



SI-6 How I Know Learned Optimism Works

Success begins with the internal cognitive generation of personal power and energy to do and accomplish. Personal power radiates from one's positive, energetic, expectant, attitudes and beliefs.

This statement might only produce a yawning “so what” reaction if it weren't for work done by Dr. Martin Seligman on what he calls “learned optimism.” His work supports the idea that optimism and personal power can be increased on purpose. The ability to turn up the cognitive heat and function at creative levels is first a decision, and then an individual learning task.

The last two years of the “Great Recession” have provided me a personal thought laboratory for experimenting with the Seligman's findings that optimism can be learned.

And you know what? I was able to replicate his findings and change a gloomy “learned pessimism” into “relearned optimism.” For me, both the descent into pessimism and the ascent to optimism has been a gradual one. The descent into negativity occurred so slowly that it was almost unnoticeable. That's what made it so sinister.

I felt like a car engine being started on a subzero winter morning—everything just seems to drag. It took ten times the energy to finally get it running. With pessimism in the driver's seat, everything is harder or poorer: vision, memory, physical energy, patience, focus, concentration, and performance are all at a low ebb.

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Finally, one day, I realized this train was getting me nowhere fast; I decided to ignore defeatist societal chatter in the media and social networking and change.

Reading and studying about learned optimism ensued and started to reverse the downward spiral. Soon personal electricity started to flow again. I learned choosing success means one must literally vow to maintain and build up personal power levels at all costs, at all times.

How? By obsessively focusing thought effort on what I want, not what I don't want. Excluding or reducing negative messages from any source, setting outcomes and working on the achievement of these outcomes every day. Thinking personal, positive affirmations ("I like myself!", or "I love to teach!") may seem silly, but when you're down, they provide an antidote. It's simple, but not easy.

Therefore, knowing very clearly and precisely what you want to achieve, and centering on the outcomes you desire when teaching, or engaged in your personal life, is the absolute first place to start when you decide to teach for success.

For the new academic term, if you are dragging, learn optimism, practice optimism and teach from optimism. You will see your personal power and influence zoom.

*~John H, (Jack) Shrawder, Exec. Director
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