

The Power of Positive is Not Always Possible (But Neither Does it Have to Be)

We always hear a lot about being positive in one's outlook – the “power of positive thinking,” we're told, is all important. Keep a bright outlook, and wonders will occur in your life.

I want to begin by clearing the obvious out of the way: When things are going well and the sun is shining on your particular little microcosm, then there is no need for this advice in the first place. Bask in those blessings and enjoy.

But when things take a turn for the worse, as they do so often in the course of any average person's life, I want to ask how it is even possible to expect anyone to be bright, sunny, and cheery when all around them dark and negative things are occurring? How do you keep a chipper smile and a joyous outlook when nothing is going your way, when things are collapsing all around you?

The realistic answer is that, in all likelihood, it isn't. And neither can you. There are certain conditions (and sets of them) in life through which no one can be reasonably expected to keep an optimistic outlook. Quite simply, it just runs counter to human instinct and human nature. Any other perspective is just not realistic.

For years I've heard people regale me with all kinds of advice about positive thinking. I've read several books on the subject. And all of it has seemed to me to end up with the same characteristic flaw I've illustrated above. To me, being positive means *feeling* positive too. But there's this:

I have come to believe that in every given situation it comes down to a simple choice: You can look at what's occurring with cynicism and negativity and have a virtual guarantee of getting nowhere — or, *without having to like it at all* you can at least acknowledge it as merely another obstacle which will test your determination to not become frozen by fear, or anger, or pessimism. Your will to keep moving, regardless of circumstances.

History is filled with tales of success involving the latter — people who pulled off the seemingly impossible, who turned events around in the face of all adversity, even in situations where there seemed to be no hope at all (just as, no doubt, there are also some number of tales concerning those with glowing outlooks who still failed).

Conversely, history is filled every day with failures who followed negativity to its natural conclusion (just as, I'm sure, there exists an aberrant minority of cases in which the most pessimistic and dejected persons still prevailed, nevertheless).

So the question *always and ever is*: Which view do you *choose* to adopt? Which one is more *likely* to prove helpful or useful?

The choice is always yours — albeit you may certainly detest and hate the circumstances at present. This doesn't mean singing and dancing with cheer through the darkness and the mire. It does mean continuing to put one foot in front of the other. It does mean considering the possibility that someday, someday, there is a better place ahead full of greater fortune. It does mean adopting a *work ethic*, if you will, of grit, grim determination, and the will to self-improvement. If you can keep just those things in your view, then to hell with "positivity." That's a fairy-tale for dilettantes for the most part anyway. The real work that needs to be done, the strength that needs to be built and flexed, the character that needs to be displayed — these are the things of importance; the nuts and bolts of both survival and success. Hang on to that, and you're already halfway there. The rest will come — odds are, anyway — with time and perseverance.

Positivity is not always possible during the cloudier and stormier periods of life. In fact, the suggestion that it should be is even somewhat foolish. The will to not be defeated by its polar opposite is the only consideration which is ultimately of any importance.