

Welcome to Basis Points! Each month, Basis Points provides you tips and techniques that we've gleaned from a variety of sources to help better your business life. The theme of this month's issue is "Optimism", an attitude whose importance – given the stresses and anxieties in our everyday world – has never been greater.

Feel Good, Live Longer

Although the "why" remains largely unknown, optimism is strongly linked to positive health outcomes. Indeed, some researchers now believe that a positive outlook produces life-extending benefits.

In a study recently concluded by the University of Pittsburgh, women who were found to be optimistic (i.e. who identified themselves as expecting good rather than bad things to happen) were 30% less likely to die from heart disease – and 14% less likely to die from other causes – than pessimists.

Even after weeding out potentially contradictory factors – such as health status, lifestyle and income – optimists' likelihood of health risk (e.g. serious illness or death) was decidedly lower than pessimists'.

Why is this so? Researchers suggest several possible explanations: optimists often have a larger social network and/or more friends that they can rely upon in times of crisis; they tend to cope better with stress; they're likely to make more regular trips to the doctor.

Source: "Psychological Traits and Total Mortality in the Women's Health Initiative", Dr. Hilary Tindle, University of Pittsburgh, 2009

*"The pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity.
The optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty"*

- Winston Churchill

The Power of Positive Thinking

Thinking positive thoughts has been touted as one of the simplest and smartest techniques humans can employ to achieve inner peace, success, happiness and good health. Best of all, positive thinking is contagious: when you project an optimistic attitude, those around you will mirror your feelings. Here are four quick tips to cultivate your own sense of optimism:

- 1 Laugh a little – Humor, particularly when it's self-deprecating, is the fastest and most direct way to counteract negativity. Mark Twain once said of humor: "It's the great thing, the saving thing. The minute it crops up, all our irritations and resentments slip away and a sunny spirit takes their place."
- 2 Don't dwell – Everyone falls short, makes mistakes, encounters seemingly insoluble problems. Forget the past and move forward. Thomas Edison famously said, "I haven't failed. I've simply found 10,000 ways that won't work."
- 3 Take a break from the news – A daily diet of grim economic news can put one in a truly sour mood. Shake things up: do something different. Listen to upbeat music; read an inspiring book; start a new fitness routine.
- 4 Create something – Nothing unleashes feelings of satisfaction and accomplishment more quickly than crafting something new. Expressing yourself creatively – whether drawing, writing, playing a musical instrument – stretches your comfort zone, forces you to learn and apply new skills and channels your energies in a positive way.



Source: "100 Positive-Thinking Exercises", RNCentral.com

Overcoming Obstacles

In his autobiography, "Pour Your Heart Into It", Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks, reflects upon all the folks who thought he was crazy to try to build a retail coffee network. "We had no lock on the world's supply of fine coffee, no patent on the dark roast... I heard all the arguments about why the coffee industry could never be a growth industry. Consumption of coffee had been falling in America since the mid-60's. And, of course, everyone told me that no one would pay premium prices for premium coffee."

Today, less than 25 years after its founding, Starbucks operates more than 8500 retail stores, employs nearly 180,000 people and enjoys annual sales of \$10.5 billion. And, according to its founder, an awful lot of upside potential remains: "Despite our success, Starbucks still has less than 6% share of total coffee consumption."

A key lesson: sometimes you have to ignore facts to be a positive thinker. As Howard Schultz observes, "Don't let yourself be threatened by people smarter than you."

Source: "Pour Your Heart Into It", Howard Schultz and Dori Jones Yang, Hyperion, 1999

Optimist or Pessimist?

If you're not sure whether you're a 'glass half-full' or 'glass half-empty' person, we invite you to visit http://stress.about.com/library/optimismquiz/bl_15optimism_quiz.htm and take a quick test that will reveal your predispositions. While the site's full-length test offers 15 multiple-choice questions, if you're in a hurry you can take a short (6 questions) or medium (10 questions) version of the test.

