



## **The Psychology of Staying Positive**

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Positive thinking is a dangerous thing. It sets you up to be disappointed when things don't go your way or when you're confronted by some unexpected challenge – and we've certainly had some of those over the last year.

Consider the guy who bounds out bed in the morning, looks approvingly in the mirror and says: "Today's a wonderful day – I'm a wonderful guy and I'm going to blow them away at the presentation later this morning – today's the big day and I'm ready"! Our hero finishes his shower, puts on his best suit and opens the front door to find that it's pouring rain – and his car won't start. It's one of those days when you're told that you'll have to wait at least an hour for a taxi so, by the time our friend makes it to his important presentation resembling a drowned rat, he's in no fit mental state to "blow them away"! Where did his positive thinking get him?

You see, things we hadn't counted on are sent to try us all of the time. A quick analysis of your business – and prospects – now in July 2009 bears little resemblance to how things were two years ago. Things change, we're constantly faced with unexpected challenges. A positive state of mind will not adequately equip you when it comes to handling those challenges appropriately. But there is a state of mind which is best suited not only to meeting challenges but to thriving in the face of them – a clear and present state of mind.

What is a "clear and present" state of mind? What the benefits of being clear and present? How you can cultivate your innate ability to be clear and present?

First off, let's be clear about "positive thinking", which is, of course, better than negative thinking! But it is only thinking. Your conscious mind thinks (it has 50,000 random thoughts every day) – your subconscious mind does the doing! Decades of psychological research proves that your subconscious creates how you feel about everything and everyone (including yourself) and then uses those feelings to automatically dictate your behaviour which, in turn, creates how those around you behave towards you. In effect, what's going on in your subconscious mind creates your life – your version of "reality". The subconscious is so efficient at doing this that it all happens automatically using what psychology calls "automaticity".

Automaticity enables you complete routine repetitive tasks without paying them any attention. But everything in life, sooner or later, becomes repetitive. Even those with whom you were originally head-over-heels in love become routine and habitual! The result is that the normal adult's life becomes a repetitive routine that is "lived" automatically. We react to what we believe is going on. This may or may not have anything to do with what is actually going on because the subconscious makes up your mind for you based on your childhood programming.

Now, you might well be saying to yourself "What in God's name has this got to do with my business, how I prospect, how I deal with my clients? What has it got to do with the global economic crisis?" Well, it has to do with everything – every single aspect of your business and personal life. For example, the global economic crisis was subconsciously created by normal people who were all reacting to each other – automatically. Everybody jumped on the bandwagon of selling mortgages to people who couldn't afford them. Everybody then had to get a piece of the sub-prime mortgage cake when it was being shared out by the banks. And, when the bubble burst, everyone panicked together. Tokyo reacted to bad economic news from the US. Hong Kong reacted to Tokyo. Frankfurt reacted to Hong Kong, London reacted to Frankfurt and Wall Street reacted to – well, actually, itself! A global chain reaction which just proves that normal people all still love being part of the herd.

The renowned psychologist, Philip Zimbardo, recently stated that you cannot – CAN NOT – achieve anything worth talking about until you break with that herd instinct. In exactly the same way, Warren Buffet recently said "When everyone is greedy you should panic. And when everyone panics you should be greedy". You have to stop being normal. The normal state of mind is all over the place. Normal people might try to convince themselves otherwise using props like self-affirmation or positive thinking. But that's no use, normal people's subconscious minds control them – not the other way around. Normal people are mad.

Would you like to be *abnormal*? Would you like to achieve *abnormal* success – even in the current economic environment? You can – because you can take control of your subconscious mind and take control of your life – business, personal, the works. This is achieved by developing a clear and present mind – a state of mind described as a "peak performance" or "flow" state by the Universities of Chicago and Milan. A "flow" state is when you are *abnormally* focused on what you are doing so that your subconscious mind is focused in the present – rather than re-running the old programs from the past that would otherwise create your reactive and destructive normal behaviour.

As children we all experienced "flow" regularly. Remember when long sunny summer holiday days seemed to last forever, but the school holidays seemed be finished in the twinkling of an eye? Time-less-ness is a key indicator of whether you're focused (clear and present) or all over the place. As adults, we only experience "flow" haphazardly – but we do experience it when, for example, a good film captivates your attention to the point that two hours seems like twenty minutes. Or when you hit the perfect golf shot (even hackers have hit the perfect golf shot) and it feels completely effortless, slow-motion-like. Or when you get engrossed in a piece of work and you find yourself forgetting lunch.

"Flow" disables automaticity. Instead, you pay *full* attention to the present. With that clear and present mind you will be able to differentiate between herd-like reactive behaviour and the real action that you need to take. You will be alert to opportunities which the normal mind would never

notice. For example, if our friend with the broken down car (by the way, this is a real example) had stood waiting at the bus stop in a foul mood, he would never have noticed that, standing next to him, was the next person who would change the course of his life.

I make this important point because we all know people, once strangers to us, that changed the course of our lives. Generally speaking, those changes came at a period of “flow” in our lives. The proven benefit of “flow” is that you will spot life’s opportunities – or, perhaps, even create them (what Carl Jung calls synchronicity).

So, how will you cultivate that “clear and present” state of mind? You need to start paying an *abnormal* amount of attention to the task in hand – whatever that might be. Abnormally successful people might call that focus or single-mindedness. Same difference – you need to *re-learn* how to pay attention the way that came naturally to you when you were a child. How? Well, Harvard recommends that you do habitual things differently – write with the “other” hand, brush your teeth or shave with the “other” hand. Breaking little habits has a two-fold benefit. When you decide to do the task differently, that decision is a conscious choice on your part. Normal people are not even aware that they can make that choice. But, your choice breaks the reactive cycle. Then, of course, by doing that something differently, you have to pay it more attention.

Nothing could be simpler – nor more life changing. The more you learn to pay abnormal attention to the present moment, the more you will begin to create an abnormally successful business and personal life for yourself. You won’t need to positive-talk yourself into grasping the next business opportunity – you won’t even have to plan or go looking for it. You’ll be the right person in the right place at the right time. Something that you probably have been on many occasions – it’s just that you didn’t notice!

Decades of psychological work proves that your ability to be happy and successful is directly correlated to your ability to pay attention. So pay attention – and notice the difference.