

Optimistic leadership

Being the leaders followers like to follow

By DR. LARRY COLE



Let's start this article by looking at your hand. Stick your left hand in front of you and look to find something you would change about it. Perhaps you have wrinkles or unattractive fingernails. Some of you will look at your wedding ring and think you've got the wrong ring on. Now look for something you like. Perhaps you have five fingers and all of them work.

This simple exercise illustrates two important psychological points. First, is that everything has positive and negative characteristics. Second, is that when you see the good, you don't see the bad and vice versa. They are mutually exclusive categories.

As leaders we have both positive and negative characteristics. Let's look at a list of synonyms on a continuum of ranging from pessimism to optimism and you can decide who you would prefer to work with.

Further, Martin Seligman, the father of positive psychology, in his book *Learned Optimism* wrote that:

- Optimists believe bad events are temporary while pessimists believe bad events are permanent.
- Optimists compartmentalize failure while pessimists believe that a failure in one area of life means failure in life as a whole.
- Optimists believe that bad things happen to good people whereas pessimists believe everything about them is bad.

All of us are on this continuum somewhere. Circle the number that represents you. Ask your employees to do the same and discuss the ratings.

We need to point out that optimists are not Pollyannaish. Pollyannaish people have the unrealistic expectation that everything is going to be good. That's not the way the world works. As noted in Harold Kushner's best-selling book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* – all of us are aware of bad things happening.

The optimistic leader's default position is summarized in the words of Catherine Ponder who wrote in her book, *The Dynamic Laws of Prosperity*, that "failure is nothing but success trying to be born in a different way."

Before discussing how you can become a more optimistic leader, here is a list of some of the advantages of being one.

- Such leaders generally have a well-defined direction for the business and expect to be successful. These leaders take advantage of the Law of Expectation, i.e., you will receive that which you expect to receive.
- We are hardwired to seek pleasure and avoid pain and it's more pleasurable to follow an optimistic leader.
- People will enjoy being around you when you help them feel that everything is going to be okay.
- Therefore, people will more readily follow you.
- Employee morale is higher.
- You and your people will be more productive and profitable.
- You are more willing to be innovative; therefore more willing to step out of the comfort zone and take calculated risks.
- When you approach problems with an optimistic attitude you will find solutions easier and faster.
- Optimistic leaders are more resilient – that is they bounce back faster from frustrations and disappointments.

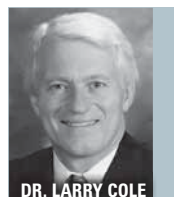
Now let's review some of the benefits for you as a person. Optimists:

- Enjoy the many blessings of living life fully.
- They are healthier.
- They live longer.
- Generally are more financially successful.

Now let's turn our attention to what you can do to become a more optimistic leader.

Yes, we can learn to be optimistic, it is not DNA determined. Actually, you can be as optimistic as you want and the more you use your optimistic muscles, the stronger they become. If we examine our life process, our first experiences on this earth were negative. On August 30, 1945, I was being born.

- I left a warm environment and came into one that was cold.



DR. LARRY COLE

is a lead trainer for the Western Equipment Dealers Association's Dealers Institute.



Pessimism					Optimism				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Cynical						Confidence			
Gloom						Hope			
Distrust						Cheerfulness			
Negative						Positive			
Looks for the bad things						Looks for the good things			