

Positive Thinking – Is this the Solution?

Everyone talks about positive thinking and often it is the first thing that comes to people's mind when they hear the term mental training. Repeatedly I have heard comments such as "Yes, I know, positive thinking" Occasionally I sounded out of the remarks: "This is not always the riddle's answer.", "It is not as simple as that." The questions are: Why is positive thinking on everyone's lips? What is the power of positive thinking? Is it really a universal cure?



Is this glass half full or half empty?

Modern brain researchers have discovered that we think about 60,000 thoughts a day of which most are unconscious. If we do not focus our thoughts on a clear target, they are rather negative. As most of our thoughts are unconscious, we have become used to this tendency and underestimate their influence on our life. Negative thoughts prevent us from trying out something new and developing our full potential.

Why is it in our nature that we have a tendency to think negatively? Again this is connected to our history of development. According to investigations of the University of Pennsylvania, we have a "catastrophic brain", i.e. our brain perceives more negative than positive things. In order to survive our ancestors needed to be aware of potential perils and think ahead of time. Hence, they focussed on everything that could go wrong. They did not perceive the things that went fine and were no problem, as this was not essential for surviving. The advantage of yesterday is a problem in our days: Focussing on problems and perils is rather an obstacle today.

Thus our brain considerably lags behind and thwarts us as it still works like thousands of years before. It focuses on negative things whereby we strengthen doubts, fears, and suspicion rather than encouraging thoughts. As our life follows the direction of our thoughts and convictions, this leads us to an unfavourable development. Just think on the picture of a car ride by night: Everything is there, but you cannot see it because it is dark. Wherever you direct the spotlights of your focus, is the street you are heading to.

How do negative thought patterns develop in our brain? Their main origins are obsolete maxims and educational methods passed on from one generation to the other which leads to negative experiences already in early life and youth. If a child, for instance, repeatedly hears the words "You are so clumsy." or perhaps only "Just leave it, I will do it.", he or she does not develop a strong self-confidence. The maxim „Talk is silver, silence is golden.“ the grandparents of our days may have learned from their parents during World War II, was definitely useful at this time. Following this maxim today rather leads to disadvantages at school or in the job, as a person tends to be reserved and "hide".

Modern medical imaging techniques (MRI and CT) enable us to “watch” the brain while it is thinking. Scientists have observed that new neurological patterns wrapped old neurological patterns and “overwrote” them. The old patterns were still there, however they had become ineffective. If you return to old thought patterns or convictions though, the new patterns unwrap again and old experiences and opinions come back to life.

How can we overwrite our old negative patterns with new positive ones? Certainly we have to start with introspection and the perception of our own thoughts. Where do I limit myself by negative thoughts and expectations? Particular attention should be paid to patterns where we limit ourselves completely which often start with the words “I can’t do it, because ...” As soon as you have identified your thought patterns, you can change them.



Comparable to a computer, our brain processes all input received. Thoughts are very clear commands to our brain - it is irrelevant whether we have sent them intentionally or unconsciously. Many times they come automatically and are just a habit. ...” All opinions and beliefs about ourself or others are close statements for our brain. Our brain adjusts its perception exactly to those thoughts to meet our expectations. Hence we live a world of our own expectations.”... (translation, p.30, “Der 6 Minuten Coach – Erfinde dich neu”, Pierre Frankh, Spiegel-Bestseller 2014).

At times we think that everybody is against us and do not notice that we ourselves are our worst enemies owing to our negative thoughts and expectations. Already Confucius said: “Let there be no evil in your thoughts.” Practising mental hygiene will already lead to a positive development of your life. Hard to believe? What do you think about a self-experiment? Without risks – but with high chances of winning!

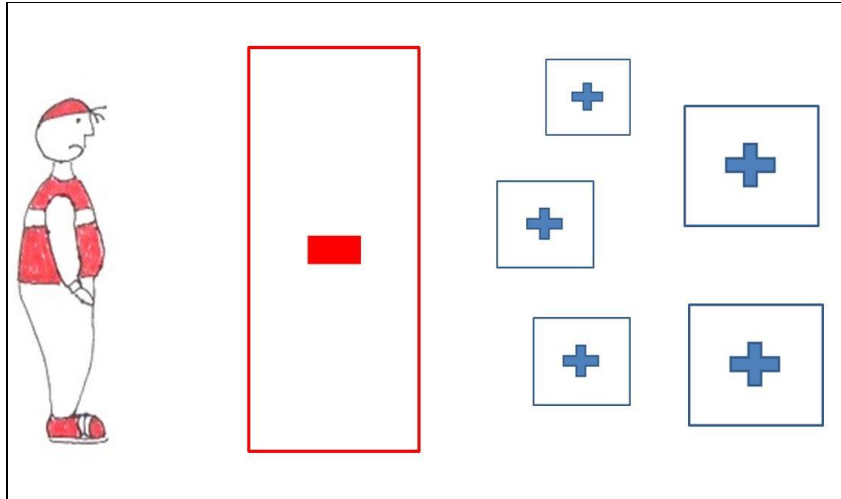
TIP

Practise mental hygiene every evening:

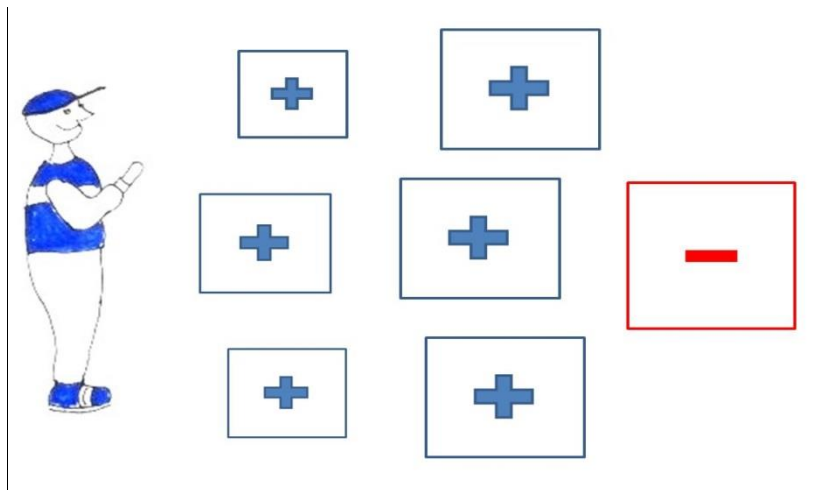
- Which thoughts did you mainly think today – rather positive or negative ones? Pay close attention to the thoughts that were connected with strong emotions as they have the highest impact.
- If you become aware of negative thoughts, think about how to reverse them in future. What could you think instead? By this you raise your awareness of negative thoughts and they will catch your attention immediately when you develop them during the day. Then you can start changing them right away (see thought stop exercise in Newsletter 1).
- To conclude I recommend an exercise of gratitude. For which situations of the day are you grateful? Develop a grateful feeling – you will see there will be more and more such situations in the future!

Good luck with the exercise! Have also a look at the following charts (idea Petra Novak, Dipl. Mental Coach / CH).

1. Focus on negative issues – positive issues are not perceived:



2. Focus on positive issues – they become more and the person feels stronger. At the same time, the negative issues reduce and become less important:



Best wishes,

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