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Think Outside The Box

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Negative vs. Realistic Expectations

You are now well aware of how negative expectation can diminish your self-esteem and fuel unnecessary negativity, while positive expectations lead to motivation for positive actions.

To bring more happiness, positivity and productivity into your life, negative expectations need to turn into realistic expectations. As surprising as this may sound, especially if you have been struggling with negative expectations all your life, they can be changed.

Apply the techniques explained here, and extract the core principles of the examples, to be most effective.

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Quiz Time!

Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2

Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2

Quiz: Flags in Europe

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Identify Negative Expectations

The first step us is to identify a specific situation, as well as the negative perceptions, related to it.

Some questions to use, when trying to identify your negative expectations, are as follows:

“What negative thing do I expect will happen?”

“On a scale of 1-10, how certain am I that this is going to happen?”

“How am I going to recognize that this expectation has come true?”

“How am I connecting this situation to previous ones I have been in?”

You can also come up with additional questions of your own, to cater to your specific

circumstances.

Example

Situation: “My friends invited me to be in their team for quiz night.”

Negative expectations: “I am not going to be good enough. I will fail my team because I won’t know any of the answers. I am going to look like a fool. Everyone is going to see how stupid I am.”

How certain are you that this is going to happen? “My certainly is 7 out of 10.”

How are you going to recognize if your negative expectations have come true? “I am not going to be able to answer any questions. Everyone except for me will know the correct answers to the questions. They will make fun of me.”

Identify Negative Behaviors

Negative behaviors are those that are congruent with your negative expectations. Negative expectations lead to negative behaviors, but then the vicious cycle turns, as negative behaviors lead to even more negative expectations.

If we use the example from above, a negative behavior would be to decline your friends’ invitation, out of the fear that your negative expectations have caused. You don’t want to risk looking silly, and so you avoid the situation altogether.

What’s the Problem?

At a first glance, protecting yourself from unpleasantness, such as feeling silly or inadequate, may seem like an excellent idea. However, in the long term, would this behavior lead to growth or will it increase your negativity?

As you can probably see now, negative behaviors are those that stand in the way of your personal development and can lead to unhappiness.

Although avoiding quiz night might keep you safe from looking silly in those specific circumstances, you can’t realistically expect to always be the best at everything.

However, if you want a fulfilling life and meaningful social interactions, it is also impossible to avoid every single situation where you might seem inadequate. Besides, by engaging in this negative behavior, you are depriving yourself of the positive outcomes of interacting with your friends.

Create Realistic Expectations

Your next step is to replace your negative expectations with realistic, positive ones. To do that, you should first try to test how realistic your negative expectations may be, by asking yourself questions.

“Just because I believe something, does it make it true?”

“What objective, external evidence do I have that my negative expectations are going to come true? Has someone else told me that they would? Has something similar happened before?”

“If a previous situation has triggered my current negative expectations, how are the two situations different and could the outcomes of this one be different?”

“What is the worst realistic thing that can happen? So what if it does?”

Feel free to come up with your questions as well, and to write down the answers, for extra reassurance.

Example

If you answer these questions honestly and try to be as realistic as possible, you will probably find that your negative expectations have been exaggerated.

Here is an example of the positive and realistic expectations you might arrive at:

“I don’t need to be brilliant, but just support my team over the course of a single night. They are my friends, and they want us to have fun together, so it is not going to be as important who wins and who doesn’t. Besides, I am probably going to be able to answer some questions correctly, especially those related to my areas of interest. What’s more, even if I am not able to answer a single question, so what? I might be a bit embarrassed, but that’s just an unavoidable part of life, and my performance on this night doesn’t represent my true self.”

Create Useful Behaviors

Positive behavior is productive, because it allows you to live a fulfilling life, be happy, engage socially and pursue your goals, rather than hide in fear, driven by negative expectations. It means confronting the situation instead of avoiding it.

Remember that everything is possible, and you can handle any circumstances, as long as you are willing to confront your negative expectations.

You can create and follow through with your useful behaviors, by [using the tips provided here](#) [1].

Experiment

Now that you have learned about transforming negative expectations into realistic ones go out into the world and experiment. You have the examples as your baseline, and all you have to do now is fill them in with your own, personal content.

Although you may like to feel a bit more confident before experimenting with your expectations and behaviors, change is always challenging, and we rarely feel fully ready for it. That is why it is most effective to start right away, rather than wait around.

If you’d like to feel more comfortable, start with small changes and negative expectations that

are not too significant to you. Just remember to keep gradually increasing the intensity and to challenge yourself.

Evaluate the Results

The last part of your challenge to productivity and positivity is to check what happens when you apply realistic expectations and useful behaviors. You might not be overly successful every time, but an evaluation would help you see how much you have improved and what you might still need to work on.

To help you evaluate your results, you can ask yourself, and honestly answer, the following questions:

“How did my expectations differ from what happened in reality?”

“What lessons did I learn?”

“On a scale of 1-10, how many of my negative expectations came true?”

“How many of my positive expectations came true?”

“What can I do next time, to materialize more of my positive expectations?”

“Did I really challenge myself to engage in positive expectations and productive behaviors, or did I hold back?”

You can come up with your questions, as long as they help you decide if you have reached your goal and what you can improve next time.

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Links:

[1] <https://explorable.com/e/overcoming-negativity-part-2?gid=21499>, [2]

<https://explorable.com/users/filipteovanovic>, [3] <https://explorable.com/users/Liya%20Panayotova>, [4]

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