

Hope can lead to Optimism

Hope is a feeling of anticipation that something especially desired might happen. Hope is powerful because it can impact words and actions, raise expectations as well as inspire and motivate transformation. Hope is frequently considered temporary and specific to a given situation, dependent upon one's skills or abilities (internal condition). Hope introduced us to positivity and raised expectations for our recovery. With our eyes wide open, our experience on the recovery path of hope helped us to see more clearly the next natural resilience step of optimism. If we've taken it, we learned that optimism goes far beyond recovery. Optimism is a pervasive expectation and explanatory style that one's life events and circumstances (global conditions) will turn out positive and favorably; it's a glass half-full perspective.

The good news is: optimism is not a genetic trait but a habit of thinking that can be learned! Dr Martin Seligman, founder of the Positive Psychology movement and author of Learned Helplessness and Learned Optimism says, "Literally hundreds of studies show that [people who lean towards pessimism] give up more easily and get depressed more often. These experiments show that optimists do much better in school and college, at work and on the playing field. They regularly exceed the predictions of aptitude tests. They age well, and are much freer than most of us from the usual physical ills of middle age. Evidence suggests they may even live longer."

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Research also shows that there are certain attitudes that promote and sustain resilience. Resilient families and teams are much more prepared to handle tough times and rough patches. It only takes one family or team member to help everyone else refocus on what they have to be grateful for. This refocusing can loosen the grip of resentments and disappointments that may be draining the hope and strength from your family or team.

The double benefit of practicing gratitude is that we'll be building our optimism in the process. By the way, the benefits of gratitude are also linked to happiness. "Gratitude exercises can do more than lift one's mood. At the University of California at Davis, psychologist Robert Emmons found they improve physical health, raise energy levels and, for patients with neuromuscular disease, relieve pain and fatigue. "The ones who benefited most tended to elaborate more and have a wider span of things they're grateful for," he notes. A habit of gratitude can get us into a habit of positive thinking and optimism so here goes some great expectations....

Reflective Exercise: GREAT EXPECTATIONS



This exercise is not meant to scare the Dickens out of you (sorry we couldn't resist that one) but to conjure up some positive energy to fuel optimism. Please follow your facilitator's direction to complete the activity.

1. Describe one thing you are grateful for about your health right now.

2. Describe one thing you are grateful for in your personal life right now.

3. Name 3 people in your life you are truly grateful for and explain why.

4. Describe one thing that makes you grateful for being in this course.

5. Describe one hardship you experienced that you are now grateful for having gone through it.
