

Have you ever thought about the reason why some people appear to find it very easy to survive life than others? Or, the reason why some people are healthier and relish more success?

If that is the case, you've most likely considered at least one time that those kinds of people were only "born under a lucky star." However, have you ever thought that maybe their good fortune is the outcome of their optimistic approach to life?

Learned Optimism is essentially about this occurrence. The author of this book, Martin Seligman, is viewed as the father of the positive psychology movement, a movement that started with Seligman's studies of, what he named, "learned helplessness."

In maybe his most well-known research, Seligman gave electric shocks to dogs. Some of these canine subjects had the capacity to stop shocks by pressing a button with their nose, while other canine subjects couldn't stop the shocks regardless of what they did.

What captivated Seligman the most was that the dogs that couldn't alter their fortune in this test would later also not even try to do anything about their circumstance when they really could. Instead, they would basically stay there, seemingly conquered.

Although it is somewhat okay for people to feel helpless in a circumstance of conquest, a thing makes the helplessness stick or lets us to "shrug off" the circumstance and move on: our alleged explanatory style.

Explanatory style means the manner in which we describe the negative incidences of our lives to ourselves: optimistically or pessimistically. Both optimists and pessimists have a tendency to make use of really different explanatory styles.

As you'll discover in the next chapters, this style does not just relate to people; however, it pertains to the whole team as well. For instance, with every other thing being equal, explanatory style is a predictor of the success and failure of sports teams, particularly when under pressure.

In this book chapter as well, you'll learn about the cause why optimists have a tendency to be healthier than pessimists.

Also, you'll discover why talking to yourself in a pessimistic manner can bring about depression.

Lastly, and most significantly, you'll learn that our explanatory style is learned and that it's likely to alter your view on life for the better.

Chapter 1 - Pessimists have explanatory styles that are general, internal and permanent; while optimists have the opposite.

Anytime we go through a negative incident in our lives, we usually clarify it to ourselves in one of two manners: optimistically or pessimistically.

However, what precisely portrays our explanatory style?

First and foremost, pessimists view issues to be permanent, whereas optimists view issues to just be temporary.

For instance, if you lose a significant customer, you might wonder, "I always lose the most significant customers all the time." By making use of the term "always," you make the clarification permanent: you've always lost significant clients, and you always will –therefore what does it matter to try?

On the other hand, if you make use of an optimistic explanatory style, then you view negative events to be temporary. For example, you might consider, "I lost this one vital client; however, I'll do better with other ones."

Secondly, where optimists consider issues as being specific to a particular condition, pessimists have a tendency to generalize.

For instance, if a pessimistic student considers that the bad grade they got is unfair, they might proceed to reason that grades as unfair generally. Therefore, it might be harder for them to study for their coming exam.

But, rather, if they considered the issue they met in a specific way, then they'd concentrate just on the circumstance itself. For example, they might reason: "Ok, it is just this one professor that is unfair; however maybe the other professor will better appreciate my work."

Third, although optimists have the tendency to view negative incidences as being caused externally, and positive incidences as being caused internally, pessimists normally consider these the other way around. For instance, if your partner leaves you, you could reason: "He left me because I'm not good enough, or maybe because I didn't laugh at his jokes."

Conversely, if you think of the cause of negative events as external, you might rather think: "He basically wasn't set for a commitment; therefore the relationship was really a waste of my time."

Fortunately, the manners in which optimists and pessimists make sense of bad incidences are not set in stone: all three behavioral patterns can be transformed.

Chapter 2 - Both Pessimism and optimism are ways of thinking, that is, self-talk, and it can be learned.

Our explanatory style originates from our personal experience. Depending on our life experiences, we become either pessimists, believing that we don't have power over our fate, or optimists, having a sense of control over our fates.

As a matter of fact, this can be noticed in dogs as well, as noticed in the experiment about learned helplessness mentioned before. The experiment made the dogs victims of an unpleasant circumstance, and by doing that they were trained to become passive and pessimistic.

Likewise, human thinking ways are learned as well, mostly during childhood and mostly from parents and schoolteachers.

Children frequently mimic their parents' deeds; therefore if those parents have a tendency to explain negative situations pessimistically, their child will be very likely to use the exact explanatory style.

Teachers are significant as well. For example, they usually assess the poor results of boys and girls in a different way, telling boys that their poor performance is as a result of them not concentrating in class, and telling girls that they're "only not really good with numbers."

Due to that, girls form a rather “internal” explanatory style, where they blame themselves for their results, on the other hand, boys frequently have an “external” style. Since an internal explanatory style can enhance depression, this could be one of the reasons for the higher rate of depression in females.

Furthermore, life crises are mainly important in terms of learning an explanatory style. If children learn that crises can be conquered, and so that difficulty is not permanent, they're very more likely to form a somewhat optimistic style.

Hence, childhood crises don't need to have a negative impact on children. Everything will depend on how those crises are dealt with by the child's main caretakers.

The most significant takeaway is that, because our explanatory style is learned, we can alter the manner we “talk” to ourselves: even if you've gotten a pessimistic style in childhood, you're not fated to use it for life.

Chapter 3 - Optimists possess a better immune system and they are usually healthier.

The positive impacts of an optimistic view are very greater than most of us believe. For example, compared with their pessimistic counterparts, optimists are healthier in general.

What is the reason for this?

First of all, on a cellular level, optimists usually possess a stronger immune system. For instance, experiments that induced a state of inevitable helplessness in rats have revealed that their immune systems release fewer T-cells – these cells are vital to immune system response.

Other studies as well have revealed that altering our explanatory style, and the relief from the feeling of helplessness that this gives, can also improve the immune system of people with cancer.

Secondly, since optimists have a tendency to be more active than pessimists, they're very more likely to take care of themselves more.

The reason for this is that optimists think that their behaviors have a positive influence; therefore, they're very likely to stick to a health care schedule. Conversely, pessimists have a tendency to think that nothing they do counts; hence, they have no cause to even attempt to alter their ways of life, regardless of how unhealthy they may be.

Furthermore, optimists met fewer negative life incidences than pessimists do, an occurrence that researchers describe in terms of a pessimist's passivity as a result of their belief that they can't change anything. Therefore, if you're a pessimist, facing plenty of negative situations, your body will need to go through lots of stress, which can eventually cause disease.

Thirdly, people that are optimistic find it very easy to maintain friendships, and friendship is useful to our health. The reason is that having a friend that you can confide in and talk about everything or anything really relieves the stress caused by negative life incidence.

Therefore, anything you are experiencing a difficult time, confiding in person that is close to you can assist you greatly. Frequently, since those kinds of people know us a lot, they'll have understanding, beneficial ideas about what we can do to enhance our circumstances.

Chapter 4 - Pessimism enhances depression.

At this moment in time, the Western world is experiencing an epidemic of depression: at any given time, about 25% of the entire population is going through some kind of depression.

However, what are the determinants of depression?

Although negative incidences and biological factors appear to play a part, these only can't clarify the entire occurrence.

For example, assuming one of your siblings is depressed, there's a greater chance that you'll become depressed, as well. But, these genetic effects are not mainly strong.

Negative life incidence cannot be the key cause of depression as well. Although it's typical to react to negative incidences in our lives with mild depressive symptoms –such as a bad mood, or lethargy – not everyone reacts to those kinds of incidences by becoming very depressed.

Therefore, if genetic factors and negative incidences themselves aren't the determinants of depression, what then is the cause of depression?

The answer, in a word, is our explanatory style: how we consider those incidences is a determining factor in whether or not we get depressed.

As revealed by one study, learned helplessness can be created by giving people a duty that's not possible to accomplish, regardless of what they do.

In one human study, participants were put in a room and they were provided with a panel that has various buttons. Then, the room was filled with noise, and the participants were given the mission of putting an end to the noise by pressing the panel's buttons.

But, the experiment was rigged for some of the subjects: regardless of which buttons they pressed, the noise just wouldn't stop.

The outcome?

These specific subjects learned to be helpless in this circumstance, and at the end of the experiment, they displayed signs of depression.

This study backs up Seligman's model of depression, which according to him "the belief that your deeds will be pointless." Therefore, while loss, conquest, and failure can lead to depression, it will just occur if you trust that nothing you can do will alter the event.

Chapter 5 - If you use an optimistic style of reasoning, you are very more likely to win at sports competitions.

As we've noticed, both optimistic and pessimistic explanatory styles have a big effect on performance. An aspect where this is especially correct is competitive sports. Given two teams that are the same in every other respect, the optimistic team will constantly beat the pessimistic team, particularly after an earlier loss.

Think of this, for instance, a study that was conducted by Seligman and his colleagues, whereby they assessed the optimism of baseball teams across two different seasons. Remember that, in terms of players, both teams had the same talent.

A particularly optimistic team describes their losses like this: "We were defeated against this one team, only this one time, and it's not actually our fault."

The study discovered that during the first season in 1985 – the New York Mets had the most optimistic style of all the National League teams. In contrast, the St. Louis Cardinals had a really pessimistic manner of explaining their losses.

On this basis, Seligman, as well as his colleagues, forecast that the Mets would relish an even more successful season in 1986 and that the Cardinals would lose ground. Eventually, this is exactly what transpired.

Another illustration of the strong impact of optimism on performance can be noticed in the 1987 Berkeley swim team. The optimistic swimmers in the team did well after losing than the pessimistic swimmers.

The explanatory style of each swimmer was assessed in one experiment. Then, after the swimmers had really done their best, their coach told them that they'd done considerably worse than they had. This was very annoying to the athletes.

When they were told to swim once again, the pessimists swam very slower (up to two seconds slower) than their first attempt, while the optimists swam just as well, or even better!

Chapter 6 - Optimists are very successful; if the talent is not matched by optimism, it is overrated.

Even though you're not a big-shot athlete, you're very more to defeat the difficulties in your life if you employ an optimistic explanatory style.

This advantage can be noticed in children as well, as children with an optimistic style do well in the classroom than their pessimistic counterparts.

In an experiment that was conducted, two groups of children, one optimistic and the other pessimistic – were given math problems that were solvable. In this first attempt, both groups did equally well.

But, in the second attempt, the math problems are changed with unsolvable ones.

How did each group react?

The pessimistic children gave up, refusing to carry on with the work. On the contrary, the optimistic children, although they knew that they were making errors, carried on in their attempts to solve the problems by making use of their existing approaches.

Lastly, in a third trial, both groups were given again solvable math problems and then asked to assess how well they will perform when solving similar problems in the later future. The pessimistic children said that they would only be able to solve nearly 50% of the problems, on the other hand, the optimists believed that they would be able to solve about 90% of the problem.

This exact effect can be seen later in life as well, as optimistic students got better grades in college than their SAT scores predict.

This was displayed in an experiment that was conducted at the University of Pennsylvania. Normally, the admissions office selects students based on their high school grades, their college board scores as well as the results of their achievement tests. Then, these are calculated into a predictive index: if the score is very high, the student is admitted to the university.

However, there is an issue with this system: specific freshmen do worse than anticipated, and some do very better.

To determine why, Seligman evaluated the freshmen students for their optimism, then waited to observe how they would do in their first semester.

As you've most likely predicted, the optimistic students did better than anticipated, and the pessimists did worse than anticipated.

Chapter 7 - Optimism is really beneficial in your professional life as well.

What is the reason why some people seem to flourish at all the job they do, while others hardly survive?

Once again, the factor that usually distinguishes these people is their explanatory style.

People that have an optimistic explanatory style are better appropriate for jobs that entail lots of rejection. This is particularly correct in sales jobs that entail cold calling: in this setting, possessing an optimistic explanatory style will decide whether or not you will flourish or give up.

For instance, the selection process of Metropolitan the insurance company– which employs 5000 new agents yearly– is very detailed, because they spend above \$30,000 to choose and train a new agent. However, after a four-year time, 80% of them will have given up.

A significant aspect of a sales agent's work is cold calling, which usually ends in lots of refusals. Just the agents who proceeded to call a minimum of ten leads a day, regardless of the number of rejections they got, became successful. The others normally give up.

Additionally to the present long selection process, Seligman assessed the optimism of prospective sales agents. He went on to employ agents that underperformed a little on the normal industry tests (which assessed the applicant's “aptitude” to be a sales agent) however got really high score in optimism.

As Seligman observed the careers of these optimists, he discovered that they really performed did than the agents who were chosen based only on their abilities.

As the study of Seligman's revealed, aptitude or gift is not enough to forecast professional success, especially in areas where one experiences lots of difficulties. Hence, he proposes choosing personnel for three main features: motivation, aptitude and, definitely, optimism.

Chapter 8 - You can alter your self-talk by making use of the ABC approach.

Now that you've understood the terrible impacts a pessimistic explanatory style can have on your life, you might sensibly think: "How can I move from a pessimist into an optimist?"

One specifically effective manner of dealing with negative self-talk is the alleged ABC method, created by the psychologist Albert Ellis. This method entails three steps: adversity, belief, and consequence.

Firstly, it's significant to watch yourself so you can notice the association between adversity, belief, and consequence in your life.

Think of this daily illustration:

ADVERSITY: Someone you love doesn't return your phone calls.

BELIEF: He or she doesn't love me. My jokes are not that funny. I'm not attractive.

CONSEQUENCE: You become depressed all day.

However, it's not usually easy to identify these ABCs in your own life, as the majority of our self-talk is unconscious. However, you should attempt to pay attention to your self-talk and look for at least five ABCs, in order for you to notice their negative impact on your life.

For you to do this, all to record the entire three ABC elements when observing your negative self-talk.

Adversity can explain any difficult event: a disagreement with your partner, a speeding ticket, or not remembering to get groceries while on your way home from work.

Belief concerns how you understand those kinds of events. Here it is significant to differentiate thoughts from feelings (as feelings are consequences). A belief could be for instance: I'm a bad parent; I'm not competent; I did a good job; My memory is bad.

When we talk about consequences, you have to think of what you did as a result of A and B, and how you felt. For instance, did you cry? Were you depressed? Did you scream and become angry? Were you ashamed?

As soon as you have discovered a few ABCs in your life, then you are now in a place to change them. It's vital to know at this point that the beliefs you've recorded will mainly influence the consequences.

Chapter 9 - Attempt to know the like between A, B, and C, and change where suitable.

Our beliefs about a circumstance will determine both its consequences and how we feel about the circumstance. Therefore, by altering our beliefs, we alter these consequences and our feelings as well.

Although it's hard to determine which of our beliefs are "true," it's obvious that how we consider negative situations extremely determines how they influence us.

For instance, assuming you're challenged with an adverse circumstance at work –for instance, you're calling a customer continuously and the customer doesn't pick up the phone. You assume that the customer is maybe really busy to answer the call. The consequence is that you choose to just drop a message and attempt again the next day.

But, with a different belief, the same adverse circumstance can have a really different outcome. For instance, after calling the customer for the fifth time, you believe that the customer is maybe

avoiding your calls since they don't want to have any business with you. The consequence of this belief is that it makes you feel conquered and worthless, and might choose to stop trying to contact them completely.

Events like the above pervade our whole lives, and can as well impact how our kids see and behave in similar circumstances. However, by talking about these ABCs with your kids and assisting them to form other beliefs, you might really assist them to live happier lives.

For instance, think of the ABCs in these two cases:

Your child's friend decides to sit next to the new children during lunch. Your child believes that his friend doesn't like him again and that he's attempting to have a new best friend. The consequence is that your child gets sad, feels rejected and, since he's busy with this circumstance, stops concentrating in class.

Now think of this alternative reaction: Your child believes that it's kind of his friend to attempt to form a friendship with the child at school; he then chooses to join them and introduce himself. The consequence? Your child feels secure in himself, and might even make a new friend due to that.

Chapter 10 - By challenging and examining your beliefs, you can be an optimist.

As we've noticed, optimists understand stressful events as being caused externally, specific and temporary. Is this the tendency we have to reach to such circumstances? If not, you're fortunate, as there are various methods that you can start to alter your beliefs.

The first method is disputation, which functions on an extreme level to change your negative beliefs. Disputing your beliefs entails testing all belief in terms of the next four questions:

Is the belief really correct? If it is, what proof is there? For instance, if a customer doesn't buy from you, does this truly signify that you're not good at your work? If your answer to that question is "yes," then how can you clarify the successful sales you've had this week?

Is there another explanation for that? Here, you should concentrate on specific, changeable and impersonal causes. For instance, if all of a sudden, your colleagues stop talking the minute you walked into the office, is it really because they were discussing you behind your back? Is it likely they were discussing another thing completely?

What are the consequences of your belief, if it were right? How likely are these consequences, and are they actually that bad?

Lastly, question yourself: is what I'm thinking beneficial to me? If a thought isn't beneficial, can you basically let it go and rather concentrate on how to change the circumstances next time around?

As soon as you have learned this approach of disputing your beliefs, you can then proceed to the second method: externalizing the voices.

For you to do this, you have to a friend that is close to you to do the exercise with you and to attack you as cruelly as you do yourself, using your entire own negative self-beliefs. Your duty is to protect yourself against these attacks by verbalizing your defense out loud.

This exercise can also be done with your kid. But, you have to make sure that your child really disputes the attacks appropriately.

By practicing these approaches all the time, you'll be on your path to altering your negative beliefs for good, and turning into a full-fledged optimist!

Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life by Martin Seligman Book Review

Optimism is healthier than pessimism, both physically and mentally, and optimists have a tendency to be happier and become more successful people. However, both optimism and pessimism are learned reactions to difficult negative events, which signifies that – by way of a variety of approaches– it's very likely for you to become more optimistic.

In adverse circumstances, think ABC.

When next you face adversity in your life, you can make use of the ABC method to dispute your negative self-talk. For example, if your partner is short with you on the phone, instead of you believing “perhaps he doesn’t love me again” or “I’m usually disturbing her, making it not possible for her to work,” you can make use of the ABC method to disrupt your negative self-talk. This will make you very happier eventually and hinder you from snapping back at your partner, who might basically be in a rush.

Make use of ABC rather than thinking of a circumstance as permanent.

When next you ruin your diet by eating a slice of cake, don't say to yourself “I'll never be able to abide by my diet and I will remain chubby” and then go on to eat the whole cake. Rather, attempt making use of the ABC method to alter your thoughts: “Okay, I only ate a slice of cake, which was yummy. The next day, I'll get continue with my diet again, and I can already notice good success on the scale.”

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