



Business Development



Turning Milk into Butter

- Optimist vs Pessimist

By Stephen Joyce of Zenergy PD

Two frogs fell into a pail of milk. One of the frogs accepted it's fate, swallowed lots of milk and drowned. The other didn't like this approach and thrashed about and did whatever it could do to stay afloat. Eventually the frog's thrashing turned the milk into butter, and it was able to climb out and survive. The perception of the situation had a significant impact on the fate of each frog.

Common to both frogs was the search for a strategy to deal with the situation. One frog took the 'optimist' approach, the other a more 'positive' outlook. Whether you claim the glass to be half full or half empty, you are always right. Your perception, however, has a great impact on the outcome of the situation.

Scientific research has demonstrated that taking a 'positive attitude' plays an important part in our bodies' ability to heal and retain health.(1) Indeed any successful treatment (medical included) must use our own bodies' healing powers. The decision to take a positive view pays distinct dividends. A common assumption about such 'positive thinkers' is that they were born like that; as if their disposition came with their birthday suit. However, when we examine the mental strategies which such people employ, a specific pattern appears. How they learned these strategies is immaterial, but there is a strategy being used and it can be learned.

When things go badly for a 'positive thinker' they typically do some or all of the following: 1) Perceive no failure, only accept the 'feedback'; 2) Tell themselves that this is the exception to the rule; 3) Describe it as an isolated incident. For example, they fail an exam but choose to view this as an opportunity to study the subject in greater depth. They might also be thankful that this feedback prevented them making a serious professional mistake in the future.

When things go well for the 'positive thinker', they: 1) Take personal credit; 2) Look for a positive pattern; 3) Project this pattern into the future. For example, they pass the exam and take this to MEAN they can achieve many other challenging things.

Compare these with the identified strategies of a 'pessimist.' When things go badly they typically do some or all of the following: 1) Look for fault often within themselves; 2) Generalize to other areas of life; 3) Predict the future based on present circumstances. Having failed an exam, the 'pessimist' takes this to mean they will fail again, possibly even in other, unrelated areas of life.

When things go well, 'pessimists': 1) Credit 'luck'; 2) Localize/ minimize the impact; 3) Predict it cannot last.

Our lives are a series of events to which we apply meaning. Our bodies produce a response, depending on the meaning we choose to apply to those events. In my experience, there is only a limited amount to which you can control the events in your lives. Things happen. Your response to events is also out of your (conscious) control most of the time. This is especially true with respect to your health. The one area in which you can do something, is the meaning you apply to the events.

You are told to take more responsibility for your own health. To do this most effectively you must first take responsibility for your own thinking. The first step is an examination of the meaning you assign to events.

Next time something 'challenging' happens in your life, check what meaning you are applying to it. Write it out:

Event	Negative	Positive #1	Positive #2
Fail exam	<i>I'm a failure</i>	<i>I've been saved from making a future professional mistake</i>	<i>I'm going learn this material really well</i>

Mental strategies are habit-forming. Like all habits, they tend to run unconsciously, until you decide you want to do something different. The upside to this process is that once you have begun applying 'positive mental strategies' in your life, they too will become a habit. Very quickly they will slip into your unconscious and run their magic from there.

What meaning are you choosing to apply in your life right now? What other (positive) meanings could you choose? By choosing the positive interpretation, you have begun the process of turning 'milk into butter.'

(1) Hall, H. et al., 'Voluntary Modulation of Neutrophil Adhesiveness Using a Cyberphysiological Strategy', Intn journal of Neuroscience 63 (1992) 287-97

Stephen Joyce will be facilitating "Health & Beliefs" at the "Women In Business" Conference - Uof C, Oct 1 & 2. He is also running a 2 day course Oct 19 & 26. For more information, contact Stephen at

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