

# The Power of Positive Self-Talk

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# **The Power of Positive Self-Talk**

**by Brian Tracy**

Perhaps the most powerful influence on your attitude and personality is what you say to yourself, and believe. It is not what happens to you, but how you respond internally to what happens to you, that determines your thoughts and feeling and, ultimately, your actions. By controlling your inner dialogue, or self-talk, you can begin to assert control over every other dimension of your life.

Your self-talk, the words that you use to describe what is happening to you, and to discuss how you feel about external events, determines the quality and tone of your emotional life. When you see things positively and constructively and look for the good in each situation and each person, you have a tendency to remain naturally positive and optimistic. Since the quality of your life is determined by how you feel, moment to moment, one of your most important goals should be to use every psychological technique available to keep yourself thinking about what you want and to keep your mind off of what you don't want, or what you fear.

Arnold Toynbee, the historian, developed what he called the challenge-response theory of history. In studying the rise and fall of 20 major world civilizations, Toynbee concluded that each civilization started out as a small group of people - as a village, as a tribe or in the case of the Mongol empire, as just three people who had survived the destruction of their small community. Toynbee concluded that each of these small groups faced external challenges, such as hostile tribes. In order to survive, much less thrive, these small groups had to reorganize themselves to deal positively and constructively with these challenges.

By meeting each of these challenges successfully, the village or tribe would grow. Even greater challenges would be triggered as a result. And if this group of people continued to meet each challenge by drawing upon its resources and winning out, it would continue to grow until ultimately it became a nation-state and then a civilization covering a large geographical area.

Toynbee looked at the 21 great civilizations of human history, ending with the American civilization, and concluded that these civilizations began to decline

and fall apart when their citizens and leaders lost the will or ability to rise to the inevitable external challenges occasioned by their very size and power.

Toynbee's theory of civilizations can be applicable to our life as well.

You are continually faced with challenges and difficulties, with problems and disappointments, with temporary setbacks and defeats. They are an unavoidable and inevitable part of being human. But, as you draw upon your resources to respond effectively to each challenge, you grow and become a stronger and better person. In fact, without those setbacks, you could not have learned what you needed to know and developed the qualities of your character to where they are today.

Much of your ability to succeed comes from the way you deal with life. One of the characteristics of superior men and women is that they recognize the inevitability of temporary disappointments and defeats, and they accept them as a normal and natural part of life. They do everything possible to avoid problems, but when problems come, superior people learn from them, rise above them, and continue onward in the direction of their dreams.

Dr. Martin Seligman of the University of Pennsylvania has written a fascinating book based on his 25 years of research into this subject. It's titled *Learned Optimism*. In this book, Dr. Seligman explains the basic response patterns of both positive and negative people. As a result of his many years of work in cognitive therapy, and the use of exhaustive testing, he finds, quite simply, that optimistic people tend to interpret events in such a way that they keep their minds positive and their emotions under control.

Optimists develop the habit of talking to themselves in constructive ways. Whenever they experience an adversity, they immediately describe it to themselves in such a way that it loses its ability to trigger negative emotions and feelings of helplessness.

Dr. Seligman says that there are three basic differences in the reactions of optimists and pessimists. The first difference is that the optimist sees a setback as temporary, while the pessimist sees it as permanent. The optimist sees an unfortunate event, such as an order that falls through or a sales call that fails, as a temporary event, something that is limited in time and that has no real impact on the future. The pessimist, on the other hand, sees negative events as permanent, as part of life and destiny.

For example, let's say that the optimistic salesperson makes 10 calls on likely prospects, and every one of those calls is unsuccessful. The optimist simply interprets this as a temporary event and a matter of averages or probabilities. The optimist concludes that, with every temporary failure, he is moving closer to the prospect who will turn into a sale. The optimist dismisses the event and goes on cheerfully to the 11th and 12th prospects.

The pessimist sees the same situation differently. The pessimist has a tendency to conclude that 10 unsuccessful sales calls is an indication that the economy is terrible and that there is no market for his product. The pessimist generalizes and begins to see the situation and his career as hopeless. While the optimist just shrugs it off and gets on with the next call, the pessimist becomes discouraged and loses heart and enthusiasm for the hard work of prospecting.

The second difference between the optimist and the pessimist is that the optimist sees difficulties as specific, while the pessimist sees them as pervasive. This means that when things go wrong for the optimist, he looks at the event as an isolated incident largely disconnected from other things that are going on in his life.

For example, if something you were counting on failed to materialize and you interpreted it to yourself as being an unfortunate event, but something that happens in the course of life and business, you would be reacting like an optimist. The pessimist, on the other hand, sees disappointments as being pervasive. That is, to him they are indications of a problem or shortcoming that pervades every area of life.

If a pessimist worked hard to put together a business deal and it collapsed, he would tend to assume that the deal did not work out was because the product or the company or the economy was in poor shape and the whole business was hopeless. The pessimist would tend to feel helpless, unable to make a difference and out of control of his destiny.

The third difference between optimists and pessimists is that optimists see events as external, while pessimists interpret events as personal. When things go wrong, the optimist will tend to see the setback as result from external factors over which one has little control.

If the optimist is cut off in traffic, for example, instead of getting angry or upset, he will simply downgrade the importance of the event by saying something like, oh, well, I guess that person is just having a bad day.

The pessimist has a tendency to take everything personally. If the pessimist is cut off in traffic, he will react as though the other driver has deliberately acted to upset and frustrate him. The pessimist will become angry and negative and want to strike out and get even. Often, he will honk his horn or yell at the other driver. There is a natural tendency in all of us to react emotionally when our expectations are frustrated in any way. When something we wanted and hoped for fails to materialize, we feel a temporary sense of disappointment and unhappiness. We feel disillusioned. We react as though we have been punched in the emotional solar plexus.

The optimistic person, however, soon moves beyond this disappointment. He responds quickly to the adverse event and interprets it as being temporary, specific and external to himself. The optimist takes full control of his inner dialogue and counters the negative feelings by immediately reframing the event so that it appear positive in some way.

Napoleon Hill, who, prior to writing his best-selling books on success, interviewed 500 of the most successful people in America, concluded that Contained within a setback or disappointment is the seed of an equal or greater advantage or benefit. And this is one of the great secrets of success.

Since your conscious mind can hold only one thought at a time, either positive or negative, if you deliberately choose a positive thought to dwell upon, you keep your mind optimistic and your emotions positive. Since your thoughts and feelings determine your actions, you will tend to be a more constructive person, and you will move much more rapidly toward the goals that you have chosen.

It all comes down to the way you talk to yourself on a regular basis. In our courses of problem solving and decisions making, we encourage people to respond to problems by changing their language from negative to positive. Instead of using the word problem, we encourage people to use the word situation. You see, a problem is something that you deal with. The event is the same. It's the way you interpret the event to yourself that makes it sound and appear completely different.

Even better than situation is the word challenge. Whenever you have a difficulty, immediately reframe it and choose to view it as a challenge. Rather than saying, I have a problem, say, I have an interesting challenge facing me. The word challenge is inherently positive. It is something that you rise to that makes you stronger and better. It is the same situation, only the word that you are using to describe it is different.

The best of all possible words is the word opportunity. When you are faced with a difficulty of any kind, instead of saying, I have a problem, you can say, I am faced with an unexpected opportunity. And if you concentrate your powers on finding out what that opportunity is-even if it is only a valuable lesson-you will certainly find it. As the parable says, Seek and ye shall find, for all who seek find it.

One of my favorite affirmative statements, which I use to deal with any unexpected difficulty, is this: Every situation is a positive situation if viewed as an opportunity for growth and self-mastery. Whenever something goes wrong, immediately neutralize its negative power by quickly reciting this statement.

If you are in sales, and your method of prospecting is not generating the results that you desire, you can view it as an opportunity for growth and self-mastery. The adversity you are facing may be meant to indicate to you that there is a better way to approach this task. Perhaps you should be prospecting in a different place, or with different people, or using a different script or a different method. Perhaps your difficulty is simply part of the process of developing the persistence and tenacity that you need to become successful in any kind of market. The difference between the winner and the loser is that the winner faces and deals with the adversity constructively, while the loser allows the adversity to overwhelm him.

The hallmark of the fully mature, fully functioning, self-actualizing personality is the ability to be objective and unemotional when caught up in the inevitable storms of daily life. The superior person has the ability to continue talking to himself in a positive and optimistic way, keeping his mind calm, clear and completely under control. The mature personality is more relaxed and aware and capable of interpreting events more realistically and less emotionally than is the immature personality. As a result, the mature person exerts a far greater sense of control and influence over his environment, and is far less likely to be angry, upset, or distracted.

The starting point in the process of becoming a highly effective person is to monitor and control your self-talk every minute of the day. Keep your thoughts and your words positive and consistent with your goals, and keep your mind focused on what you want to do and the person you want to be.

Here are five ideas you can use to help you to be a more positive and optimistic person:

First, resolve in advance that no matter what happens, you will not allow it to get you down. You will respond in a constructive way. You will take a deep breath, relax and look for whatever good the situation may contain. When you make this decision in advance, you mentally prepare yourself so that you are not knocked off balance when things go wrong, as they inevitably will.

Second, neutralize any negative thoughts or emotions by speaking to yourself positively all the time. Say things like, I feel healthy! I feel happy! I feel terrific! As you go about your job, say to yourself, I like myself, and I love my work! Say things like, Today is a great day; it's wonderful to be alive! According to the law of expression, whatever is expressed is impressed. Whatever you say to yourself or others is impressed deeply into your subconscious mind and is likely to become a permanent part of your personality.

Third, look upon the inevitable setbacks that you face as being temporary, specific and external. View the negative situations as a single event that is not

connected to other potential events and that is caused largely by external factors over which you can have little control. Simply refuse to see the event as being in any way permanent, pervasive or indicative of personal incompetence or inability.

Fourth, remember that it is impossible to learn and grow and become a successful person without adversity and difficulties. You must contend with and rise above them in order to become a better person. Welcome each difficulty by saying, That's good! and then look into the situation to find the good in it.

Finally, keep your thoughts on your goals and dreams, on the person you are working toward becoming. When things go wrong temporarily, respond by saying to yourself, I believe in the perfect outcome of every situation in my life. Resolve to be cheerful and pleasant, and resist every temptation toward negativity and disappointment. View a disappointment as an opportunity to grow stronger, and about it to yourself and others in a positive and optimistic way. ###

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