

Enhancing Resilience: Positive Psychology and Mindset

DHRM HR LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

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Let's start simple

Close your eyes... and take eight deep breaths



A simple hypothetical

- This morning you were walking through the main hallway in your workplace and saw Pat, a colleague of equal seniority.
- You don't know Pat that well but you were assigned to work together briefly on a challenging project four months ago. You didn't get much feedback on the project and haven't talked with Pat since then.
- As you approached each other, you smiled and said hi. Pat made direct eye contact with you, didn't say anything, didn't smile, and briskly moved past.

Be Honest with Yourself

What were your first reactions?

What negative thoughts crept in?

Another hypothetical

This morning you received the following email from your direct supervisor:

Dear [You],

I need to talk with you this afternoon. Are you available at 3:00?

**Thanks,
[Supervisor]**

Be Honest with Yourself

What were your first reactions?

Did you have any negative thoughts?

What are your instinctual reactions to Pat?



Psychological Approach	Reaction	Consequence
Negative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Pat is standoffish.”• “Pat doesn’t like me.”• “I don’t like Pat anyway.”• “I guess that project didn’t go well.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ignore Pat the next time• Fractured relationship
Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Pat must be distracted or busy.”• “Maybe Pat didn’t see me.”• “Maybe Pat’s having a bad day.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Connection is made• Commiserate over being busy or distracted• Learn if the project didn’t go well

What are your instinctual reactions to the email?



Psychological Approach	Reaction	Consequence
Negative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “I must have done something wrong.”• “Must be bad news.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unproductive worry• Closed or defensive attitude for the meeting
Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “I wonder what she wants to discuss.”• “That was unusually cryptic and formal. She must be having a busy day.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Calm, open attitude for whatever happens in the meeting.

What is Resilience?

The ability to grow and thrive through adversity



More than just the ability to “bounce back”

A daunting challenge

5

Beware the trigger thoughts

- I'm going to **fail**
- I **can't** do it
- I **don't** want to do it
- I'm **worried** that...
- This is going so **wrong**
- What a **mess!**
- What if I **fall short?**
- They're going to **hate** this
- I'm to **blame**

WEAK

Hippocampus

Regulates memory and emotions.

STRONG

Prefrontal Cortex

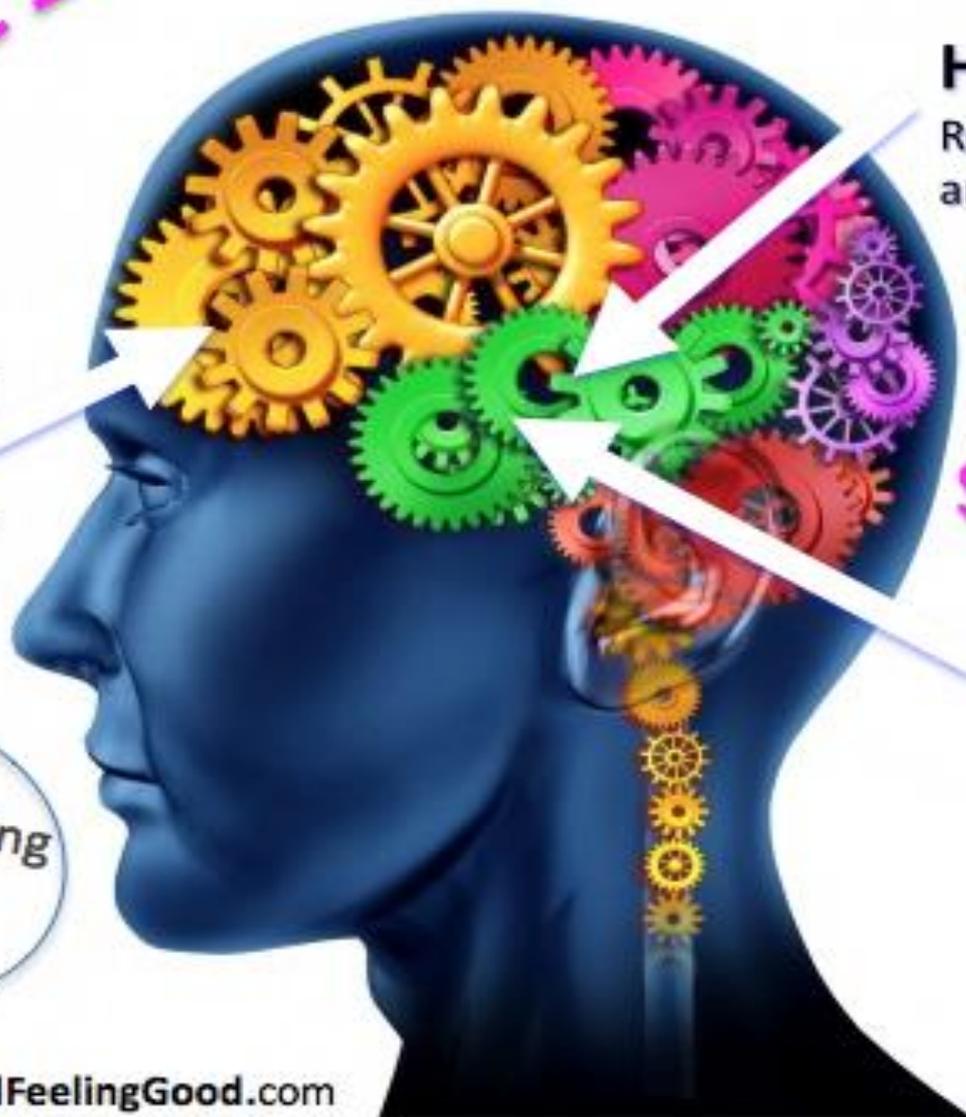
Thinking/logic/
what to do/
evaluation.

Amygdala

Turns on fight or flight, and stores memories of the event.

Everything is ok.

Aargh!



There is good news!

Resilience can be taught.

- Large law firms
- U.S. military
- Sports Teams



The Key:

Positive psychology techniques

Positive Psychology: Retrain your brain



Be Honest with Yourself

- Frequently negative
- Instinctual

- Disrupt the biological and trained negativity
- Intentional
- Conscious

- Goal: frequently positive
- Intentional until instinctual

The Key

Practice!

Meet Jack

- Jack is an intense and ambitious law student. He received mostly A- and A grades in his first year of law school.
- Jack badly wants to be a prosecutor when he graduates. To impress future employers, he took the basic Criminal Law course in the Fall of his second year.
- Three days ago he received his grade: a C+. It was one of the four lowest grades in a class of 90 students.
- Minutes after he received the grade, Jack fired off an e-mail to the professor seeking feedback on his exam. The professor has not answered the e-mail.
- What thoughts have been going through Jack's head the last few days?

Thinking Traps



Thinking Trap	Ticker-Tape
Overgeneralizing	“I’m lousy at Criminal Law.” “I’m going to be a lousy prosecutor.”
Catastrophization <i>or</i> All or nothing thinking	“I got a C in my most important class. I’m never going to get a job in my field. There’s no point staying in law school.”

And more Thinking Traps...



Thinking Trap	Ticker-Tape
Emotional Reasoning	“I feel like a failure. I guess I am a failure.”
Personalization	“The professor must think I’m an idiot.” <i>or</i> “The professor is an idiot.”

Rewriting the “Ticker-tape”

Goals

1. View the problem...
 - ✦ as temporary
 - ✦ as local
 - ✦ as changeable
 - ✦ in perspective
2. Realistically explore the best case, worst case, and likeliest case

The New Soundtrack

Temporary: “This was just a setback. Law school is a marathon.”



Local: “This was just one course. I’ll do better moving forward.”

Changeable: “I should figure out what went wrong on the exam.”

“There are steps I can take to improve my resume.”

Perspective: “Many worse things could have happened.”

“Billions of people are starving tonight.”

The Key

Practice!

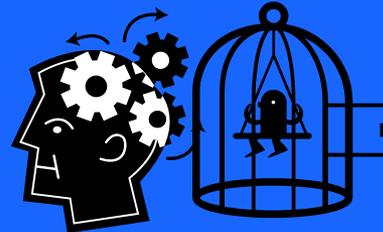
Practicing Positivity: 4 Steps



Attune
yourself
to
adversity



Notice
the
“Ticker-tape”

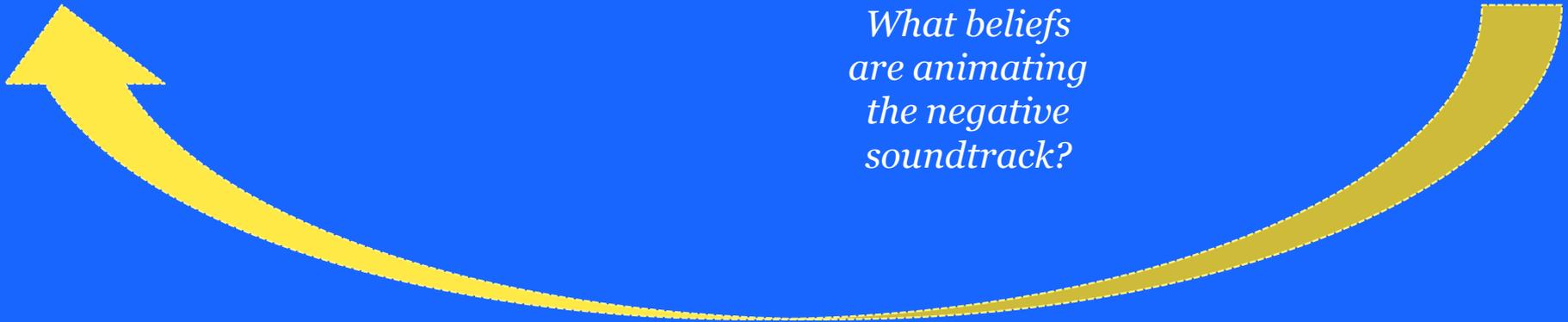


Identify
your
thinking
traps



Rewrite
the
“Ticker-tape”

*What beliefs
are animating
the negative
soundtrack?*



So, Let's Practice Again

- Identify a recent adversity or setback in your life.
- What was your instinctive “ticker-tape” or “soundtrack”?
 - What “**iceberg beliefs**” about yourself or others influenced the soundtrack?
- Did you fall for any of the thinking traps?
- What would have been a more resilient “ticker-tape”?

Another Positivity Technique: Gratitude Journaling

- Write down 5 things for which you are grateful.
- Write down 5 more things for which you are grateful, but which would not appear on your list if you did this exercise every day.
- Write down 5 things you are grateful for at work this week.

The Science of Gratitude

Research shows that intentional, consistent gratitude practice:

- increases optimism
- increases mindfulness and awareness
- improves sleep quality and quantity
- correlates to more frequent exercise
- increases general well-being

Benefits accrue for months even with 1 week of journaling.

Enhancing the Impact

- Notice the kindnesses of those closest to you



- Calendar your gratitude practice



More Positivity Practices

- Exercise
- Mindfulness
- Laughter
- Spirituality
- Close relationships

Improve your employees' resilience

- Gratitude and ABC exercises
- Best Case, Worst Case, Likely Case
- Use specifics when you praise
 - Create a positive vocabulary
 - Identify natural and achieved strengths
- Encourage holistic wellness
 - Spiritual, physical, emotional
- Create spaces for relationship-building
- Model the practices, courageously