

Building the Positivity Characteristic



This characteristic helps you:

- see the positive side of unfamiliar situations easily
- look at the world as an exciting place filled with opportunities
- see the value to be gained from pursuing a potential opportunity, even if you are not ready to pursue it
- see the lessons that can be learned from negative outcomes
- envision the possibility of turning negative situations around

You may want to strengthen this characteristic if you:

- have an unusually high degree of caution about new situations
- focus more on the negative aspects than the positive
- are usually skeptical when other people propose new ideas
- find it hard to get excited about anything
- spend a lot of energy fretting and worrying about change



Changing Your Self-Talk

When you encounter change and disruption, you generate *explanations* that influence your *feelings and actions*.

Something disruptive happens → You decide why you think it happened (explanation) → You respond based on your explanation (feelings /actions)

Explanations can be *pessimistic* or *optimistic*

- *Pessimistic* explanations for negative events tend to focus on broad and long-lasting reasons
- *Optimistic* explanations for negative events tend to focus on specific and short-term reasons

Explanations tend to come to mind *very quickly*; most people don't spend a lot of time thinking about them, but move quickly to feelings and actions. Example: *Your boss yells at you and tells you that the report you sent him was awful.*

- Pessimistic explanation: *He's stupid and incompetent* (broad, long-lasting reason)
- Optimistic explanation: *He's having a bad day* (specific, short-term reason)

Pessimistic explanations often make it hard to come up with useful responses, while *optimistic* explanations often suggest next steps.

Challenging Pessimistic Explanations

1. The first step is to *pay attention* to your explanations (sometimes called "self-talk").
2. Next, ask yourself some questions:
 - ? *Is there good evidence to support this explanation?*
 - ? *Are there other possible explanations that are at least as likely and are more optimistic?*
 - ? *Is the situation really as bad as I think it is?*
 - ? *Is it helpful for me to think this right now?*

Try It Yourself

1. Identify a change that is disruptive to you. Keep a simple journal with your weekly observations. What explanatory "self-talk" do you notice?
2. Make a list of your negative self-talk. For each negative statement, ask yourself, "What can you do to revise this explanation to be more *optimistic*?"

Micro-Practice: What can you do "in the moment"?

- ✓ If your first reaction to something is "NO," try out a "YES."
- ✓ If you notice that you are feeling anxious, take a deep breath and think of one thing you are grateful for.