



THE BRIGHT SIDE® OF CHANGE

Written by Donna Rae Smith

Finding the Bright Side

In the famous novel *Pollyanna*, the title character plays a game of finding the “glad” in everyday occurrences. Housed in a stuffy attic room, she delights in the third floor view; when she receives only crutches for Christmas, she gives thanks that she doesn’t need them.

Pollyanna’s enthusiasm may have been infectious in the novel, but in real life optimists tend to get a bad rap. To be called a Pollyanna is typically more insult than compliment, a suggestion that a person has her head in the clouds or isn’t realistic.

And yet research consistently shows the benefits of an optimistic outlook. Optimism has been linked to [our health](#), success at work and personal relationships. A healthy dose of optimism enables you to find the best in a situation, and create a more positive reality than someone inclined to look for the negative.

When unfortunate things happen, [pessimists will tend to blame themselves](#), think that their bad luck is the cause, or believe that more bad fortune lies in store. Optimists are less likely to take bad luck personally, or to worry about what it portends. As a result, optimists are more likely to bounce back from a setback.

Of course there’s such a thing as being unreasonably optimistic. It would be unwise to not plan for the future, trusting instead that things will magically take care of themselves. Likewise we would caution someone from taking extreme business risks, if those risks are based simply on a “feeling” that things will go your way. This is where some measure of pessimism can be beneficial – in making reasonable choices based on past experience and on the experiences of those around us.

If you’re short on a good dose of optimism, there is hope for you. We tend to think that optimists are only born, never made. Not so. With practice and some effort, you can learn to think like an optimist, finding the positive in any given situation and letting yourself be open to new opportunities.



The Experiment:

Try one or more of the following techniques for cultivating optimism and let us know how it goes.

1. **Find good fortune.** If you're trying [last week's](#) experiment (or even if you're not), jot down 2-3 things each day that went your way. It could be as simple as finding a quick parking spot, or receiving an unexpected gesture of goodwill from someone. The point is to pay attention to —and recognize—your good fortune, small and large.
2. **Reserve judgment.** In a recent [blog post](#), one venture capitalist suggests the 24x3 rule: when presented with a new idea or meeting a new person, wait 24 seconds before allowing a critical thought to come into your head. Once you've mastered 24 seconds, move on to 24 minutes and then 24 hours. While we all need critical judgment, the tendency to rule out new ideas too quickly can be bad for our growth as individuals and the growth of our businesses.
3. **Positive in, positive out.** Filtering out negative or disturbing information is incredibly difficult in our media-saturated age. But you *can* limit your exposure to negativity. Counter the wealth of bad news by finding positive and inspiring real life stories that will affirm your faith in the hopeful and uplifting. If you don't know where to start, do a Google search for “good news” or “happy news” and see what you find. Pick up a copy of *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, or a comparable title.

THE CONVERSATION: Share the results of your experiment in the comments below or contact the author directly at donnarae@bright-side.com.

ABOUT DONNA RAE SMITH

Donna Rae Smith is a guest blogger for Smart Business. She has forged a career, enterprise and an applied discipline on the practice of teaching leaders to be masters of change. She is the Founder and CEO of Bright Side, Inc., a transformational change catalyst company with an emphasis on the behavior-side of change. For more than two decades, Donna Rae Smith and the Bright Side team have been recognized as innovators in executing behavioral strategies coalesced with business strategies to accelerate and sustain business results. Bright Side®, The Behavioral Strategy Company, has partnered with over 250 of the world's most influential companies. For more information, please visit www.bright-side.com or contact Donna Rae at donnarae@bright-side.com.

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