



Positive Thinking?

By Lehan Stemmet, Ph.D.

We often hear that there is power in thinking positively. There is some truth in that. It is an important part of becoming more resilient and dealing with life's challenges, however, it is only a part of the equation. Positive thinking precedes and coexists with proactive action. I have dealt with many people over the years who were very positive and couldn't understand why things just didn't seem to work out for them.

That is where the problem was – they wondered why things didn't work out for them. In the end they waited for things to change without being proactive. If you have not yet realized it by reading through some of our posts here or listening to the podcasts: resilience requires action. You need to be proactive and take action. You need to behave differently. It requires a positive mindset, faith, trust, mental agility, a willingness to learn, etc... but in the end it all boils down to taking action.

Action, yes, repeatedly until you have built new habits and formed new neural networks. Through consistently behaving differently, more positively and proactively, you eventually increase your ability to be more resilient. Resilience is not so much about being able to handle more or bigger challenges. It is about being able to bounce back and recover, and returning to a normal state psychologically and physically. Athletes do not become fit by reading books about fitness or thinking about being fit or simply visualizing themselves being fit. That only gives them an understanding of it and some visuals of being fit... they become fit by getting on the track, running around the block and doing increasingly more repetitions of each specific type of exercise. They become fit by acting on their positive mindset and beliefs. Resilience is the same. You need to exercise to become fit. You need to practice to become resilient. You also, importantly, need to proactively build times into your days, weeks, months and years to be resilient – to bounce back. Wanting to be resilient and not making time to bounce back is futile. Trying to be resilient about things you could prevent proactively is a waste of resources and time... Many people try to be resilient about things that might have been preventable in the first place.

Positive thinking by itself won't get you anywhere. Imagine how long your body could survive on telling yourself that you have eaten enough when you haven't eaten anything to be sufficiently nourished. Or imagine you keep telling yourself that there is enough fuel in your car when the gauge tells you that you will run out of fuel soon. Imagine telling yourself that everything will be OK if you jump out of an airplane, but you don't take a parachute. At some point reality overtakes positive thinking. That is why I love this verse in the Bible: *"In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."* (James 2:17, NIV). The context may not be entirely aligned to the concept of resilience, but the principle of having faith and being positive without doing anything about it resonates nicely. You must act. Not reactively, but proactively. There simply is no other way. This is the principle behind the 'Deal With It' concept. It doesn't mean 'toughen up' as most people think. It actually means that you have to Deal With It, you have to act!

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