

Promoting Learning

by Dr. Marvin Marshall

THE POWER OF POSITIVITY – Part 2 (Continued from last issue)

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People do better when they feel better, not when they feel worse.

Positivity is a more constructive teacher than negativity. Positive messages elevate, encourage, and foster growth.

PROJECT POSITIVE EXPECTATIONS

Attitude is the mind's paintbrush; it can color any situation. The teacher who says, "This is a very important test. Be careful," paints a negative picture that shakes confidence. Saying, "This is a very important test and I know you can handle it and do well," paints a positive picture.

Which would you rather hear when you walk into a restaurant: "I can't seat you for thirty minutes" or "In thirty minutes I will have a wonderful table for you"? The result is the same, but the perception is different. The child who wets his bed conjures up one image when the parent says, "Don't wet your bed tonight" and a completely different picture when the youngster hears, "Let's see if you can keep the bed dry tonight." The message we convey can have a dramatic effect on young people's behavior.

The first step is awareness. To assist in becoming aware of negative statements, listen to yourself. When catching yourself saying something that paints a negative picture, take the extra step of thinking how it could be rephrased to paint a positive picture. "I'm afraid that I will forget my keys," becomes, "I'm going to remember that I placed my keys in the top drawer." Adults do not purposely set out to deprecate young people; awareness of positive language can ensure they do not. For example, rather than saying, "Did you forget again?" say, "What can you do to help yourself remember?" Rather than, "When will you grow up?" say, "As we grow older, we learn how to solve these problems from such experiences."

Positive attitudes affect teaching. Many years ago, the first day of school began on a bright note for the new teacher, who was glancing over the class roll. After each student's name was a number 118, 116, 121, and so on. "Look at these IQs," the teacher thought. "They have given me a terrific class!" As a result, the elated teacher challenged his students, raised their expectations, and communicated his confidence in them. The teacher tried innovative techniques and involved students so they became active learners. The class did much better than expected. Only later did the teacher find out that the numbers placed by students' names on new class roll sheets were locker numbers.

Here is a simple way to start off each year, especially at the elementary level. At the end of the previous year, each teacher writes one positive comment about every student that will be passed on to the student's new teacher. The comment can relate to an interest, a talent, a personal skill, an attitude, or anything else worth sharing. The result is that the student's new teacher is equipped at the very outset with a positive viewpoint toward each student.

Students at risk often think about of what they are *not* good at. These students are often right-hemisphere dominant, so their strengths do not lie in the left-hemisphere (logical, linguistic) areas in which schools focus after the primary grades. These students often have some hidden talent in art, psychomotor skills, leadership, or personal relations. Find one interest, talent, or skill these students possess and, in private, say something positive to them. “I see you draw well. I can tell because of the detail in your drawing.” The message with students who have low self-worth needs to be repeated a number of times in different ways. Sometimes young people have to believe in someone else’s belief in them until their own belief in themselves kicks in. Building on the positive gives a positive mindset. *The pictures that young people have of themselves drive their behaviors.*

We always want to refer to the behavior, never the person. If you say, “You are late all the time; you are just one of those late people,” the person will work to that expectation. On the other hand, saying, “You have such great work habits in many areas, and punctuality is something that you can improve on. I know you are capable of being here on time each day,” then the young person has something for which to strive. A positive picture has been created.

Also, consider the fact that mood follows action. Grandmother knew this, which is why she said to mother, “If you don’t feel good, clean the stove.” Similarly, doing something productive engenders positive feelings, in contrast to doing something negative or doing nothing at all. The advice is sound: *Change what you do and you change your view.*

Research has shown that optimism, whether “natural” or “learned,” results in better health. People who are optimistic have a better handle on dealing with their emotions, which has an impact on the immune system, heart, and other body functions.

Positivity brings hope, which is a cousin of optimism. A series of tests on hope was given at the University of Kansas, and results were compared to the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores, which are supposed to determine success as a college freshman. It was found that the test scores on hope were better predictors than the SAT scores. Hope and optimism are learned. They are teachable. A starting point is always to ask yourself, *“How can I say that in a positive way?”*

KEY POINTS

People do better when they feel good, rather than when they feel bad.

Consequences are usually imposed, which is the prime reason why they are perceived negatively and why they do not change the way a person wants to behave.

Advertising consequences ahead of time is counterproductive because it focuses on consequences, rather than on expected behaviors.

If a consequence is deemed necessary, rather than assign it, a more effective approach is to elicit the consequence, thus placing ownership and responsibility on the young person.

Contingencies promise with the positive and place the responsibility on the young person, where it belongs, rather than on the adult.

Negative comments engender negative attitudes. Positive comments engender positive attitudes.

People who are most effective in influencing other people phrase their communications in positive terms.

Positivity brings hope.

The pictures that people have of themselves drive their behaviors.

Positivity prompts feelings of being valued, enthusiastic, supported, respected, motivated, challenged, capable, and proud.

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