

Optimism and “Luck Readiness”—Competencies for Challenging Times.

Some people seem to have a natural tendency to be optimistic; to see the possibilities in a situation and be energised by them. Others see lack and limitation and tend to negate the efforts of the optimists—and themselves—to do anything about it. Most people, however, soldier on as survivors, navigating the circumstances as best they can.

When job security is reduced and work is harder to get, people who have cultured an optimistic view are more likely to “get up and get on with it”. They are more likely to see it as a challenge and be stimulated by the learning it requires of them. They are more likely to dig deep and mine inner resources that have not hitherto been required.

It is very tempting, in this climate of pessimism, to go along with the status quo, worrying about job security and feeling limited by lack of opportunity. But according to Martin Seligman (“Mr Positive Psychology”), pessimists can learn to be optimistic by learning new cognitive skills that adjust unhelpful thinking. He says, however, that optimism is not the same as positive thinking. It is all about the way an event or situation is interpreted, and that determines the nature of the emotional or behavioural response.

People who are more inclined towards pessimism will have an internal dialogue that sees the situation as their own fault, that it will last forever, and that it will have an impact on everything they do. This inevitably causes a downward spiral of well-being and what others might perceive as poor “luck”.

“Luck readiness” is an interesting term (or concept) that I was reminded of recently. It seems to imply having a conscious intent towards—and being prepared for—good things happening. Having good luck is, to me, about believing in the possibility of good outcomes, having successful encounters and making experiences work in your favour. (Of course, being in your favour must also mean, in my books, being good for others, too.) Being ready for luck is all about being in the frame of mind to have a positive experience. This is the optimistic orientation.

Having good luck has always had the attached sentiment: “It’s not about good luck; it’s about good management”. Dr. Richard Wiseman, author of *The Luck Factor*, suggests four principles that can help manage and enhance good luck:

1. Maximize your chance opportunities
2. Listen to your hunches (intuition)
3. Expect good fortune
4. Turn adversity (bad luck) into good

We all have had times of adversity, but we also know that when we are experiencing cognitive good health (i.e. when we are positive and confident), we seem to believe we are deserving of good tidings, and we eventually get them. Cognition begets emotion, and emotion begets behaviour.

Martin Seligman suggests: "Practice disputing your automatic interpretation, all the time, from now on." In this way we can more consciously be aware of the core beliefs that underpin our experience and make adjustments to them. In challenging times we could benefit by finding the "silver linings".

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