

Alter Your Attitude to Change Your Circumstances

How long does it take for your attitude to plummet into the "zone of negativity"? Just a few seconds of looking at news headlines or listening to TV news sound bites is all it takes for most of us to feel a new tsunami of fear, discouragement, and even depression wash over us. And if that's not enough, the pessimism and worry of people around us is contagious, threatening to infect us to the depths of our being.

The fact is that there are lots of things going on in our world that can tempt us to develop a negative attitude about life. If you are looking for work or seeking to make a career change, however, negativity (or as Zig Ziglar aptly describes it, "stinkin' thinking") can sabotage your efforts! When you get caught up in negative thinking, you lose. Not only do you lose momentum and energy, but you also can lose your ability to think

creatively, make positive connections with other people, and demonstrate faith and trust in God. Negative thinking is a "calling blocker" because it hinders us in living the life God calls us to live.

Confronting Our Stinkin' Thinking

We are living in some of the toughest economic times many of us have encountered, and each of us is challenged with how we will respond. John Homer Miller said, "Your living is determined not so much by what life brings to you as by the attitude you bring to life; not so much by what happens to you as by the way your mind looks at what happens." One of the keys to living your calling -- that is, doing the things God is calling you to do with your life -- is learning that you are in control of your attitude.

Each of us has conditioned ourselves to think in particular ways. Our thought patterns have become so ingrained and habitual, however, that we don't "feel" like we are making choices in how we react to life experiences-but we are. If you want to fulfill your God-sized calling, you will need to master your attitude. Charles Swindoll has important words for each of us to heed:

*The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude to me is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill... The remarkable thing is you have a choice every day regarding the attitude you will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past...we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. **I am convinced that life is ten percent what happens to me and ninety percent how I react to it. And so it is with you. You are in charge of your attitude.***

Attitude Affects Outcomes

Joan (not her real name) was working with a career counselor, and really wanted to make a career change. She was researching the field of meeting planning as a possible job option. Her next step in investigating the field was to conduct some "informational interviews" with people who worked as meeting planners, asking them questions about their jobs and the career field in general. When her career coach asked how her assignment had gone, she said, "I can't find anyone to talk to. No one is willing to meet with me. I've tried doing this before and I didn't get anywhere then, either. This just isn't going to work." Some gentle probing uncovered the fact that she had become discouraged after not hearing back from the first two people she called. She then had decided that the task was impossible and had chosen to give up.

Interestingly, the career counselor's next client was exploring the same field. Kathy, however, had a very different experience with her informational interviewing assignment. "It wasn't easy because everyone is pretty busy in this type of work. But I kept at it. I knew there had to be a way to find some people to talk to. I had to ask about eight people I knew before I finally found someone who had a good lead. His cousin, John, works at a convention center. He was willing to talk with me, and then he gave me the names of some of the meeting planners he has worked with. So now I've met with five different people!" Her positive perspective enabled her to accomplish her goal.

The Power of Self-Talk

Henry Ford said, "Whether you think you can or whether you think you can't, you're right." Joan and Kathy bring Henry Ford's words to life. Joan thought she couldn't complete the task, and she didn't; Kathy thought she could, and she did. They both were right about the outcome. Each of the women shaped their attitudes-and their eventual results-by the messages they told themselves as they were in the midst of the experience. During all of our waking hours, we have a continuous stream of "self-talk" going on in our minds. It happens automatically, and we are usually not even aware that we are doing it.

Our self-talk interprets our experiences, which in turn shapes our attitudes. Joan's self-talk had been a litany of "I won't be able to find anyone to talk to...no one wants to meet with me...this didn't work before and it won't work now...I'll never be able to do this." No wonder she gave up! From the perspective she had created with her self-talk, it would be a waste of time and energy to continue on with an impossible task.

Kathy, on the other hand, was optimistic that she would succeed. The messages she mentally reinforced were things like "I know this is challenging, so I'll just have to keep at it...I need to be resourceful to connect with people...it will be great to talk to people in the field...I can do this." Her self-talk created a positive "frame" through which she viewed her experiences. The first seven people she talked to had no helpful leads for her. Instead of interpreting this to mean, "I'll never find anyone to talk to," she framed it as "I'll have to work harder to find contacts."

Reframing Your Experiences

Taking charge of your attitude often means that you have to "re-frame" experiences. Reframing is changing the way you look at an experience. Joan viewed her experiences through the frame of "It will never work, so there's no point in trying." Had she instead been seeing the unreturned phone calls through a frame of "I may have to work at this awhile before I succeed," she would have called back or contacted additional people. A negative frame on our experiences and life will hold us back, while a positive frame will motivate us to keep going until we accomplish our goals.

A positive frame on life doesn't "just happen," however. We have to create it intentionally on a daily basis. Developing a positive, optimistic attitude is challenging. We have to work at monitoring and changing our self-talk, and may have to re-frame how we see ourselves as well our perceptions of past, present and future events in our lives. We do have the power to change our lives by changing our thinking.

Each of us is the most limiting factor in our own lives. We will only attempt what we believe is possible. What we do in our lives-or don't do-is a reflection not only of our self-image but also of our faith in God. Shallow faith produces limited results; deep faith produces miracles. No matter what has happened in the past or what weaknesses we may have, God is greater. Neither our past nor our present hampers God. The opinions and perspective of the other people in our lives do not affect or limit God. He can transform and empower you to accomplish everything he calls you to do.

Calling Catalysts for Taking Charge of Your Attitude

More than anything else, your attitude-how you think-will impact how far you go in discovering and living your calling. Our book, *Live Your Calling*, contains several "calling catalyst" strategies to help you enlarge your faith, change your thinking and live your calling. Here are two of them:

Exchange limiting "self-talk" and "frames" for motivating messages and positive views on life. We choose how we think and see the world. The Apostle Paul illustrates this truth when he exhorts us to choose to rejoice always; to pray with thanksgiving rather than choose to be anxious; and to choose to think about things that are excellent or praiseworthy (Phil. 4:4-9). Ultimately, the power to think positively comes from having faith in the One with whom all things are possible (Phil. 4:13).

Intentionally work on changing any "limited thinking" habits you have developed. They won't change by themselves. To get rid of a bad habit, you have to replace it with a good habit. For example:

- Ask yourself "**How CAN I...?**" instead of thinking "I CAN'T..."
- Ask "**In what ways CAN I make this work?**" instead of "It will NEVER work."
- Respond with "**Let's figure out how I/we CAN make this happen!**" instead of "Yes, BUT (here are all the reasons I can't do this thing)."

Trying to think this way may feel very foreign to you, especially if you have well-developed negative thinking habits. You can make major progress just by taking sports psychologist Bob Rotella's advice: "If you don't want to get into positive thinking, that's OK. Just eliminate all the negative thoughts from your mind, and whatever's left will be fine!"

Choosing to see the positive in ourselves and in the life situations we encounter comes down to a matter of faith. For Christians, our optimism is founded on trusting that God is in control, and regardless of how bleak or hopeless circumstances seem to be, He is using them for our good and His glory.