



THE OPTIMISTIC COACH

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Great coaches see the best in those they coach; however, I've noticed that their positive attitude extends toward the world and the future—an attitude that is infectious. They are unabashed purveyors of hope, an all-too-rare commodity in today's world.

In the midst of the turbulent and fast-changing business environment and the instability of our globalized world, it is understandable that people may feel overwhelmed and somewhat despondent. Tossed about by forces larger than themselves, they feel powerless and insignificant.

Coaches don't ignore these realities. They understand not just that we are living in times of great change but that the pace of change is highly likely to keep accelerating in most areas of our lives. But they are not intimidated by this reality. They don't pine for the past. They see the changing world as a wonderful chance to reinvent oneself, contribute at higher levels, and seize opportunities previously unimagined.

Even in the face of adversity, they believe that negative circumstances are a temporary and not a permanent condition. They intentionally take the perspective that all work, careers, and lives exist in naturally evolving environments and that people can choose to optimize their experience. Rather than feeling victimized by the shifting world around them, coaches hold the perspective that we always have a choice—perhaps not to control our circumstances, but to control our responses and most importantly, to craft our own futures. Helping others learn to make these choices in ways that lead them to ever-greater heights of development is the essence of the coach's work.

Some time ago I participated in a consulting skills workshop in San Francisco, and on the first morning of the program we were assigned to trios and instructed to introduce ourselves and ask each other questions in order to get to know each other.

After I did my introduction, one person in my group, who looked more like a hippie than a consultant, said to me “I would much rather imagine who you could be than to learn about who you are today.” At the time, I thought this to be a rather strange statement; however his words stayed with me and came alive with new meaning once I began my coaching career.

While I greatly enjoy meeting new people and learning about their uniqueness, I believe that I am at my best as a coach when I share his optimistic point of view. William James once wrote that, “Pessimism leads to weakness. Optimism leads to power.” Optimism provides the emotional energy needed to convert our hopes and aspirations into reality. Optimism drives us to action. It sets a tone of hope, vitality, and inspiration for others and for ourselves.

According to Martin E. Seligman, PhD, optimists have three common traits.

1. They view adversity in their lives as temporary and localized (i.e., not permeating all other aspects of their life).
2. They view adversity in their lives as external and not entirely their fault, and
3. They are not defeated by setbacks.

Those who have an optimistic outlook will roll with the punches, will be more proactive and persistent, and will not abandon hope. Pessimists, on the other hand, tend to view adversity as permanent, (unchangeable) and pervasive (affecting all aspects of their lives).

A pessimist views adversity as more personal (viewing him- or herself as the source of the adversity; that it is all his or her fault). In the face of setbacks or challenges, pessimists are more likely to do worse than predicted and even give up, while optimists will persevere. Optimism, therefore, is a crucial component of personal achievement and is especially important in times of chaos, change, and turbulence.

There is no doubt that optimism gives one a competitive advantage. Where others have resigned themselves to the status quo, those with an optimistic outlook seek to take control of their destiny. They believe that they can have a significant influence on the future—and that belief fuels their optimism, which in turn fuels their personal power. And this optimism is often passed on to those they coach.

Optimism is a choice—not a personality trait. What are you choosing?



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