

## OPTIMISM

### What is optimism?

**Optimism refers to the consistent demonstration of a “glass half full” or better attitude and to inspire others to explore a similar attitude for themselves.**

### Why is it important to show optimism?

Being optimistic allows you to see life from a perspective of opportunity and growth, and allows you to be inspired to find new ways, see new things, and live life to the fullest. In addition, having an optimistic attitude can be infectious and so it attracts like-minded people and, together, you create a supply of inspiration and energy which fills your world with the sense that anything can be achieved and with the people with whom you can achieve it. In this way it is a self-fulfilling attitude.

It's easy to talk the talk of optimism, for example to say that life is abundant, however, this isn't optimism in action if you then simply wait for 'the land of plenty' to appear. Real optimism means you walk the walk; that is, you not only believe you can achieve what you set out to achieve, but you also take action to bring about your goals. Being optimistic means holding the belief that there is always a way, that there are always options. Optimism is underpinned by an attitude of abundance rather than one of scarcity. With this attitude and perspective your life flourishes and so do the opportunities that present themselves because you are setting yourself up for this to be your experience. Although you must be prepared to look and to do the foot work, a person who is optimistic tends to have a deep sense that everything happens for a reason and that if they are thrown off course, they allow that it may well be because there is something even better that will come as a result of this seeming detour.

Some people wonder why other people seem to get things in life while some seem to get all the problems. It is because optimistic people see problems in life as opportunities and choose to get out on the court and play, hitting back all the hard balls knowing the good ones will come in their turn and be all the sweeter. So it is not that life gives some people a better deal than others, rather it is that some people actively look for the positive perspective on the hand they are dealt which is no different from anyone else. Being optimistic is about seeing a situation or event and actively looking for the silver lining rather than getting stuck in doom and gloom thinking and expectations about how things can get even worse. The phrase the 'glass is half full' refers to looking at any event seeing all the possibilities inherent in it, rather than looking for all the missing components that one might have wished to be there. With the right attitude your glass will overflow with events and opportunities.

### Why is it so easy to slip up in the area of optimism?

If you are constantly exposed to a negative environment, events or people, it is easy to slip up in the area of optimism as the negativity can rub off meaning that we fall into the same type of thinking.

Our current economic climate is a good example of circumstances that might be testing your optimism. Perhaps you, or someone you know, have lost their job. If so, it would be easy to think

'I'll never get a job, there is so much competition, so many people are being put off; so many companies are closing down'. While all of this may be true, if you apply optimism you might also consider that this could be a great time to get out of the rat race, self evaluate and work out what you truly want to do. Or perhaps finishing work has given you the permission you needed to look at opportunities and to explore all those possibilities that you've so far only dreamt of. When you operate with optimism in your attitude you're very likely to find yourself presented with lots of great suggestions, feedback and referrals, people to see or connect you to possibilities. This is because of the positive spiral that optimism creates due to its infectiousness.

The challenge to optimism is, of course, when the glass looks half empty – which it does for all of us from time to time. This is exactly the time to put the effort into considering in what way the glass could be seen as half full.

It is also easy to slip up in being optimistic by giving ourselves too hard a time for being pessimistic! Remember that this will just spiral the pessimism – so it's far better to accept that you may well have a few trips on the doom and gloom bus; the trick is just to remember to get off the bus the moment you realise you are on it.

Something else to consider is that people on the doom and gloom bus might not be ready to get off and they want company. They want to be comforted and told that their perspective is justified and accurate and have other people validate their point of view. The trouble with doing this for someone is that you then also start to convince yourself that the doom and gloom story is the true state of affairs. So it's important to watch how you support people who are going through tough times. Reach out to them by all means, but don't get pulled into the pit with them – rather give them a ladder. What they really need, after all, is to know that there's light at the end of the tunnel.

### Tips and/or behaviours of a person who is optimistic

- Optimism can be learnt, and is well worth learning, because it fundamentally shifts one's perspective on life into one of possibility and opportunity rather than blocks and limits. And this perspective is self-sustaining; the more one is optimistic the more one sees opportunities and positive results, and the more that happens, the stronger one's faith in this attitude becomes
- Being grateful for what is, rather than lamenting for what isn't, is one of the ways to grow an optimistic attitude – to start seeing the glass as half full.
- An optimistic person is aware of the power of their attitude so makes the effort to look for the positives in situations and events that, at first sighting, might look negative or undesired.
- An optimistic person is aware of the infectious nature of optimism, and of the opportunities that come from mixing with other people who are optimistic, so they make the effort to spread optimism.

- An optimistic person doesn't get drawn into their own or other's pessimism for long as they understand that solutions and options, i.e. the way forward, will come from looking for the good in any arising circumstances and working with that to find the next step.

### Evaluate your own optimism

- Do you look for opportunities in the face of gloom?
- Are you a person who uses creative suggestions to cheer someone up?
- What would you consider to be your first natural response before you knew all the facts; negative, positive and ambivalent?
- How do you view the world situation at present?
- How easy is it for you to come up with solutions to your problems?
- Do you look for solutions or do you look for problems?
- When you have a fight with a colleague, friend or partner, how do you react?

### Improve your optimism

- Consider your current situation and review if there is something you could look at differently.
- Consider a problem that you are having difficulties with and ask yourself what the silver lining might be. And if you don't know, imagine what the most optimistic person you know might consider to be the silver lining.
- When you are faced with a problem, practice viewing it as an opportunity – look for what you might learn, who you might meet, what opportunities might present themselves from as you work through the circumstances (note that it is helpful simply to not call the circumstances or event a problem at all).
- Think of the people around you who are optimistic? Ask them about how they sustain this attitude and outlook. Spend more time with them and observe how they create this outlook for themselves and practise doing the same for your self.
- When something doesn't go your way, if you catch yourself thinking 'this always happens to me', pause and confront the 'always' in that thought – it's much more likely that this only happens to you sometimes. In addition, ask yourself what is one step you could take to turn this into a better scenario for yourself.

## Further resources

If you would like to develop further in the area of optimism, the following books, courses and consultants may be worth considering. Please note that High Ideals does not endorse or receive any direct benefit from recommending the following resources. The list is simply a suggestive collection of materials that members of the High Ideals management team have found useful in their own development.

- Book - Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life - by Martin Seligman
- [www.authentichappiness.com](http://www.authentichappiness.com) This is a web site devoted to the field of positive psychology, founded by Dr Martin Seligman, who is a Director of the University of Pennsylvania Positive Psychology Centre. Positive psychology focuses on the empirical study of such things as positive emotions, strengths-based character, and healthy institutions. His research has demonstrated that it is possible to be happier — to feel more satisfied, to be more engaged with life, find more meaning, have higher hopes, and probably even laugh and smile more, regardless of one's circumstances. The Authentic Happiness website has lots of resources available at no charge and has almost 700,000 registered users around the world.
- [www.queendom.com](http://www.queendom.com) Queendom is the land of tests ... so many of them that the sheer choice of topics will inspire you to take a wonderful journey inside yourself. The site creates an interactive venue for self-exploration with a healthy dose of fun. There is a full range of professional-quality, scientifically-validated psychological assessments that empower you to grow and reach your real potential through insightful feedback and detailed, custom-tailored analysis.
- **Fish!** – by Lundin, Paul & Christensen (book, video and workshops)
- Book - The Road to Optimism: Change Your Language - by J Mitchell Perry, Rick Griggs, Richard E Griggs

## Author and editor acknowledgement

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