

Optimism



Optimism

- 1. What is optimism and why is it important?**
- 2. Understanding optimism and pessimism**
- 3. How to lead a more optimistic life**



1 What is optimism

- Its about learning a set of skills about how to talk to yourself when you suffer a personal setback
- Its not about bragging, being selfish, blaming others for your mistakes, or not taking responsibility for your own actions



Why is it important?

- Life and fate treat optimists and pessimists the same
- The optimist bounces back from defeat, gets up and moves on
- The pessimist gives up and gets depressed



Why is it important?

- The optimist achieves more:
 - at work,
 - at sport,

and has better health



The work of Dr Martin Seligman

- Commenced in 1964
- Researched:
 - Sales
 - Sport
 - Politics



Achievement traditionally linked to talent and desire

- Talent can be measured, but is difficult to increase
- Desire can be increased easily, but only temporarily

The third component to success is optimism



2 Understanding optimism and pessimism

- Two key concepts
 - Learned helplessness
 - Explanatory style



Learned helplessness

- Giving up and quitting because you believe that whatever you do it doesn't make any difference
- Failure makes everyone at least momentarily helpless. How long that helplessness lasts depends on your optimism or pessimism.
- The more pessimistic you are the smaller the events that will make you feel helpless and the longer the feeling will last.



Explanatory style

- How you habitually explain to yourself why events happen



Explanatory style

- Three dimensions:
 - Permanence
 - Pervasiveness
 - Personalisation



Permanence

- **Bad events**
 - Optimists see bad events resulting from temporary transient conditions
- **Good events**
 - Optimists see permanent abilities causing good events



Pervasiveness

- **Bad events**
 - Optimists see bad events resulting from specific conditions
- **Good events**
 - Optimists see universal abilities causing good events



Hope

- Whether or not we have hope depends on our permanence and pervasiveness.
- Hope comes from finding *temporary* and *specific* causes for bad events.
- Finding permanent and universal causes for misfortune leads to despair.



Personalisation

- When bad things happen we can:
 - blame ourselves, i.e. internalise, or
 - blame other people or circumstances, i.e. externalise



Personalisation

- People who blame themselves have low self esteem, and believe they are worthless, untalented and unlovable
- If you blame external effects when bad things happen you don't lose self esteem



Personalisation

- Personalisation controls how you feel about yourself
- People who believe that they cause good events tend to like themselves better



What if you are a pessimist?

- Four areas of your life that is affected:
 - Likely to get depressed more easily
 - Achieve less at work than you should
 - Health not as good as it could be
 - Life isn't as pleasant as it could be

Has most effect when something bad happens



The advantages of pessimism

- Heightens our sense of reality
- Endows us with accuracy



The disadvantages of pessimism

- Promotes depression
- Produces inertia
- Feel bad – blue, down, worried, anxious
- Self fulfilling – lack of persistence, fail more frequently



The disadvantages of pessimism

- Poor health
- Defeated more often in competitive situations
- Feel worse when bad things happen
 - setbacks become disasters,
 - disasters become catastrophise



When to use optimism

- You are in a competitive situation
- You are concerned how you feel, physically or mentally
- You want to lead or inspire others



When not to use optimism

- You are in a risky situation
- You are counselling others whose future is dim
- You want to appear sympathetic to the troubles of others



Optimism

- If the cost of failure is high
 - don't use it
- If the cost of failure is low
 - then use it



3 How to lead a more optimistic life

- Adversity
- Beliefs
- Consequences



Adversity

- Something happens
- When we encounter adversity we think about it



Beliefs

- We think about it
- Our thoughts become beliefs



Consequences

- Our beliefs have consequences
- We feel or do something



Two Responses

- Distraction
- Disputation



Distraction

- Think of something else
- Have some physical way of distracting yourself
- Decide to think about it later at some fixed time



Disputation

- Dispute the beliefs, this is more successful in the long run
- There are reasons why this happened, short term specific reasons
- Distance yourself from the event and its causes



4 ways to dispute a belief

- Evidence
- Alternatives
- Implications
- Usefulness



Energization

- Now I can get on with life



Learned optimism

- Adversity
- Beliefs
- Consequences
- Disputation
- Energization



Learned optimism

- Need to practice
- When an adverse event happens follow through
 - A
 - B
 - C
 - D
 - E

