

COACHING I

9. THE POWER OF POSITIVE THINKING

9.1. Background Information

Many people say things like, "I try to think positive, but I am overwhelmed by negativity." Many people have concluded that either positive thinking doesn't work, or they are somehow not trying hard enough. The fact is, positive thinking *can* be a very effective tool in the right circumstances, but it has to be done the right way and at the right time. But before I get into that, I want to get off on the right foot and say it is best to consider positive thinking as self-coaching. It's a more accurate description of what you're trying to do, and it is the name researchers use when they try to determine if self-coaching makes any difference. And they've discovered it does. For example, in a study of Olympic gymnasts, they found that those who made the U.S. men's gymnastics team employed more self-coaching than those who weren't able to qualify. In a different study, "positive self-talk" made it easier for a gymnast to do well. Researcher Susan Jackson did a study on twenty-eight elite athletes from seven different sports. She found that confidence, ability to focus, and level of motivation were key factors in their ability to consistently succeed. Self-coaching can enhance those key factors.

Positive thinking refers to one's confidence in actions, beliefs, and competencies. Having positive thinking is the key towards a successful and fulfilling life. Self-talk can be described as that little voice inside one's head which can either be beneficial or detrimental to one's thinking. This inner voice usually gives comments, critiques, or praises one's deeds and actions.

9.2. Self-Talk: 3 Tips

There are different views regarding self-talk in relation to building positive thinking. Some people may relate self-talk to the barriers towards attaining true confidence in oneself. This can be true in the cases of people who do not push to take the pessimism out of their systems. There is also a school of thought that says self-talk is an important tool in the development of positive thinking. The inner voice is seen as a teacher, mentor, and a friend. Self-talk has been used by successful people in their careers in fields such as sports and show business.

Here are some few tips on how to use self-talk towards developing positive thinking:

1) Listen to your inner voice. This is the first step in making good use of self-talk. Identify the inner voice in your head and listen to what it is saying.

2) Assess your thoughts. What are the thoughts saying? What attitude towards oneself is being stated by these thoughts? How have you responded to these thoughts in the past? What have these kinds of thoughts made out of me throughout the years? Another important aspect to assess is the way a person reacts to the thoughts that are being said by his inner voice. A person may think that his negative thoughts are empowering and that these things give the much-needed push to attain one's goals. Negative comments and thoughts can be useful in the short run. However, they do more damage than good in the long run. Viewing one's life in a positive light is the sure way towards having a positive thinking. When a person goes down, the inner voice would say "stand up, you can do it!" rather than "stay down before you hurt yourself again!" The general tone of one's inner voice is as important as what it is saying. Negative tones should be eliminated and be reversed into positive ones.

3) Make a difference. Dealing with one's inner voice can be a hard task. If it's daunting to talk to someone who wouldn't listen, it's much harder to talk and listen to oneself because there can be no sensible arguments that could happen. Getting rid of the negative thoughts inside one's head will give the positive thoughts some space. It is all about rephrasing the negative thoughts to make them positive. One's concept of the world is based on his views of the world. One will develop positive thinking by feeling good about himself. The inner voice should not have control over the person; the person should have control over the inner voice. Positive thinking is like a pair of eyeglasses. Having the right pair can make one enjoy the beauty of things to the fullest. Life, if one truly looks at it, is all about perception. One will never enjoy life if he perceives it with much negativity. This is also true in terms of viewing oneself. Positive thinking is tied to having true happiness. True happiness can only come from within a person's heart and believing in oneself is the only way to achieve happiness.

9.3. 10 Ways to Build a Positive Mental Attitude

1. **The choice is yours** - Your life is the product and result of your choices. You always have (and had) a choice. You can choose to let the current state of the economy bring you down or you can choose to look for opportunities in the face of adversity and challenge. Choose to focus your attention on what you *can* do and what you *will* achieve. The way you choose to see the world creates the world you see.
2. **Limit your time in front of the TV** - Instead read a positive book, start a project, pick up a new hobby, spend some quality time with your family, or do something that will enhance your life. Manage your time around your highest priorities and values.
3. **Build the habit of using positive language** - Listen to the words you use. Avoid words like 'always', 'never', 'can't', 'won't' and even 'why.' Say 'I choose' or 'I want', instead of 'I need' or 'I should' and notice the difference.
4. **Surround yourself with positive people** - Surround yourself with people who have a positive influence in your life, people who speak the truth and support you. Expand your circle of positive influence with people who are further ahead in personal and professional development than you are. Disassociate with negative people who impede your progress.
5. **Develop a “Givers Gain” mentality** - Give away what you seek without expectation or measuring. When you seek success, help others to be successful. When you seek happiness, help others to find happiness first.
6. **Invest in yourself** - Listen to positive attitude audio CD's, invest in courses or workshops or attend personal development seminars. Read books from people who write about how you *can* and *will*, not why you can't or won't.
7. **Let go of anger, resentment and judgment** - Hanging on to negative emotions like anger or resentment will drain your energy and hinders you from moving forward to create positive change in your life. The best way to let go of these emotions is to fully acknowledge the feelings associated with the initial negative experience. Honor those feelings and let them go as they no longer serve you, and replace them with something positive. You can still hold on to the lessons learned from the initial negative experience.

8. **Create positive, realistic expectations and take action** - All too often people try to live up to the expectations of others, such as a parent, a manager or a significant other. Make sure your expectations are congruent with who you really are. You are what you believe, and you become what you expect. Expect the best, and only the best, from life, from others, and from yourself. Take action on your expectations.
9. **Stop believing in what you think is true and start believing in what you really want** - Identify and let go of limiting beliefs that no longer support or honor you. Instead develop empowering beliefs that are aligned with your goals, values and your heart's desire.
10. **Take responsibility for your own life** - Focus your attention on what you can control: your thoughts, your actions, your behavior, your emotional state and your daily actions and activities. You're the steward of your own life and are solely responsible for the results and experiences you create. Taking ownership and responsibility for your own life is a freedom and tremendous privilege.

9.4. Concluding Principles

Self-coaching, which many people call positive thinking, can indeed make a difference. But to make it work for you, apply the following principles:

1. **Coach toward a purpose.** The first step in self-coaching is to make sure you know what you're coaching *toward*. Clearly define your purpose. Make it simple. Don't complicate it and don't attempt several purposes at once. Yogi Berra said, "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." That's funny because you can't take a fork in the road. You can't go two directions at once. Choose one and then coach
2. **Give yourself advice.** Look at your circumstance the way you might see it if a friend of yours was in your situation. And then advise yourself the way you would advise your friend. "It's not as bad as it seems. You'll get through this. You can handle it."

Be kind and gentle. Reassure yourself and use your good common sense. Give yourself your best advice and then follow it.

3. **Give yourself encouragement.** It makes a difference to tell yourself, "I can do it." That's all encouragement is: The basic message "you can do it." This is what people call "belief in yourself." It's nothing more than coaching yourself,

encouraging yourself, saying to yourself, "I can do it." Talk to yourself in a confident and reassuring way. Encourage yourself without overstating your case or trying to feel enthusiastic. Talk to yourself genuinely and sincerely, like you would talk to your best friend, and give yourself some encouragement.

4. Give yourself reasons. Remind yourself of the reasons why you can overcome this obstacle. Tell yourself about your past successes. Remind yourself of your strengths. Also, remind yourself of why you really want it. Think up *new* reasons. Good reasons will motivate you and strengthen your determination.

5. Aim for your favorite positive emotion. I have often wanted to have a good attitude, so when I was dealing with others — co-workers, my neighbors, the clerk at the store, my wife — I tried to have a positive attitude. I tried to be cheerful and enthusiastic. Aim for love instead. Or gratitude or feeling relaxed or determined. These are easier to attain and worth more than cheerfulness.

6. Try anti-negativity. It's about getting rid of negative, self-defeating thinking. It is attacking and finding fault in your pessimistic assumptions. When you're in a negative mood, this is probably the easiest and most natural way to be more "positive." Instead of trying to pretend you feel positive or somehow drum up a positive feeling, you *attack* your negative thoughts with as much venom as you like. It works. Sometimes positive thinking is too much of a step. Use anti-negativity to get yourself up to neutral before attempting anything positive.

7. Reframe "negative" events. This is probably what most people think of as "positive thinking." Reframing is looking at a circumstance in a different way deliberately. If you change the way you think about it, you can change the way you feel about it, and that usually helps you deal with it more effectively.

8. Repeat what works. You may have noticed that good coaches develop "sayings." They have certain things that they say often. As you coach yourself, you will often coach yourself the same way on the same activity over and over, and you'll develop short, pithy sayings that capture a useful meaning. Use those. Once you get very good at coaching yourself, you can do a whole coaching session with one sentence and be back to the activity with a good attitude.

If you ever thought that positive thinking was bunk, try using these ideas and see if it changes your mind. I think you'll find that when it's done with skill, positive thinking can be very effective. It can improve not only the way you feel, but how effective you are at accomplishing your goals and dealing with people.