
ESSENTIAL



MANAGERS

Positive Thinking

Preview from Note
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Analyzing Your Approach

Tracking your thoughts, feelings, and beliefs helps you feel in control. It lets you understand why you are having negative thoughts. If you keep a record of your emotions, you can use it to guide how successfully you are changing your attitude.

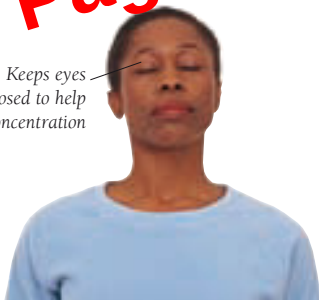
FOCUS POINT

- Monitor your progress in a daily diary—this will make you think and act more positively.

CATCHING THE THOUGHT

The most fundamental elements to track are your thoughts. If you find yourself feeling negative, take a few moments to relax, then register what comes into your head, and gather information about the way your mind is working. Take a mental snapshot of your thoughts. What pictures are you visualizing? What sounds are you hearing? What words are you saying to yourself? What memories of the past or fantasies of the future come to mind? Express your thought in one short sentence, such as “I will never get this right” or “I am really annoyed with him.”

Keeps eyes closed to help concentration



▲ Pinpointing your thoughts

Capturing a negative thought is the first step in changing it. Concentrate exclusively on what is going on in your mind.

Useful Exercises

- ▶ Find early photographs to help you remember your childhood and the beliefs that you gained then.
- ▶ List three important people in your life. Ask what beliefs, negative and positive, they have passed on to you.
- ▶ To focus your mind on an angry or anxious thought, ask yourself, “What is it that I am angry/worried about?”

AUDITING YOUR BELIEFS

To identify the beliefs that underlie your thoughts, learn to notice which negative thoughts crop up again and again. When you have a clear sense of that pattern, ask yourself, “What does this thought mean about me?” Answer with the words, “It means....” Then keep asking what your answer means about you, until you reach an absolute statement, such as, “I am weak,” “People are untrustworthy,” or “The world is a nasty place.” Such definitive statements are your core beliefs about yourself and the world; identifying them enables you to challenge them.

Altering Your Mental Images

Thoughts can be experienced as mental representations: internal pictures, sounds, and words. By exploring, shifting, and developing these, you can affect the way you think and feel about both yourself and your life.

MAKING POSITIVE PICTURES

To feel more positive in the short term, try changing the content of your mental images. Change by adding: see your scary boss with polka-dot boxers over his pants. Take away: in a stressful and hectic office, picture your desk on a sunny, deserted beach. See behind a facade: hear your worst enemy confessing how insecure he or she is. Put up a barrier: think of yourself surrounded by a bubble that protects you from problems. The things you envisage in your mind's eye will not automatically happen, but changing your inner view of reality will make you feel better and more able to achieve a good outcome.

Useful Exercises

- ▶ To improve your mood, try altering the style in which you experience internal images.
- ▶ If someone is angry, picture their face soft-focused. It may make you feel less threatened.
- ▶ If you find your inner voice is slow and lethargic, talk to yourself quickly to raise your energy.
- ▶ Practice using visualization to allow previously unrecognized thoughts to emerge.

FOCUS POINT

- Understand that you cannot change reality, but you can change your perception of it—and so achieve positive results.
- Remember that when using visualization you can control what you see.



▲ Changing the scene

When you are feeling rushed in a busy supermarket, imagine it empty of people and carts—you will feel calmer.

TAPPING YOUR UNCONSCIOUS

Visualization involves allowing your mental images to extend into a kind of internal movie. This technique is useful if you want to make a decision, envisage a goal, or take the first step toward achieving a goal. Playing out a situation in your mind can raise your creativity, change your emotional state, help you focus, or reduce stress. Create a clear image of what you want to explore, then run the movie, noticing what happens and how you feel. If what you are seeing starts to feel negative, let the images go and slowly return to the present: speed your breathing up, stretch, and open your eyes.

Using visualization ►

With finals looming, Sara wants to feel calm and in control. She plays out positive scenes, and by the end she is feeling relaxed and energized.



Making Internal Images Positive

Style	Questions to Ask	Positivity Technique
Size	How big are the images you see?	Enlarge positive images, diminish negative images.
Distance	How far away is the image?	Move positives closer, move negatives farther away.
Focus	Is the image sharp or soft?	Soften the focus to relax yourself, sharpen the focus to motivate.
Colour	Are you seeing in color or black-and-white?	Try adding, softening, and brightening color to increase energy and enthusiasm.
Viewpoint	Are you in the scene or an observer?	Imagine yourself inside positive scenes, but standing outside negative ones.
Movement	Are objects moving or still?	Speed up images to energize, slow them down to calm yourself.

Rethinking Your Beliefs

Beliefs are firm convictions resulting from your experiences in life. The best leave you feeling positive about yourself, other people, and the world; the worst leave you feeling powerless. Identify helpful beliefs and learn to change those that are not.

“Nothing is a waste of time if you use the experience wisely.”

Rodin

BUILDING POSITIVE BELIEFS

Strengthen your useful and supportive beliefs by noticing whatever confirms them. For example, your belief is, “People really value me”: over the next week or so note down every time someone does or says something to support this. Notice when people ask for your opinion. Accept when people compliment you. Remember times when someone tells you you are important. Ignore any feelings you have about being unvalued—these are simply feelings. Look at the actual evidence.

FOCUS POINTS

- Ask yourself what you are afraid of, then check if your fear is well-founded.
- Opt for experiences that challenge your fears. Take a course and master something that scares you.



▲ Accepting positive feedback

When you talk to your friends, notice how they enjoy your company and value your opinions. Registering others' positivity about you will raise your self-belief.

COLLECTING THE PROOF

If you struggle to convince yourself about a belief such as “People value me,” get a friend or partner to tell you the ways in which they admire you. Or in a work appraisal, ask your manager to list the ways you are valued. Talk to others about whether they feel valued. It is likely you will find they feel as insecure as you do, however confident they seem, and you will realize you are not alone.

USING “AS IF” APPROACHES

If you meet a major challenge to your positivity, try acting “as if” everything is fine. Act as if you like yourself, or as if you accept others; act as if your future is bright, or as if your past is resolved. Picture yourself as successful, beautiful, effective, loving—and whatever you say or do, make it the words or action of the person you want to be. This approach may feel false at first, but you will learn valuable lessons about what it means to be positive, and with practice will grow into the role.

Self-Talk

If you find yourself becoming negative and feel frustrated with harmful thinking patterns, use these instant self-talk boosters to raise your mood and keep yourself on track.

“I am improving day-to-day, even if I still have negative thoughts sometimes.”

“I am making a conscious effort to do more of what I enjoy and less of what I do not enjoy.”

“My negative thought is a reminder that I need to be kinder to myself.”

Useful Exercises

- ▶ Each day, note something you have done, rate it one to 10 according to how you enjoyed it, and give reasons.
- ▶ Each week, choose at least three positive things to do for yourself.
- ▶ Each month, allow yourself one day's total indulgence, doing only things you enjoy.

PLANNING A POSITIVE DAY

A good way to get into the habit of thinking positively all day and every day is to make a day plan. Write down at least ten possibilities for specific times of day, from waking in the morning to falling asleep at night. They might be: 7 AM—shower, dress, repeat positive affirmations; 7:45 AM—really enjoy breakfast; 9 AM—write positive affirmation and place on desk; 11 AM—take relaxation break or go for quiet walk; 12:30 PM—read something enjoyable over lunch; 6 PM—spend evening with positive people; 7:30 PM—enjoy good meal; 11:45 PM—repeat a final positive affirmation before falling asleep.

▼ Indulging yourself

Your day plan should include entries for the evening—perhaps taking a long bubble bath or listening to relaxing music.



Relaxes with
fragrant
bath oil

Building Health for Positivity

It is widely accepted that there is a link between physical health and mental well-being. To maintain a positive way of living, you need to support your mental approach with the right diet, exercise, and stress-reduction program.

EATING FOR POSITIVITY

You are what you eat. And there is increasing evidence that poor diet can send your body into a downward spiral of negative emotions. If you eat foods that make your blood-sugar level soar, that produce an adrenalin rush, or that trigger food intolerance, you are likely to spend your days on a roller coaster of emotion. Choose a diet that avoids refined carbohydrates and refined sugars, and where possible eat unprocessed foods with no additives in order to avoid bad reactions to artificial colorings and flavorings.

FOCUS POINTS

- If you need to lose weight, follow a balanced diet and exercise more, rather than eating less.
- Avoid eating too many of the key foods that may trigger intolerance, such as wheat and milk products.

CHOOSING THE BEST DIET

Your brain naturally produces certain neurotransmitters one of whose functions is to help you feel good. In particular, serotonin keeps you calm, focused, and optimistic, while dopamine and norepinephrine keep you alert and active. Choose a diet that is designed to support their long-term production: for serotonin, eat foods rich in unrefined carbohydrates, such as cereals, pasta, rice, starchy vegetables; for dopamine and norepinephrine, eat foods rich in amino acids, such as chicken, fish, beef, nuts, and pulses.



▲ Enjoying the good life

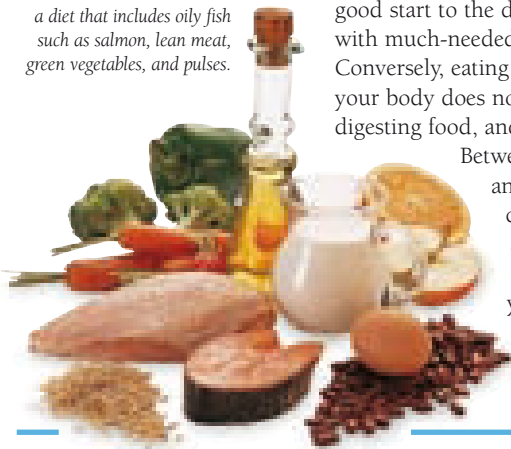
A varied and well-balanced diet plays a significant role in maintaining balanced emotions.

Foods with a Feel-Good Factor

Nutrient	Source
B vitamins	Lean meat, fish, wholegrains, nuts, orange juice, low-fat dairy foods, brewer's yeast extract, and pulses
Calcium	Milk, cheese, canned fish, green leafy vegetables, nuts, and seeds
Folic acid	Green vegetables, wheat germ, oranges, cheese, nuts, eggs, and liver
Iron	Wheat bran, liver, spinach, and dried fruit
Magnesium	Nuts, fish, leafy green vegetables, and wheat germ
Omega 3 fats	Oily fish (mackerel, salmon, sardines, trout) and vegetable oils (grapeseed, soy, sunflower)
Selenium	Brazil nuts, shellfish, liver, fish, and wholegrains

▼ Eating well

Low mood has been linked with deficiencies of some vitamins and minerals. Follow a diet that includes oily fish such as salmon, lean meat, green vegetables, and pulses.



ESTABLISHING A GOOD REGIMEN

There is sense in the old adage: breakfast like a king, dine like a pauper. Eating breakfast gives you a feel-good start to the day by kick-starting your body with much-needed fuel after its overnight starvation. Conversely, eating a light meal in the evening means your body does not have to cope with the strain of digesting food, and you will fall asleep more easily.

Between meals, avoid “comfort” foods and drinks such as chocolate and caffeine. While they may give you an instant lift, their feel-good effect may suddenly dip, leaving you feeling even more down than before. Regular low-sugar snacks will keep your energy level—and your mood—high.

Forming Good Relationships

Positive thinking means being positive with other people as well as with yourself. Dealing well with others creates good relationships, and the more good relationships you have in your life, the more emotionally resilient you are likely to be.

FOCUS POINT

Remember that the more connected you feel to other people, the more meaningful your life seems.



GIVING PRAISE

All successful relationships are based on mutual respect. So open up and tell others if they impress you. They will appreciate it more if you give them details about what you like and if you express your feelings as well as just your thoughts. Beware of qualification—do not praise a good performance, only to compare it with an earlier failure. And remember that regular, “drip-fed” compliments is much better than a downpour followed by a drought.

◀ Building confidence

Giving your children encouragement and praise will focus their attention on success and build confidence for the future.

Things to Do

- ✓ Do make a habit of showing praise and appreciation regularly.
- ✓ Do offer praise “sandwiches”—two pieces of positive feedback enclosing a suggestion or request for improvement.
- ✓ Do follow through on your words of praise with positive body language—a smile, nod, or touch where appropriate.

Things to Avoid

- ✗ Avoid praising all the time. People may think they have gotten something wrong if the praise suddenly stops.
- ✗ Avoid praising things for courtesy's sake; such false compliments devalue genuine praise.
- ✗ Avoid praising success only. This gives the message that effort is worthless.



▲ Using positive body language

Approving body language is the most direct way that you can tell someone you feel positive about them and get them to feel good about themselves and respond well to you.

COPING WITH CRITICISM

If someone criticizes you, stay calm. Let your critic say their piece so that they feel they are being heard. But take on board only what feels right; offset any hurt by recalling times when you have done well. If you sense the criticism is correct, particularly if you have had similar feedback from others, ask your critic to coach you in improving. This will not only mean you are supported to learn; it will also get him or her on your side, building a relationship out of a potentially tense interaction.

ADOPTING A NO-BLAME ATTITUDE

Even if you feel bad about what someone does, avoid heavy criticism. Work out any critical emotion by writing your feelings out in a letter that you never send or by imagining a conversation. If you still feel you need to give the person feedback, begin by pointing out what they have done right, to help them feel confident. Then, specify what you need them to do, in positives rather than negatives. Lastly, look for improvement in behavior and reinforce it by praising as soon as you can.

FINDING REASON TO FORGIVE

When something has gone wrong and you cannot immediately find forgiveness—for yourself or another person—look back carefully at what has happened, and you may see the situation in a different light. Perhaps there were valid reasons why you or the other person did what they did, or maybe it was a difficult time or situation. It could be that what happened actually caused no harm, or that it is outweighed by good things you or the other person have done. Perhaps that was the only or best choice of action under the circumstances at the time.



A token of forgiveness

If you find you can forgive the other person, you might like to show it with a small gift.

Working with Energy

Most people spend a third of their adult lives at work. So it is vital to make sure that when you are working, you feel positive about what you do. In that way your career supports rather than undermines your positive approach to life.

MOTIVATING YOURSELF AT WORK

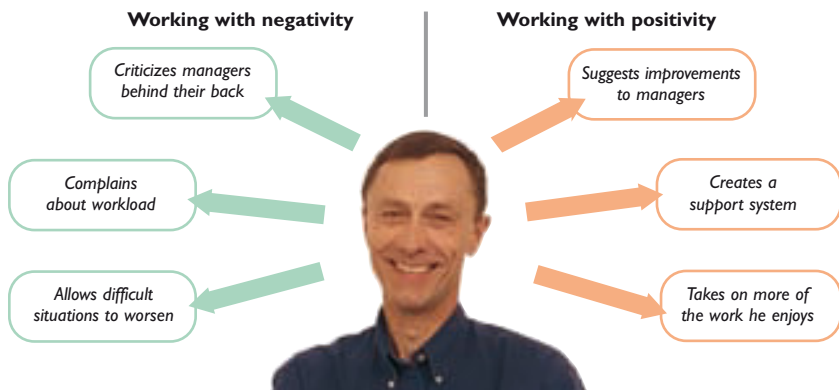
The essence of a happy job is to work with what is important to you, the things in life that really attract you. If you like people, work with them. If you love knowledge or ideas, or clothes, or words, find work that involves these. Be sure to chart your successes. Identify how you can do well, and then get regular feedback on how to do even better. And keep moving on. If you are stuck at your current level, learn how to do your current job even better than you already do it, so that you still experience improvement.

FOCUS POINTS

- Try not to bring work home with you. If necessary, offload your concerns in written form in a work journal.
- If you are stressed at work, ask why you need to work so hard—it may be your choice rather than your employer's demand.

▼ Making the best of things

The positive thinker who is unhappy at work takes action to improve things. If you feel negative about your job, try to become more rather than less involved. The more you actively contribute, the more control you will have.



Ageing with Attitude

Positive thinking can alter the length as well as the quality of life. It is generally accepted that with a positive outlook not only can you move into the later years feeling both fulfilled and contented, you can also actively prolong your life.

REALIZING THE BENEFITS

The key to aging positively is to realize that, with current health care and society's support, aging is now a positive experience. You can stay fit, healthy, and active until well into your eighth and ninth decades. Your increased knowledge will easily offset the very small decrease in mental capacity. Your gathered wisdom means that you can emotionally outperform younger generations. And with added experience, there is no reason why your capacity for sexual pleasure should not keep increasing with every passing year.



◀ Looking good

Taking care of your appearance not only makes you feel better, but also gives the message that age has in no way reduced your capabilities

Self-Talk

Switch any typically "older" attitudes to the attitudes that younger people have, and you will see your life become more enjoyable and positive. Try telling yourself:

“I love doing...”

“Young people inspire me...”

“It will be an adventure...”

“At my age, I can...”

ACTING ENERGETICALLY

Aging often makes you likely to settle for the comfortable option, the familiar idea. But every time you do that, you block off future fulfillment by being less willing to take risks or experiment. The key is to expand your comfort zone, do things that at first you do not find easy. Expose yourself to extremes: listen to loud music, watch movies outside your normal range, eat exotic foods. Seek out challenging activities: get up to dance, volunteer for extra responsibility. It may feel hard. But if you go for it, you will start to enjoy a wider range of life experiences.