed it as "the soap that floats," and you can see the advantage of that when taking a bath. It is probably still the company's best-known product. And 3M's post-it notes, another accident with no apparent use for a glue that only stuck lightly and retained its stickiness - until an employee used them as bookmarks that would remain in place.

There is a fine line between creativity and reframing. Reframing is taking literally anything, whether a product, the personality trait, a problem, or whatever, and trying to find something good or better in it. Reframing involves creativity, perseverance, and most of all, a positive attitude.

### 3.4 STRENGTHEN YOUR EXECUTIVE SKILLS

Reframing requires cognitive control - the ability to change the way we think about something. Self-control is essential if you want to develop and retain a positive attitude. In fact, all the executive skills, those brain-based skills that reside in the prefrontal cortex, including such things as flexibility, emotional control, and goal directed persistence, are important.

Every time you successfully use any of these skills, you are strengthening them. But you can also exercise both your body and your brain through physical exercise, and such things as mindfulness, meditation, quality relationships, stress reduction, and so on. For a discussion of these skills, you might refer to my book, [Strengthen your brain's executive skills](#), published by Bookboon.



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## 4 LEARNING HOW TO FOCUS

### 4.1 PRACTICE VISUALIZATION

An old issue of Psychology Today reported on the use of video playbacks of athletes. David Drazin, a clinical psychologist, created tapes of athletes at their best, winning a race, beating an opponent at tennis, or sinking a putt. The videotapes were voiced over with commentary from the athletes describing the sensations and thoughts they had at the time. The athletes watched the tapes immediately before competing to give themselves a boost in self-confidence. According to a study completed by Drazin on the effectiveness of these tapes, golfers who viewed tapes of themselves at their best had the highest scores in “putting” competitions.

*“Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference.”*

– Winston Churchill

A further example of visualization in action was provided on an audio recording produced by the late Jack Kinder, Jr. Two lowest ranked members of a California State tennis team evidently shot to almost instant stardom after participating in a mind-programming process. The tennis players were videotaped every day during practice and all the mistakes and bad shots edited out. The composite tape eventually produced showed the players playing to perfection, making faultless serves, volleys, and shots. The tennis players viewed these edited tapes of themselves and practiced what they saw. Within two weeks they had changed their lives and became undefeated representatives of their college team. By changing how they viewed themselves, they became successful at what they did.

Bill Glass, All-America football great, during one of his talks, told the story of Jim Brown, who had gained over 200 yards against New York. When asked after the game how he had managed to get himself so “up” to perform the way he did, Jim Brown replied that all week long before the game, he saw himself in his imagination doing the job - catching passes, making blocks, end runs - reacting to every conceivable situation. And when he did perform well, he was not surprised.

Athletes who do well see themselves doing well, long before the game. If you want to be successful in what you do, you must burn into your mind a picture of what you want to become. Norman Vincent Peale, in his book, Positive imaging, claimed there is a tendency in human nature to become precisely what we imagine ourselves to be. It goes further than “positive thinking”, since you do not merely think about a hoped-for goal, you visualize it intensely.

So, visualize what you want to become. See yourself managing your own clothing store, or speaking to an audience of 2000 people, or designing and manufacturing the novel children's game you have been thinking about. Visualize in detail. See yourself performing, taking specifications, giving specific orders - and collecting and depositing specific checks. See yourself achieving those goals you set for yourself.

## 4.2 THE NEED FOR MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness involves being in the moment mentally as well as physically. For example, you could be at home or on a golf course and yet mentally be back at the office thinking about the project you are working on or worrying about the work piling up in your inbox. Likewise, you could be working on a project at the office and yet be concerned about something at home. In either case your body is in one place and your mind in another.

*"We live in the age of distraction. Get one of life's sharpest paradoxes is that your brightest future hinges on your ability to pay attention to the present. "*

- Jay Dixit

Gretchen Rubin, in her book *The happiness project*, relates her experience of driving home with no recollection of going from point A to point B. She said she is sometimes terrified because she has no recollection of watching the road. This is the result of multitasking, where the second task could be just thinking about something else, being preoccupied with other thoughts. It can be even more terrifying if you consider going through life this way, preoccupied with thoughts of one thing or another and not remembering half of what you did. That is why it is so important for your body and your mind to be in the same place at the same time. Scientists claim that being in the *now* calms the mind and elevates brain function as well as reduces stress. When your mind is rapidly switching from one thought to another, your creativity is at a low.

Michael Carroll, in a *Mindful Magazine* article, mentioned a 2015 Gallup poll, which found that 67% of Americans come to work disengaged. And research shows that when we are checked out at work, we are more stressed, less productive, and less willing to offer an innovative idea. The challenge is to come to work with an open mind and a positive attitude.

Mindfulness means living in the moment and awakening to experience. To enjoy your experience of being with your family or on a golf course or lounging on a beach, your mind must be centered on what you are doing at the time – not thinking about the past or worrying about the future. Our minds are frequently working in the future or the past:

they seem to be its default settings. You can be mindful at any time, and dwell on the present as it happens. But it takes practice.

### 4.3 THE BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness precludes multitasking, which is distracting. Mindfulness forces you to focus on whatever you are doing at the time. For example, if you are physically present with your spouse, you should not be mentally at work and vice versa.

Mindfulness improves your attention span and concentration – factors that are critical to resisting the lure of technologies and other interruptions in this digital age of speed. You could refer to the “gorilla test” described in the book, *The invisible gorilla*, where many of the students are so intently watching players passing a ball back and forth, they never notice a fake gorilla walking onto the court.

*“Mindfulness boosts the classic attention network in the brain’s frontal-parietal system that works together to allocate attention.”*

– Richard Davidson, neuroscientist.

Mindfulness has been proven to decrease stress and relieve the pressures of a busy day – factors that are also at odds with a positive attitude. Stress has been associated with health problems, such as heart disease, diabetes, and obesity. Because of this you might want to start with some mindfulness practices such as meditation or yoga. Or get organized first. You should find it easier to stay organized once you have purposefully set your direction in life and have learned to live with stress. Refer to my book, [Making stress work for you](#), published by Bookboon, if you need help in this area.

### 4.4 HOW TO PRACTICE MINDFULNESS

There are many ways to develop mindfulness, including more formal meditation, yoga, and controlled breathing and relaxation exercises. But you can also practice daily simply by being “in the now” as you go about your activities both at and away from work.

Using an example of driving or walking to work, you might try observing the street names, location of the various stores and service stations, and generally being aware of your surroundings. Be in the moment. Living in the moment, defined as mindfulness, is a



state of active, open, intentional attention to the present. And it will move you from peak performance to peak experiences.

There are other benefits of mindfulness besides focus. An article in the special 2017 “Mindfulness” edition of Time magazine, mentions that according to 2013 research out of the *University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University*, mindfulness practice can shrink the brain’s jumpy fight or flight center, the amygdala. And the *American psychological Association* feels that mindfulness is also a helpful strategy for alleviating depression, anxiety, and pain.

A 2011 Toronto Globe and Mail article reported that mindfulness practice was being introduced into schools to help children relax, focus their thoughts, and help them to function better. Research already shows that mindfulness therapy has potential for kids with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and anxiety. Goldie Hawn, author of the book, *10 mindful minutes*, reported that her foundation-funded research found mindfulness helped students achieve better reading scores, less absenteeism and a 63% rise in optimism.

*“Create a positive workplace culture with actions such as offering mindfulness drop-in sessions at lunch time, which people can join if they want to.”*

– Shamash Alidina & Juliet Adams

Nira Rittenberg, an occupational therapist who specializes in geriatrics and dementia care says that about one-third of caregivers to dementia patients experience a major depression. It is a high-stress mindfulness occupation with a high incidence of compassion fatigue, and Rittenberg says that mindfulness-based approaches have been found to be helpful in coping with the stress.

Mindfulness, meditation, and relaxation exercises are recommended if you work in a high-stress fast-paced environment, so that you can maintain your positive attitude at work. There are several books on the Bookboon website on mindfulness, including *Leadership & mindfulness*, *Practical mindfulness*, and *Uncovering mindfulness*.

## 4.5 POSITIVITY INCREASES WITH AGE

Emotional well-being is when a person consistently reports more positive than negative feelings. And according to research reported in the November/December 2015 issue of *Scientific American Mind*, we become more positive and happier the older we get. Despite hardships and failing health, something about maturity keeps people in good spirits.

It could be from failing minds, but more likely this positive attitude is from a changing outlook as we grow older and wiser, and more able to control our brains. Certainly, studies suggest that positivity and happiness both change over time and is not something that we always possessed or acquired suddenly once we had aged.

It was found that seniors who are the most positive also have the sharpest minds – so if you are young, keep your brain healthy with both physical and mental exercise. And if you are older, do likewise. Everyone, regardless of age, should give their positivity a boost whenever possible.

# 5 HOW YOUR ATTITUDE IMPACTS OTHERS

## 5.1 ATTITUDE IS CONTAGIOUS

In business it is especially important to have a positive attitude. Whether you are the boss, a manager, or other employee, how you speak and behave impacts those around you. Like laughter, or any emotion, for that matter, positive thinking can be contagious.

We catch more than just colds from one another. We can catch people's mood, pain, grief, and compassion. And body language aside, the reason appears to be those mirror neurons that have been capturing the interest of neurologists and others in the last fifteen years or more. These mirror neurons - cells scattered across our brain that reflect their surroundings – including the actions and feelings of others.

*"Mirror neurons are one key to understanding how human beings If survive and thrive in a complex social world."*

– Vittorio Gallese, neuroscientist.

Our mirror neurons fire regardless of whether we or someone else is performing a specific action. It enables us to relate to the person to the degree that we even have a fair idea of why they are performing that action. For example, when you are grabbing a cup of coffee, a specific neuron fires to tell your hand to reach out and grip the handle of the cup. And when you watch a friend pick up her own cup of coffee, a mirror neuron also fires as if you were also picking up her cup of coffee, even though your hand is not moving at all.

This empathy with others includes emotions. So, if you cringe at the sight of someone else getting hurt, empathize with your friend who is grieving, and feel uncomfortable when a co-worker is upset and anxious, blame it on these specialized brain cells.

And no wonder our mothers warned us to stay away from obnoxious people, surround ourselves with positive friends, and be polite to people. When mother said, "This hurts me as much as it hurts you," she was not fibbing. Studies show that the pain we feel when others get hurt activates the same regions of the brain that are activated when we get hurt ourselves. Not only does this make sense of the fact that we sometimes get "bad vibes" from people we meet, it also proves that we can have a positive influence on others – whether family, friends or business associates – by being kind, caring, compassionate and cheerful.

Give your mirror neurons a chance to do their thing. Just because you are in a rush, for example, does not mean you have to **act** as if you are in a rush. University of Kansas researchers studied the effect of doctors standing vs. sitting when visiting their hospital patients. When questioned afterwards, the patients whose doctors sat with them perceived the visit to be a lot longer than those patients whose doctors stood by their bedside.

*"Mirror neurons even play an important role in watching sports. The feeling in the pit of your stomach when LeBron's shot bounces off the rim might be your mirror neurons firing."*

– Elizabeth Jacobs

If you are a manager, even if you have only ten minutes to talk to a member of your staff, you can still sit down, which makes you much more connected to the person than if you're standing up. And make good eye contact, nod your head, lean in - all the actions that convey that you are present mentally and emotionally as well as physically.

The worst thing you can do is remain standing, walk to the door, put your hand on the door handle, and keep talking, because then the person does know that your mind as well as your body is already on the way out. Instead, you could stay seated and say, "If you have another question, I can answer it now, and if you'd like more time to go over things, we can schedule another meeting." That way, you are completely with the individual, and not sending the message that you cannot wait to get out of there.

## **5.2 ASSOCIATE WITH POSITIVE PEOPLE**

It helps to associate with positive people for a variety of reasons. First, positive people make you feel good. Since a good attitude is contagious, if you are surrounded by people who think optimistically about health, the future and so on, it is easier for you to do so as well. According to Hendrie Weisinger and J.P. Pawliw Fry, in their book, *Performing under pressure*, the expectations that others have is one of the most important influences of an individual's own expectations and behavior.

A bad mood is contagious as well, according to Gary Lewandowski, Jr., associate professor of psychology at Monmouth University. You unknowingly pick up other people's nonverbal behaviors and tend to mimic them – like yawning. (It is more common when the person yawning is someone close to you.) Similarly, you can pick up their high energy or low energy, positivity or negativity, enthusiasm, or lethargy.

As if having to cope with the hazards of second-hand smoke is not bad enough, it is now found that second-hand stress can be hazardous to our productivity and health as well. The suggestion that we are influenced by the actions and emotions of others is based on research that the class of brain cells called mirror neurons, mentioned previously, that reflect the actions & feelings of others.

*"Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won't come in."*

- Alan Alda.

Carefully choose those with whom you associate; because you can pick up their bad moods as easily as you can pick up good moods. Avoid toxic people whenever possible. And do not ignore your intuition or gut feelings when you transact business with someone.

According to a study in the New England Journal of Medicine, referred to in the January 2018 issue of Prevention.com, if your closest friends gain weight, your chance of gaining weight could increase by 57%. So, choose friends who will have a positive impact on your life

### **5.3 DO NOT BE A LONER**

Gretchen Rubin, in her book, The happiness project, referred to a study that showed that doing things **with** someone rather than doing them alone is always more fun, regardless of whether it is exercising, commuting, or doing housework. Of fifteen daily activities, researchers found that the only one thing people preferred doing alone was prayer.

Unfortunately, people seem to get busier every year, not with the meaningful goal-related priorities that we have been talking about, but by the preponderance of trivia that has been introduced into their lives. People should be scheduled in your planner as well as tasks, projects, and activities. Make a list of the people you really enjoy spending time with. How much time did you spend with those people during the past week? Last month? Last year? Chances are there are people – perhaps even family members – who are being crowded out of your life because of your busyness.

*"You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you."*

- Dale Carnegie

Be careful that you do not allow the people who count to be crowded out by things that do not. Our choices in life have multiplied exponentially during the past decade. We can obtain almost anything we want to know the Internet, make videos with smart phones, play electronic games on our laptops, send instant messages and get directions on our latest iPhone, Facetime our friends in faraway places while reviewing our email messages, ad infinitum. We could spend a lifetime reading instruction manuals for electronic toys and household gadgets. I have outlined the hazards of technology, not just the advantages, in my eBook, [Managing the use of technology](#), published by Bookboon.

It is a life of choices. And the problem is there are too many of them. If we are not careful, what we do may not reflect our true values. We must make sure that we do not lose sight of what is most important.

Take that list of people, for instance. To ensure that you will spend adequate time with them, make commitments now. Schedule time in your planner next week or next month for a coffee, luncheon, or night on the town. Never end a conversation with a good friend by saying, "Let's get together sometime." Instead, say, "Let's schedule a time when we can get together." Then do it.

## 5.4 BE OPTIMISTIC, BUT REALISTIC

There have been numerous studies showing that too much negativity can hamper success and that we should focus on the positive and reframe the negative in a more positive light. But there have also been more recent indications that **too much** optimism can be a danger as well. In this book, I have **not** been talking about a Pollyanna approach to life. You do not want to be so confident and positive that you ignore the reality of the situation. New York psychologist Gabriele Oetengen's studies, for example, showed that unfettered optimism can actually hold us back, and that when transferred to daydreams, we can become so satisfied with those daydreams, we fail to execute the external facts necessary to get results.

Over 30 years ago, the late Dr. Alan Loy McGinnis wrote a book called the Power of optimism. He maintained that optimists enjoy better health, earn more money, excel in school, and establish long and happy marriages. He also claimed that a positive attitude is acquired, not inherited, and that most people can achieve it. But he did not say to avoid reality, but to accept what cannot be changed. He said to avoid phony pep talks: successful people do not talk about how wonderful things are when in fact they are bad.

Social psychologists Justin Krueger and David Dunning pointed out in a 1999 study at Cornell university, that blind optimism leads to "underestimation of risk and overestimation

of ability and inadequate preparation.” We must be careful that we do not interpret positive thinking or optimism as license to ignore the future and simply concentrate on the present moment. We must always plan for the future and not adopt the attitude that the future will look after itself. Thinking positive outcomes assumes thinking positive actions.

What you do today will impact where you will be tomorrow. Be optimistic, realistic, and action oriented.

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