

## The Power of Positivity

How happy are you right now? Acknowledging that being happy will mean different things to different people at different phases in their lives. Is it determined by your genetics, your environment, some combination of the two or something else? Your family, work colleagues, physical environment and what's in the news all play a part.

But in the context of your business and work, is how you feel now particularly important? After all, if I work hard and achieve success then happiness will naturally follow, right? Is it a sort of by product or almost inevitable consequence?

There are a couple of problems with this idea. Firstly, that when we set goals for ourselves, better car, larger house, higher income etc., when we achieve them our brain has a nasty habit of moving the goalposts, fancier car, even bigger house, more income etc. The old goal has now become your new normal!

Secondly, and in this I must defer to research conducted by [Shawn Achor](#) of Harvard University who taught on the 'Happiness Course', our brain actually works the other way round. If you feel happy then Achor's research concluded that you will work harder, faster and more intelligently.

### The accepted norm?



### Achor's findings



VS

## Our view of the world

We all see the world through a lens and that lens shapes our view of reality. For example, I quite often notice Asian tourists in London wearing face masks – whereas the eight million or so who live here (except for a handful of cycle couriers) do not.

The way I see it, if the environment is hazardous then wouldn't it make more sense for the long-term residents to take precautions – the risk to short-term visitors being relatively insignificant? But this is

### Mind your own business!



Our business development director Stuart Dey recently ran a breakfast meeting at which the power of positivity was discussed. The views expressed here include his own research and thoughts as well as suggestions contributed by our business club members.

exactly the point the way those tourists see it – our air is excessively polluted so that masks make sense. As someone who rides a motorcycle, I'm more concerned about the traffic! My lens is different giving me a different view of the same environment.

The question is, can we change the lens and thus how we see things, so that we are happier and therefore more likely to be successful?

## Training our brains to be more positive:

Achor suggests trying to build at least one of these in to your daily routine:

1. *Gratitude*: identify three new things to be grateful for each day.
2. *Meaningful experiences*: take 2 minutes each day to write down positive meaningful experiences
3. *Exercise*: for at least 10 minutes each day
4. *Meditate*: focus on the task in hand, at your desk for two minutes every day. One delegate drew attention to the 'Headspace' app but numerous apps, websites, books etc. are available.
5. *Random acts of kindness*: help your co-workers or others in your social support network. Giving contributes more to your happiness than receiving!

## Is it worth trying any of these techniques?

If you like statistics, the research findings of Shawn Achor included:

- Optimistic sales people outsold their pessimistic counterparts by 37%.
- The percentage of long term-happiness determined not by the external world but by the way your brain processes the external world is 90%.
- The percentage of job successes which can be predicted by IQ is 25%.
- When in positive mode (as opposed to negative, neutral or stressed) our brains are 31% more productive.

Achor studied KPMG tax managers in New York during their manic tax return filing season. He split the team into two – a control group and a test group. Those in the test group chose one of the five training ideas listed above and did it each day for three weeks. On every metric the test group performed better than the control group.

Four months later he subjected both groups to 'Life Satisfaction Scale Tests' (the maximum score is 35 points). The control group scored 22.96, whereas the test group returned 27.23, significantly higher. The three weeks of training had a lasting effect – four months later happiness had become a habit!

## Other techniques and ideas

One area which can have a big impact on our positivity is *stress*. Training intended to help people cope better usually includes consideration of its negative effects and this can result in delegates feeling more stressed! But it can also be a fuel for growth. Life changing experiences and achievements are rarely

stress-free. If you can differentiate causes of stress that you can control from those which you can't, one tip is to take steps to reduce or eliminate a cause you can affect.

Here are some other strategies which you might find useful.

*Dress:* for the job you want, not the one you have.

*Act:* as if you hold the position you desire – 'fake it to make it'.

*Take responsibility:* for what happens to you but to see the other perspectives.

*Relive successes:* there are usually far more than you may think, and measure your personal success rather than by comparing yourself with other people.

*Words:* use 'but' and 'ah but' sparingly.

*Problems, learning and solutions:* learn from problems but don't dwell on them – instead seek achievable steps that lead to solutions.

*Emotions & experiences:* be aware of your own mood and invest in experiences rather than material possessions.

*Conflict:* try to resolve contentious issues amicably and quickly.

*Role models and mentors:* take a moment to think if this is worth pursuing for you?

*Plan:* take time each day to look forward – not just in business (be prepared) but to other interests and recreation.

## What do I do now?

Successful businesses often have a core team of people with differing expertise, experience and attitudes, including to risk. Holding a positive mindset is not the same as ignoring risks or being wildly optimistic! A positive approach is likely to mean you or your team are more effective and have the edge.

When we hosted our meeting on the power of positivity several months ago I was worried that the subject might not be well received by everyone. On the day, my concerns proved groundless, everyone really engaged with the topic.

*Being aware moment-to-moment, of one's subjective conscious experience from a first-person perspective* is Wikipedia's definition of mindfulness. Everyone now seems to be talking about it and I recently noticed an advert on the London Underground encouraging mindfulness.

Ruby Wax, who graduated from Kellogg College at Oxford University with a masters degree in mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, has just released a new book [Mindfulness for the Frazzled](#).

Should you and your team address the power of positivity to get long-lasting benefits in everything you do?

## Shipleys' Business Breakfast people

Please ask for a Shipleys team sheet or visit [www.shipleys.com](http://www.shipleys.com) for more information about our people and how they may be able to help you. Our website includes [past meeting summaries](#).

						
Steve Foster	Mike Lockett	Simon Robinson	Peter Conneely	Stuart Dey	Dean Hardy	Carol Stevens