

Reducing Conflict 36 Changing Attitudes

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



We have all heard the sayings about attitude. I am sure that every parent of every child has uttered the phrase “you need to change your attitude” numerous times.

From the pulpit or the schoolroom to the boardroom, and even to the barroom, you can hear things like:

- What governs your happiness in life is not what happens to you, but how you react to what happens to you.
- You must approach people with an attitude of gratitude.
- The most important word that governs your success in life is attitude.
- To change your life for the better, change your attitude about life.
- A positive attitude may not solve all your problems, but it will annoy enough people to make it worth the effort.
- Wherever you go, no matter what the weather, always bring your own sunshine.
- If you aren't fired with enthusiasm, you will be fired with enthusiasm.

Beyond the Catchy Phrases

After a while, these platitudes lose their meaning due to oversaturation. For this article, I wanted to dig beyond the catchy phrases and get back to what attitude really is and how we all can do a better job of controlling our own and coaching others to improve theirs.

When circumstances or other forces prevent us from experiencing life in a way that makes the most sense to us, we often turn sour and develop what is known as a bad attitude. This becomes manifest in numerous familiar ways from pouting, to doubting, to shouting, and even to clouting.

The Secret to a Better Attitude

Is there a universal secret that can help people keep a more positive attitude most of the time? Let me share two extremes. I know a woman who wears a pin with ruby slippers on it. She is like a ray of sunshine who is on a constant crusade to spread as much cheer as she can with everyone.

Does she ever have a bad day? I'll bet she does, but I have never seen her really down. She lives in a very nice world, even when some people are not very nice to her.

I ran into another woman in a hair salon this past week. I went into a strange place because I had some time to kill. The woman spoke in a constant stream of babble. She literally could not stop talking at all. Every phrase she uttered was negative. For her, the world is the pits, and she endures a steady stream of evil. I marvel over these two extremes. Ask yourself seriously, where on the scale between these two extremes do you reside most of the time?

Not Talking About Severe Psychological Problems

I need to make a distinction here between the majority of people who have some control over their thoughts and the few people who have deep psychological problems based on disease or prior traumas. There are people who feel they must lash back at the world because of what they have endured.

Perhaps it was some kind of physical or mental abuse when they were a child. Perhaps there was a total betrayal by a trusted loved one. For these people, trying to alter their mental state by thinking positive thoughts might further repress some gremlins that need to come out with professional help.

For the majority of folks, even though we have some issues to resolve, learning to have a more positive attitude could be a major step forward in terms of leading a happier life.

We Have the Power to Choose

The greatest power God gave us is the power to choose. I learned that from Lou Holtz 25 years ago in a video entitled *Do Right*. What Lou meant is that the choice is ours where we exist on the scale of attitude.

Why do so many people choose to dwell on the negative side of life? Is it because they enjoy being miserable? I think not. I believe if a person realizes there is a more enjoyable place to dwell, he or she will do the inner work necessary to gravitate toward it.

The reason many people live in misery is because they simply do not know (or fail to remember) that they have the power to change their condition. It is there all the time if they will only recognize and use the power. In the song "Already Gone" by The Eagles, is a profound lyric: "So often times it happens, we all live our life in chains, and we never even know we have the key."

If you push the concept to the extreme, it can be comical. I am reminded of the final scene in the movie *The Life of Brian* where a couple dozen men are tied to crosses as they are being crucified. They started whistling and singing a cheerful song, "Always look on the bright side of life."

What trick of the mind can we use to remember the power we have over our thoughts? It is simple. We need to deal with root issues and then train our brains to think in a different pattern.

Habitual thought patterns can be changed simply by replacing bad thoughts with good ones consistently for about a month. That is long enough to reprogram our brain to overcome a lifetime of negative attitudes and thoughts. There is a simple process that is guaranteed to work if we will remember to use it consistently.

Process to Change Your Attitude

Step 1 - Catch yourself having a negative thought. This is the part where most people fail. They simply do not recognize they are having negative thoughts, so no correction is possible. Through the power of this article, you now have the gift (if you chose to use it) of catching the negative thought next time you have one. Use that power!

Step 2 - Replace the negative thought with a positive one. Mechanically reject the negative thought and figure out a way to turn it to an advantage. Napoleon Hill had a great technique for doing this. He posited that every bad situation contained the seed of an equivalent benefit. When something negative happened, rather than lamenting, he would fix his energy on finding the seed of the equivalent benefit. With practice, it is possible to do this nearly all of the time, as long as you are not being crucified.

Step 3 - You must praise yourself for rejecting the bad thought and replacing it with a good one. Why? Because the road to changing a lifetime of negativity is long and hard. You need encouragement along the way to recognize that you are literally reinventing your entire self through the power of your mind.

One might think this is impossible objectively, but you are accomplishing it. I read a joke that it is great to be a youth because you do not have the experience to know that it is physically impossible to do what you are doing.

Every time you praise yourself for taking the initiative to change your attitude, you make the next life-changing attitude adjustment easier to make. Thus, you can begin to form a habit of changing the way you think. Presto, a month later the world will see a new and much more positive you.

The good news is that this three-step process takes no time out of your busy day. It costs absolutely nothing to do it. Nobody even needs to know you are doing it, and yet it can literally transform the only thing in life that really counts: the quality of your life.

Conclusion

The amazing thing about this technique is that you can teach it to others rather easily. The idea is so simple it can be understood in a five-minute discussion, yet the benefits are so powerful it can make a huge difference in the life of the other person. I recommend you try this method of self-improvement for a month and experience the benefits. Once you do, then help some people who are miserable to improve their lot in life by applying this process.

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