

# Optimism is Optimal

By Nick Arnette

What happens when we fill our minds with negative thoughts? I feel illustration coming on...

I met some missionaries who were in Zambia during a terrible drought. There was only one source of water for miles around. Everyone and everything used that water for various purposes. Wildlife used the water—doing what animals do in and around water. People would bathe in it; others would carry the water back to town for cooking and drinking. Of course the water was making them sick due to all the contamination. But the people in the area didn't know what was making them sick. Fortunately, the missionaries showed them how to purify water and how to find other sources of clean water.

What those people were taking in was literally making them very sick. Our mind works the same way. If we fill it with negative thoughts, we produce unfavorable results. Have you ever said something you weren't expecting to say and then later asked yourself, "Where did *that* come from?" I rest my case.

Don't take my word for it. Check out what the experts say about it:

Only half of the heart disease in the United States can be explained by the traditional risk factors. The other half might be caused by negative emotions such as depression, hostility, and anger. For example, one study found that people who have "angry" personalities or are easily upset by stressful situations are more prone to heart disease. Researchers have also found that positive emotions such as care, love, and appreciation increase immune antibodies and balance heart rhythms. And a University of Pittsburgh study found that optimistic women outlived dour ones. You don't need to be told that negative thinking is bad for you. We all know how it feels. It's not good. (So guys, if you want to be happy for the rest of your life, find an optimistic woman to be your wife!)

And a pessimistic outlook in the workplace will not only have negative effects on your ability to do your job, but it can also make you seriously ill. In the March/April 2003 issue of *Vibrant Life* magazine, Peggy Rynk writes:

*In a study conducted at the University of Chicago on the effect of attitude on health, 200 telecommunication executives were observed as their companies downsized. The health of the executives who saw change as an opportunity for growth fared much better than those who saw it as a threat.*

*Less than a third of the executives who had a positive attitude contracted a serious illness during or soon after the downsizing. But executives who saw downsizing as a personal threat had more than a 90 percent likelihood of becoming severely ill.*

Not only can unhealthy thoughts wreak havoc on our careers and our health, pessimistic thoughts often place all the power into the hands of the person, company, or situation that did us wrong.

Elwood Hale is my good friend and mentor. I described to him a disagreement I had with one of □my best friends. I told him the whole story, □probably even embellishing it to make my □case stronger. All he said was, “That must □have been very disappointing.”

What, that’s all? Really? I was looking for a little sympathy. Instead, Elwood □followed with some very sage advice. □ He said, “If the solution to a problem □rests on what someone else should be doing, control of your life has gone out of your hands, and into the hands of another human being.”

In short, I was operating in a reactive mode. I saw myself as a victim. I was not in charge of the situation or my thoughts.

Elwood added another gem: “Don’t let anyone determine what kind of day you’re going to have or what kind of person you’re going to be.” □So true!

Many of the difficult people we’ve encountered through the years probably had no idea they were so irritating to us. Let’s face it, they’re usually clueless; that’s why they’re knuckleheads! Even if they were aware of their own cluelessness, chances are they probably weren’t spending a lot of their free time thinking about you and how much they enjoyed getting under your skin. Why waste your valuable time and energy thinking or talking about them? Why would you want to give them so much power and control of your life? Focus on how you can be a better person and train yourself to focus on more positive things. It’s not easy to do, but the alternative is literally a waste of time. On top of that, it’s not good for you.

The preceding article is an excerpt from *Me, We and Glee: How to have a great attitude, work as a team and keep your sense of humor*, by Nick Arnette. Known as *The Feel Good Funny Guy*, Arnette is a popular keynote speaker at business meetings throughout the United States and Canada. You can contact Nick Arnette at [www.NickArnette.com](http://www.NickArnette.com), email: [nick@nickarnette.com](mailto:nick@nickarnette.com)

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