

# Positive Psychology: Learned Optimism

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This is basically a very condensed summary of Dr. Martin Seligman's book, *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life* (1990).

## I. The Origins of Learned Optimism: Learned Helplessness

This all began with Dr. Seligman in 1964 when he went to graduate school to study experimental psychology. Working with dogs, he noticed that when the dogs are exposed to shocks they cannot control, they learn helplessness. They decide that nothing that they do matters, and even when they are transferred to an environment where they can escape their shocks, they simply give up.

The animal research, and subsequent research with humans, established that both animals and humans can learn helplessness.

- When faced with situations where they were powerless to change an annoying element, two out of three (both animals and humans) would cease trying to affect the situation. Further, when placed in a new situation with a different annoying element, they would make no attempt from the beginning.
- The other 1/3 of the subjects who are exposed to uncontrollable shocks never become helpless. They would shrug off situations and continue acting to improve their lot regardless. They never give up.
- One in 10 of the control subjects who received no training shocks are helpless from the start. They would make no attempt to change an annoying element, even though they had not been exposed to an uncontrollable situation to cause them to learn helplessness.

The good news was that when people or dogs are exposed to shocks that they can control, they learn efficacy, and escape more quickly when transferred to a different environment. They have been "inoculated" against helplessness.

## II. An Overview of Optimism vs. Pessimism

Note: The book contains the Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ) and scoring instructions. (Now available, with many other tools, at <http://www.authentic happiness.org/>.) Using this tool, you can assess your level of optimism. This is very interesting, but it needs to be taken before reading further about the theory.

**Explanatory Style** - Whether or not you are vulnerable to helplessness depends on the way you explain things to yourself. In short:

Optimism - reacting to setbacks from a presumption of personal power

- Bad events are temporary setbacks
- Isolated to particular circumstances
- Can be overcome by my effort and abilities

Pessimism - reacting to setbacks from a presumption of personal helplessness:

- Bad events will last a long time (permanence)
- Will undermine everything I do (pervasive)
- Are my fault (personal)

### **Permanence**

- Do you believe that bad events are permanent or temporary? What about good events?
  - Permanent: Traits, abilities, "always", "never"
  - Transient: Moods, effort, "sometimes", "lately"
- Failure makes everyone at least momentarily helpless. But how quickly do you recover? For some people, it is near instantaneous. Others may never recover.
- People who believe that good events have permanent causes try even harder after they succeed. People who believe that good events have transient causes give up even when they succeed, believing success to be a fluke.

<b>Permanent (Pessimistic)</b>	<b>Temporary (Optimistic)</b>
"I'm all washed up."	"I'm exhausted."
"Diets never work."	"Diets don't work when you eat out."
"You always nag."	"You nag when I don't clean my room."
"The boss is a bastard."	"The boss is in a bad mood."
"You never talk to me."	"You haven't talked to me lately."

On the other hand, people who believe good events have permanent causes are more optimistic than those who believe they have temporary causes.

<b>Temporary (Pessimistic)</b>	<b>Permanent (Optimistic)</b>
"My lucky day."	"I'm always lucky."
"I try hard."	"I'm talented."
"My opponent got tired."	"My opponent is no good."

## **Pervasiveness: Specific vs. Universal**

- People who make universal explanations for their failures give up on everything when a failure strikes in one area. People who make specific explanations may become helpless in that one area, but not in any others.
- Optimists believe that bad events have specific causes and are compartmentalized, and that good events enhance everything they do. Pessimists believe that bad events have universal causes, and good events have specific factors.
- Bad events:

### **Universal (Pessimistic)**

"My teachers are unfair."

"I'm repulsive."

"Books are useless."

### **Specific (Optimistic)**

"Professor Jones is unfair."

"I'm repulsive to him."

"This book is useless."

- Good events:

### **Specific (Pessimistic)**

"I'm smart at math."

"My broker knows oil stocks."

"I was charming to her."

### **Universal (Optimistic)**

"I'm smart."

"My broker knows Wall Street."

"I was charming."

## **Hope**

- Finding temporary and specific causes for misfortune is the art of hope; finding permanent and universal causes is the practice of despair.
- Bad events:

### **Hopeless**

"I'm stupid."

"Men are tyrants."

"It's five in ten the lump is cancer."

### **Hopeful**

"I'm hung over."

"My husband was in a bad mood."

"It's five in ten this lump is nothing."

- Good events:

### **Hopeless**

"I'm lucky."

"My wife charms my clients."

"The U.S. will root out the terrorists."

### **Hopeful**

"I'm talented."

"My wife charms everyone."

"The U.S. will root out all its enemies."

## **Personalization: Internalize vs. Externalize**

- People who blame themselves have low self-esteem as a result. People who blame external events preserve their self-esteem and like themselves better.
- Optimists internalize good events and externalize bad events. Pessimists do the opposite.

Optimism psychology is in the field of cognitive science. It is not magic. But, the event-explanations of optimism can be practiced and learned, even by those who have not consistently used them previously. See Changing from Pessimism to Optimism below.

### **The Depression Epidemic**

- Several studies have shown that the prevalence of depression has risen an order of magnitude during the 20th Century. People born before WWI had a 1% chance of being depressed at some point in their life. People born around 1925 had a 4% chance. And people born around 1955 had a 6% chance. This is even worse, because the older people had lived more years in which they could have become depressed.
- Not only is severe depression more common, it also strikes at an earlier age
- There is a causal link between pessimism and depression. It appears that the cause of depression is the same as the cause of learned helplessness: the belief that your actions will be futile.

### **Depression and Explanatory Style**

Women are twice as likely to suffer depression as men because they think differently, even though, as children, boys are more pessimistic than girls and more depressed. Men tend to act rather than reflect. Women have a greater tendency to contemplate their depression, trying to analyze it and determine its source. This “rumination”, coupled with pessimism, leads to depression.

- This may also help explain the depression epidemic, as we live in a society obsessed with self-consciousness.
- Susan Nolen-Hoeksma of Stanford did an experiment. Sad people were given a choice between selecting words that described their mood or ranking a list of nations based on their wealth. 70% of women chose to focus on their mood. 70% of men chose the distracting geographic test.

### **Curing Depression - Cognitive Therapy Works: How You Think, How You Feel**

- Most cases of depression are not biochemical or rooted in psychoanalytic causes. Rather, they are habitual patterns of thought that have their genesis in the explanatory styles that lead to learned helplessness.
- You learn to recognize the automatic thoughts that pop into your head at the times you feel worst
- You learn to dispute your automatic thoughts by marshaling contrary evidence
- You learn to make different explanations, called re-attributions, and use them to dispute your automatic thoughts
- You learn how to distract yourself from depressing thoughts.
- You learn to recognize and question the depression-sowing assumptions governing so much of what you do

Thus, through cognitive therapy (paying attention to and changing how one thinks), individuals

can change a pessimistic explanatory style to an optimistic one and move out of their depression. As the title says, by changing how we think, we can change how we feel.

### **Pessimism and body cycles**

In the late morning and early evening, we are more optimistic. In the late afternoon and the middle of the night, we are more pessimistic.

## **III. Why Optimism is Important**

### **The Case for Optimism:**

- Inoculates against depression
- Improves health
- Combines with talent and desire to enable achievement

### **The Case Against Pessimism**

- Promotes depression
- Produces inertia rather than activity in the face of setbacks
- Feels bad subjectively--blue, down worried, anxious
- Self-fulfilling; pessimists don't persist in the face of challenges and thus fail more frequently (even when success is attainable)
- Is associated with poor physical health
- Even when pessimists turn out to be right, they still feel worse than the deluded optimists.

**The following summaries of studies dramatically show, scientifically, that optimism is a positive emotion which creates positive results.**

### **Success at Work**

"The explanatory-style theory of success says that in order to choose people for success in a challenging job, you need to select for three characteristics:

1. aptitude
2. motivation
3. optimism

All three determine success.

### **The Met Life Study on Salesforce Hiring**

Working with Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, Dr. Seligman studied optimism in insurance agents. He learned that life insurance agents are a stunningly optimistic group.

Metropolitan Life used the insurance industry career profile to help screen new agent hires. In 1985, 15,000 applicants took both an attributional style questionnaire (ASQ) and Met Life's career profile. One thousand agents were hired based on the career profile alone, as MetLife had done in the past. However, MetLife had a chronic shortage of agents and as an experiment, also hired 129 agents who scored just below the cutoff point on the career profile but in the top half of the ASQ.

- The more optimistic half of agents studied sold 37% more than the pessimistic half
- The most optimistic 10% sold 88% more than the most pessimistic 10%
- The pessimistic half was 2x as likely to quit in the 1st year
- The most pessimistic quarter was 3x as likely to quit in the 1st year
- After two years, the optimists in the regular group of hires were outselling the pessimists by 31%. Amazingly, however, the special hires outsold the pessimists in the regular force by 57%!

### **The London study**

- George Brown studied the housewives of the poorest areas of London
  - 20% were depressed, 10% psychotically
  - He found three protective factors that fought off depression
    - Intimate relationship with a spouse or lover
    - A job outside the home
    - NOT having three or more children under the age of 14 to take care of
  - He found two major risk factors
    - Recent loss (e.g. death of a husband, son emigrating to another country)
    - Death of their own mother before the subject reached her teens
      - "If your mother dies when you are young, you think about later losses in the most hopeless ways."

### **Optimism at school**

**The Princeton-Penn Longitudinal Study (400 children)** - Dr. Seligman and his staff conducted a study of 3rd-grade children from 1995 until they finished seventh grade in 1999.

- 3rd grade pessimists either got depressed or stayed depressed (if already depressed)
- 3rd grade optimists either never got depressed, or recovered quickly
- Trauma that affected the students:
  - A brother or sister leaves home for college or work
  - A pet dies
  - A grandparent the child knows well dies
  - The child moves to a new school
  - The parents fight/divorce (the #1 problem for kids)
- Divorce effects on the students:
  - Children of divorce tend to be much more depressed
  - More bad things happen to them than children of intact families--even things that can't be explained by the divorce

- 3.5x chance that a sibling will be hospitalized
- 3.5x chance that the child will be hospitalized
- 2x chance that a friend of the child will die
- 2x chance that a grandparent will die
- Alas, parents who fight a lot but don't get divorced cause nearly as many problems
- Girls vs. Boys - At every point in the study (3rd-7th grade), boys are more depressed than girls, and girls are more optimistic

### **The UPenn Frosh Study**

Optimists rose to the occasion and performed as well as or better than predicted. Pessimists were more likely to underperform

### **The West Point Study**

Pessimists were far more likely to quit, and get worse grades than their SATs predict. I.e., in college, students with optimistic explanatory styles will outperform predictive measures such as SAT scores or high school grades. Students with pessimistic scores will under perform.

### **Optimism in Sports**

#### **Team Sports**

The 1985/86 Mets and Cardinals and the NBA: Atlantic Division, 1984/85 teams were studied, using a technique called CAVE (Content Analysis of Verbatim Explanations), in which they took the verbatim written statements of the subject (e.g. quotes from local sports coverage of an athlete) and rate them on permanence, pervasiveness, and personalization.

- Optimistic teams show better pressure batting statistics the following season
- Optimistic teams win more games the following season than their previous W-L record would predict
- Optimistic basketball teams did better than predicted, pessimistic teams did worse.
- Conclusions on team sports
  - Teams have an explanatory style
  - Explanatory style predicts results above and beyond ability
  - Optimism leads to success and pessimism to failure
  - Explanatory style has its effect on teams under pressure--after a loss, or in the late innings of close games.

#### **Individual Sports**

The Berkeley swim team, including Matt Biondi, was tested under lab conditions. The coaches would tell the athletes that they had swum the event worse than they actually had (very disappointing, but difficult to detect)

- Matt Biondi swam the 100 fly in 50.2 seconds, and was told he swam it in 51.7. Surprised and disappointed, he swam it again a few minutes later, and swam it in 50.0 seconds. He got faster after defeat.
- Overall, optimists either maintained or improved performance after disappointment. Pessimists deteriorated by 2 seconds in a 100-yard event--the difference between first place and dead last.

### **Optimism and Health**

- Summary: Optimists have less illness, and recover more quickly than pessimists. Depression lowers the functioning of the immune system, while studies of optimism show it may cure cancer!
- Nursing home residents who have more choice and control are more active, happier, and less likely to die.
- Madelon Visintainer's rat sarcoma study
  - Injected rats with tumor cells so that there was a 50% chance of life or death
    - 50% of control rats (no shocks) lived
    - 70% of rats with controllable shocks lived
    - 27% of rats with uncontrollable shocks lived
  - These results held even if the tumor was implanted long after the shocks--childhood mastery could immunize the rats against cancer.
- Cognitive therapy dramatically raised killer cell activity in cancer patients.

### **Mechanisms**

- Learned helplessness weakens the immune system--T-cells no longer multiply rapidly and NK cells lose their ability to kill foreign invaders.
- Optimists are better at seeking and sticking to medical advice. Pessimists have more trouble quitting smoking, and get sick more often
- Optimists suffer fewer life traumas, which make us vulnerable to illness
- Optimists have better social support
  - Middle-aged people with at least one good friend have much better health than the friendless
  - Unmarried people are at a higher risk of depression
  - People who isolate themselves when sick tend to get sicker
- Pessimistic college students have twice as many infectious illnesses and make twice as many doctor visits as optimists
- Optimists tended to avoid recurrences of breast cancer. Even if the cancer recurred, optimists survived longer.

### **The Grant Study (200 men from the Harvard classes of 1939-1944, selected for fitness and intellect)**

- "These men experienced just about the same rate of heartbreak and mortal shock as men who were born at the same time in the inner city."

- Men who used "mature defenses" (humor, altruism, sublimation) went on to have much more successful and healthy lives. At age 60, none were chronically ill, versus 1/3 for men with "immature defenses" (denial, projection).
- Before 45, optimism has no effect on health. But as the body declines, optimism becomes the primary determinant of health.

### **Politics, Religion, and Culture**

- The CAVE technique was applied to the acceptance speeches of presidential candidates from 1948 through 1984. From 1948 to 1984, the more optimistic candidate won 9 out of 10 presidential elections. The one exception was Nixon in 1968, where Humphrey's campaign was marred by riots at the Democratic National Convention.
- A pessimist is likely to make fewer campaign stops (confirmed by the research), be less well-liked, and engender less hope.
- From 1900 to 1944, the more optimistic candidate (based on more optimistic explanatory style "stump" speeches) won 9 of 12 elections--the main exception was FDR, whose pessimistic speeches reflected the grim times.
- In the 1988 election, CAVE analysis correctly predicted 86% of Senate races, including all but one upset.
- A comparison of the secular and non-secular writings of Russian Jews and Russian Orthodox showed that the Jews were much more optimistic in their religious writings. Perhaps this optimism had some effect on their likelihood to emigrate. Religions and cultures that promote a sense of helplessness produce a people less prone to act in the face of adversity.
- More optimistic societies (using West and East Berlin ) achieve more than those with a pessimistic explanatory style.

## **IV. How the Operating Mechanism of Optimism, Our Explanatory Style, is Formed**

The three factors that shape explanatory style are:

1. **Mother's Explanatory Style.** The form of the everyday causal analyses he hears from parents, especially their mother's explanatory style. Children ask "Why?" constantly, and are constantly listening to the explanations of adults in their lives (with the mother's explanations being heard most often). Thus, if the mother's style is personal, pervasive, and permanent when bad events happen, the child hears and internalizes this. If, on the other hand, the mother assigns specific, temporary, and external causes to bad events, the child learns to talk to herself in the same way.

Their father's explanatory style has no effect (this is probably a product of mothers typically being the primary caregiver).

2. **The form of criticism he hears from adults** when he fails (if permanent and pervasive, he'll turn to pessimism). This applies mostly to people whom the child deems an "authority" (such as parents, teachers, and significant caregivers) whose messages goes straight into the subconscious.

**School:** Girls are generally more amenable to the discipline and culture of the typical elementary classroom. Boys, on the other hand, tend to be more disruptive, fidget more, and generally act up. Carol Dweck's studies showed that girls and boys hear very different explanations in their teacher's criticisms. Because the girls tend to be well-behaved and the boys don't, when failure occurs:

- Boys are blamed for poor behavior (which is temporary and specific). Boys who fail are typically told "You weren't paying attention," or "You didn't try hard enough," or "You were being rowdy when I was teaching fractions."
- Girls tend to get more permanent and pervasive explanations. Girls often hear "You're not very good at arithmetic," or "You always hand in sloppy papers," or "You never check your work."

When given impossible problems to solve, the two sexes gave very different explanations

- Girls: "I'm not very good at word games." "I guess I'm not that bright."
- Boys: "I wasn't paying attention." "Who cares about your lousy puzzles anyways?"

Failure devastates us. All of us, upon experiencing failure, quit -- at least temporarily. Optimists bounce back and began trying almost immediately; defeat is temporary and achievement is assured. Pessimists, on the other hand, are defined by their failures. They are a failure, and there is no point in a failure continuing to try.

Children are natural optimists, and they sure better be in our schools. We often assure failure by such tactics as grading on the curve. We define relative success as failure. School is experienced by many students as a place they are failing. Is it any wonder that educators report "losing" students as they enter the later middle school years, which is approximately the same time that the natural optimism of childhood wanes. These students are suddenly unable to cope with an environment they have been in as long as they can remember. How can such a failure not be a complete turn-off?

### **3. Childhood losses, traumas, and crises**

Family or personal crises during childhood, and how those crises are resolved, can shape explanatory style. If they are temporary, he will learn that bad things can be changed and conquered. If they are permanent and pervasive, the seeds of hopelessness will be planted.

Girls whose families experienced but recovered their lifestyle in the late 30's and 40's from the Great Depression tended to be optimists. They were more optimistic in old age (and aged better!) than those whose families did not. Girls whose families didn't recover learned helplessness and became pessimists.

## Other Findings Regarding Children and Optimism

- A. Explanatory style tends to be set early; by the third grade, you'll determine whether you're an optimist or a pessimist.
- B. "On the whole, prepubescent children are extremely optimistic, with a capacity for hope and an immunity to helplessness they will never again possess after puberty, when they lose much of their optimism."
- C. Up until puberty, girls are more optimistic than boys
- D. "Children's explanatory style is enormously lopsided, much more so than adults'. Good events are going to last forever, are going to help in all ways, and are the child's doing. But events just happen along, melt away quickly, and are someone else's fault. So lopsided is the average child that his scores look on average like those of a successful insurance sales agent for Metropolitan Life. A depressed child's lopsided scores look like those of the average non-depressed adult's. No one seems to have the capacity for hope that a young child does, and it is just this fact that makes fear depression in a young child stand out so tragically."
- E. Children do get depressed about as much as adults, but they do not get hopeless, and they do not commit suicide. Children younger than 7 never commit suicide, even though children as young as 5 commit homicide.
- F. Optimistic children tend to become optimistic teenagers and adults. On average they will be less depressed, achieve more, and be healthier than children whose scores are in the pessimistic range.

## V. Changing from Pessimism to Optimism

Without evidence we can change our explanatory styles, the message would be fatalistic. The message that we can change, with thoughtful, explicit practice, is reason for hope and action.

The approaches presented for individuals, children, and in the organizational context are all built on the same principles. The structure is "ABCDE".

A = Adverse event or situation

B = Beliefs about that event

C = Consequences of those beliefs

D = Disputation and Distraction

E = Energization

The method is to:

1. Learn to identify adverse situations or events that you routinely face. Write down the objective descriptions of what happened (not your interpretations of them)

2. Learn to hear (and record) the beliefs about those events that come to your mind (the “recordings” you play in your head). Your beliefs are how you interpret the adversity. Be sure to separate thoughts from feelings. You can check the accuracy of thoughts; you can't check the accuracy of feelings - if you feel sad, you are sad.
3. Feel the consequences of those beliefs (and write them down), in terms of emotions, energy, will to act, etc., and what you did.
  - o Your feelings are consequences. Often you will feel more than one thing. Write down as many as you are aware of.
  - o What did you do then?
4. Dispute those beliefs or distract yourself. It's easy to distance oneself from the accusations of others, but when we launch the attack ourselves, we all too easily assume it must be true. Four disputation techniques include:
  - a. **Disputation** - a deep, lasting remedy for disturbing beliefs is to dispute them.
    - i. Evidence - focusing on evidence that contradicts or undermines the negative belief and supports a more positive interpretation.
      - a) Show that the negative belief is factually incorrect. Many people catastrophize - they select the potential cause with the direst implications - you can easily dispute this by pointing to the distortions in this. Ask, "What is the evidence for this belief?"
      - b) Unlike positive thinking, which consists of trying to believe upbeat statements in the absence of evidence, **learned optimism is about accuracy**. Repeating positive statements doesn't raise mood or achievement; it's how you cope with negative statements that has effect ("the power of non-negative thinking")
    - ii. Alternatives - generating alternative specific, external, and temporary explanations.
      - a) Most events have many causes. Pessimists latch on to the worst possible cause.
      - b) To generate alternative explanations, focus on changeable, specific, non-personal causes. (Notice the opposite of permanent, pervasive, and personal.)
    - iii. Implications - challenging negative implications on which harmful beliefs rely. Sometimes, the negative belief is correct. If that's the case, you can still de-catastrophize.
      - a) "Even if my belief is correct, what are its real implications?"
      - b) You can then repeat the search for evidence
    - iv. Usefulness - challenging the usefulness of the belief. Sometimes, the consequences of holding a belief matter more than the truth of that belief. E.g., your belief that life isn't fair is true, but doesn't do much for you. If a belief isn't useful, try distraction, or look to the future. "Is the situation changeable? How can I go about changing it?"

Seligman suggests that once you have learned the ABCDE disputation technique, you can practice with a friend or spouse providing the negative statement to challenge you, while you provide the disputation.

- b. **Distraction** can be employed to stop the “loop” of these tapes in your head. There are several simple but effective thought-stopping techniques
  - a) Ringing a loud bell
  - b) Carry a 3x5 card with the word STOP on it
  - c) Wear a rubber band around your wrist and snap it hard while saying “Stop” in a loud voice.
  - d) When adversity strikes, schedule some later time for thinking things over. That is, write the worrisome beliefs, fears, etc. down the moment they occur to think about at a set future time. This leaves one free to act.
  - e) To keep your thoughts from returning to a negative belief, direct your attention elsewhere. For example, concentrate on a small object with all your focus.
5. Finally, notice what happens to your energy and will to act when you dispute the negative beliefs. Over time, the disputation becomes rapid and effective as the energization from it rewards you for the effort. Eventually, the positive explanatory style becomes your “default” response.

This ABCDE technique for learning optimism may be applied in a work setting. The focus is on getting past your personal "wall", the part of your work that most makes you want to give up. For example, to implement this for the negative emotions involved with cold calling:

1. Write up an ABC report for each of 10 cold calls. Analyze the pessimism in your statements
2. Now do it again, but this time, dispute the consequences, and write down the energization and feelings that ensue

### **Flexible Optimism and the Value of Pessimism**

Dr. Seligman says that optimism is not always the right approach. When a real risk of a severe negative consequence exists, a cautious, risk-avoiding approach is appropriate. It is appropriate in such an instance to view the risk as pervasive, permanent, and applying to you and yours personally.

Pessimism can keep us from taking risky, optimistic actions in areas where the downside risks are unacceptable. Thus, many executives must, to some extent, be professional pessimists since they must weigh risks that could result in devastating loss to the organization with the attendant harsh personal consequences for employees, owners, partners, and customers. But, when the risk is small (some wasted time and effort, a little public embarrassment, the possibility of a number of failures prior to success), take the optimistic view and ACT!

## **Why does pessimism exist?**

Pessimists are sadder but more realistic. Optimists distort reality in a self-serving direction and pessimists tend to see reality accurately.

- Depressed people more accurately judge how much control they have. Optimists overestimate their control, particularly when they are helpless and have no control at all
- Optimists wildly overestimate their abilities; 80% of American men think that they are above average in social skills
- In laboratory tests which are rigged that that they get 20 questions right and 20 questions wrong, pessimists report getting 21 right. Optimists report getting 28 right.

## **When to use Optimism**

- If you are in an achievement situation (e.g. selling, writing a book)
- If you are concerned about how you will feel
- If the situation is likely to be protracted, and your physical health is an issue
- If you want to lead, inspire, or win votes

## **When to use Pessimism**

- If your goal is to plan for a risky and uncertain future
- If your goal is to counsel others whose future is dim, do not use optimism initially
- If you want to appear sympathetic, don't start with optimism, though using it later once confidence and empathy are established will help

**If the cost of failure is high, optimism is the wrong strategy.**

## **Applying the Concepts of Learned Optimism in the Workplace**

1. Select optimistic employees
2. Place employees in the right roles
  - a. Optimistic Jobs: Require persistence, initiative, bring frequent frustration, rejection, and defeat.
    - i. Sales
    - ii. Public Relations
    - iii. Presenting and Acting
    - iv. Fundraising
    - v. Creative jobs
    - vi. Highly competitive jobs
    - vii. High-burnout jobs
  - b. Pessimistic Jobs: Require a pronounced sense of reality. Low-defeat jobs, low turnover, low-pressure. Jobs that need people who know when not to charge ahead and to err on the side of caution.
    - i. Design and safety engineering
    - ii. Technical and cost estimating
    - iii. Contract negotiation
    - iv. Financial control and accounting
    - v. Law (but not litigation)
    - vi. Business administration
    - vii. Statistics
    - viii. Technical Writing
    - ix. Quality control
    - x. Industrial-relations management

### **Another Method to Become More Optimistic - Altruism**

Seligman suggests that you might give up some activity you do for your own pleasure (roughly one evening per week) and spend this time in an activity devoted to the well-being of others or the community. Experienced volunteers report that a major surprise for them is the lift they derive from their work. They discover that the poor and sick are not monsters but very human beings; that modest heroism among the afflicted is the rule rather than the exception; that while what they see as volunteers may sadden them, it does not depress them; and that quite often they are deeply moved. It is liberating to see firsthand that among the theoretically helpless there is frequently an amazing degree of master, spiritual and psychological.

## **VI. Learned Optimism Reprise.**

We can change the way we think. We can learn optimism. Learned optimism alone will not stem the tide of depression; optimism is just a useful adjunct to wisdom. By itself, it cannot provide meaning. Optimism is a tool to help us achieve the goals we have set for ourselves. It is in the choice of the goals themselves that meaning - or emptiness - resides. When learned optimism is

coupled with a renewed commitment to helping others, our epidemic of depression and meaninglessness may end.

