

## WHAT KIND OF THINKER ARE YOU?

*"The thing always happens that you really believe in; and the belief in a thing makes it happen."*

Frank Lloyd Wright

*"Times of stress and difficulty are seasons of opportunity when the seeds of progress are sown."*

Thomas F. Woodlock

*"Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out"*

Vaclav Havel, former President of the Czech Republic

Intuitively, we all know that when we feel good, we work better, are more creative and more productive. Good feelings are like lubrication to the brain – mental clarity and efficiency go up, memory is sharpened, we understand things more easily and make better decisions.

Dr. Martin Seligman, a Pennsylvania psychologist, put forth a large body of research in his landmark book, *Learned Optimism* (1990). He found that just about everyone who has a propensity to be optimistic in their world view tends to have greater success, better health, and longer life.

Optimism is what motivates us to search for solutions, to engage in creative problem solving, and to want to improve things. Seligman's research revealed that optimism correlates with resilience and the ability to remain free of depression.

However, it is important to note that optimism doesn't mean unbridled or unrealistic optimism, for the latter can lead us to ignore real threats for which we need to prepare. Extreme optimism can therefore be a liability, and must be tempered with an accurate perception and understanding of circumstances.

The key to developing the capacity for realistic optimism lies in one's "explanatory style", which is the habitual way that we explain events, both good and bad (Andrew Shatte and Karen Reivich, *The Resilience Factor*).

Our explanatory style is often out of conscious awareness for we tend to relate to our thoughts in the same way we do our breathing – we do it automatically and for the most part, don't pay attention to it unless we're stressed.

Increasing awareness of your explanatory style is a good way to increase your choice of thinking about events, and thus, your choice of feelings. For example, do you:

Look outside of yourself to assign blame or look within to see where you have responsibility?

Give general reasons for good events or give reasons specific to the situation?

Tend to look for transient reasons for bad events or believe the cause to be permanent?

There are six attributional styles we use to explain events:

Internal or External (me-not me)

Temporary or Permanent (always – not always)

Specific or global (everything-not everything)

Optimists explain the events in their lives in a particular attributional style. When they experience negative events they think "it's temporary, and it's only for this particular event, and I'm not the cause of it." When optimists experience positive events they think "it's permanent, and it's for all life events, and I'm the cause of it."

So, optimists and pessimists differ in that they explain the events differently. However, once you look at your attributions, you can consider other perspectives and by doing so, create more positive feelings and different actions.

It's easy to forget how powerful our thinking is in shaping our reality and what we are able to create for ourselves, both negative and positive! Yet our thoughts can empower us or disempower us, for we see what we believe.

Since we generate our thoughts, we're the only ones who can change them. If you want to be intentional in creating success for yourself, you must pay attention to how you're thinking.

The Law of Manifestation is predicated on the blueprint that our thoughts create our feelings which drive our actions which lead to the results that we get. If we want to change the results we're getting, it is critical to start by looking at the quality of our thinking and our attention.

Are you practicing realistic optimism? If not, commit yourself to paying attention to how you explain things and the story you tell yourself, using the six attributional styles.

When you experience an adverse event or thought, make it a practice to tell yourself the most hopeful story possible without doing damage to the facts. As with any habit, changing your explanatory style will take commitment and considerable repetition before a new style becomes automatic.

When you start practicing realistic optimism, you'll notice you have increased energy, improved mood, and the desire and ability to engage more fully. Once that happens, it's inevitable that you'll see changes in your performance and your results