
----- WHAT'S UP, DOC? -----

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"Creating Leadership Solutions for Profit and Growth"

THIS MONTH'S THEME: MATURE OPTIMISM

Some people cultivate a kind of pessimism or cynicism as a protective barrier. They insulate themselves from the potential for disappointment with a kind of seen it all, done it all skepticism. Well, that's a step above naive optimism, which never really understands that bad things do happen, that plans go awry, and that even tragedies occur. But more and more, our understanding of human health tells us that there is a third option: mature optimism. This month's edition will attempt to define "mature optimism," why it matters, and how you can cultivate it for yourself.

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THIS MONTH'S QUOTE:

"Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out." -- Václav Havel

That's a neat quote from a Nobel Peace Prize winner, but I would add this: the right kind of hope - hope that comes from mature optimism - helps to create the very positive outcomes it envisions. This is not a matter of certainty, but a matter of maximizing probabilities. -- AJS

1. NAIVE VERSUS MATURE OPTIMISM

WHAT IS NAIVE OPTIMISM?

Naive optimism is the kind of optimism we have as children - and all too often, as adults. This is the kind of optimism we have before we've learned some of life's most unwelcome, even bitter lessons. Among those lessons are the following truths: People lie and cheat. Bad things happen to good people. Sometimes bad deeds lead to prosperity for those who do them. In life, it is often shrewdness or connections that matter more than genuine talent and merit. Relationships can fail, and sometimes we lose people we love. In short, nothing is ever perfect. Naive optimists never really get more than an intellectual grasp on these truths - they spend their lives ignoring or avoiding much of reality because facing these things feels too overwhelming. They run from great romantic ideal to great romantic ideal, but never really get anywhere because there's too much of reality they can't afford to see, so they can never find or build what they want.

WHAT IS MATURE OPTIMISM?

Mature optimism is naive optimism that had crossed the great divide of disappointment, even disillusionment, with what life sometimes has to offer. There is also a middle position between naive and mature optimism. The person in the middle position between the two knows full well that bad things happen, etc., and has experienced life's disappointments, and tries to protect herself from too much optimism in the future - lest she set herself up for future hurt and disappointment, or be unprepared when the next unexpected and unwelcome event occurs. But the mature optimist takes this one step further: the mature optimist is not unprepared for bad events, but plans for the best, prepares for reasonably foreseeable bad events and hopes for - even expects - the best possible outcome. The mature optimist is strong enough - by choice and through self-discipline - to be optimistic, in spite of the many ways that events can sometimes wear us down.

2. WHY YOU SHOULD CULTIVATE MATURE OPTIMISM

IT'S GOOD FOR YOUR PHYSICAL HEALTH

It's really not a matter of dispute anymore: emotional health, and mature optimism, makes the environment inside the body as strong as possible

to fight off infection and disease. Just as we know that stress and negativity wear down physical health - especially when it leads to behavioral patterns (like smoking) that decrease health - we also know that emotional health and positivity contribute to physical well-being. Many people come to terms with this truth when they face catastrophic illness - which is perhaps part of the reason so many cancer survivors, for example, are such strong people. But the rest of us don't need to wait for potential near-death experiences or illnesses to build strong habits right now.

EXPECTATIONS ARE OFTEN SELF-FULFILLING

Expect the worst, and you will probably create the conditions - however unintentionally - to see your expectations confirmed. Expect the best, and you will probably create the conditions - intentionally and unintentionally - to see the best, or some semblance of it, occur. You may not see the best thing occur, but you may create the conditions through which a better result may occur than would otherwise have happened. For example, imagine I buy a plant for my home that can grow into a tree. If I expect it to grow well, then I am more likely to water it regularly, pot it in good soil with room to dig in roots, and I'll sprinkle in some Miracle Grow now and then. But if I expect the tree to falter or fail, I am less likely to be attentive to these details - or to get any tips from my friends who are better at keeping houseplants than I am. And so the tree is more likely to wither and even die. I can help it thrive - or kill it - with my expectations, because my expectations direct my subsequent behaviors.

IT MAKES YOU A LEADER

Most people look to leaders for the intangible quality of hope, whether they realize it or not. Leaders are people who make us feel more able to achieve, who create new possibilities for us or help us find new possibilities in ourselves, as individuals and as teams of individuals. No leader can truly be effective without the ability to inspire confidence and hope in others, even if the word "hope" is never used. Good managers inspire confidence based on their competence. Leaders inspire loyalty and hope based on their ability to make others believe in new possibilities.

AVOID LIVING THROUGH THE SAME BAD EVENT "TWICE"

If something bad is going to happen, why live through it twice - once by way of anxious anticipation, and then the second time when it actually occurs? What a waste of time! Why not just go through it once - when it really happens, and at least enjoy the day today in the meantime? And guess what? The bad scenario may not occur. And guess what else? If we're busy expecting the worst, it is more likely to occur, but if we do the right things right in the immediate term, and stay positive, the worst is less likely to befall. And then, even if it does, the mature optimist will already be in the strongest possible position to face bad events

because of all the other positive things he or she will have going on in the meantime.

3. RECOMMENDED BOOKS AND FILMS

BOOK: "Warfighting: The U. S. Marine Corps Book of Strategy: Tactics for Managing Confrontation," The United States Marine Corps, Doubleday, New York, 1994 (paperback).

A slim little book full of good management principles. Take the "war" part as a metaphor and look at the book as a guide to principles of good management practice - not from the "soft" side, but from the practical, pragmatic approach of maximizes mission effectiveness through preparation and good planning.

FILM: "Some Like It Hot"

I haven't seen any movies this month, nor have I heard of any hot new ones from friends. Do yourself a favor and rent the old Billy Wilder classic, starring Marilyn Monroe, Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon. If you have not seen it, it's a timeless comedic riot. Or send me your own movie recommendations!

4. CHUCKLES

Click on the following link for the Associated Press report of the results of a search for the "world's funniest joke." No kidding!

<http://www.salon.com/mwt/wire/2002/10/03/jokes/index.html>

5. SUBSCRIBER SUCCESSES

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story in the newsletter 'What's Up, Doc?'"

6. ABOUT DR. SCHULER

A. J. Schuler, Psy. D. is a speaker, consultant and leadership coach who helps people and organizations become more effective, profitable, focused on their missions and able to maximize their opportunities that lead to growth. Dr. Schuler, President of Schuler Solutions, Inc., accomplishes this through speeches, seminars, consulting and one-on-one coaching focused on developing excellence in both leadership and team performance. He has served diverse organizations in the private and public sectors, including The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, Sony Development, Nomura Securities and the Executive Office for Immigration Review. A graduate of the Wharton School of Business, Dr. Schuler has successfully led the profitable growth of a dynamic, international consulting firm while serving as Operations Director, and has successfully coached over five hundred CEO's and corporate executives.

7. HOW TO SUBSCRIBE OR UNSUBSCRIBE

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P.S. - Remember to send in your comments and successes, and to forward this newsletter to at least one friend! -- AJS