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How can the absence of ill-being equal the presence of well-being? Does lessening unhappiness increase happiness? Does getting what is good in life require more than eliminating what is bad?

These are among the key questions underlying the rapid evolution of CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) pioneered by University of Pennsylvania psychiatry professor Aaron Beck and built on by his mentee, psychology professor, Martin Seligman. As Seligman explains in his biographical book, ***The Hope Circuit: A Psychologist's Journey from Helplessness to Optimism***,

"I and many of the practitioners and scientists in positive psychology came right out of work on misery and suffering. I devoted thirty-five years of my life to undoing depression and helplessness. I found that merely getting rid of the bad stuff was not enough, and so I advocated working on what makes life worth living as well...it is the presence of positive emotion, engagement, good relations, meaning, and accomplishment (PERMA)...getting what is good in life entails a lot more than just eliminating what is bad."

Seligman's work is deeply grounded in extensive research. PERMA emerged from these evidence-based approaches and is a central framework in positive psychology:

Positive Emotion -- happiness and life satisfaction are moved from being the end goals to factors of well-being.

Engagement -- when we're in this state of "flow," time flies by as thoughts and feelings are often absent. We then look back later at just how fun or rewarding the activity was.

Relationships -- acts of kindness, connecting with others, and sharing laughter, joy,

In this Issue:


**Cognition and Mindfulness:
Thinking About Our Thinking**

**Cognitive Psychology:
Choosing Our Reality**

**Explanatory Style:
Don't P and Should Yourself**

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pride, or purpose provide deep and lasting feelings of well-being.

Meaning -- feeling we're part of something much bigger or serving a greater purpose than ourselves.

Accomplishment -- goals such as money, fame, winning, or mastery that we pursue for their own sake whether or not they bring positive emotion, stronger relationships, or meaning.

This issue highlights the roots and growth of positive psychology as a branch of CBT. We start with Aaron Beck's founding of CBT. It's a modernization of ancient wisdom found in mindfulness and Buddhism. You'll see how Beck and the Dalai Lama compare the two approaches.

We'll see how Martin Seligman laid the foundation for positive psychology with his publication of research in *Learned Optimism*. To see beyond what is, to what could be, we need to become learned optimists. This involves changing our focus from what's wrong or where we're lacking to building on our strengths and what brings us the deepest meaning and purpose.

A key component of CBT is our automatic explanatory style. This is defined by the "three Ps" of permanence, pervasiveness, and personalization. Thinking about our thinking -- becoming mindful of our inner dialogue -- is the first step in reframing our explanations to move up the pessimism-optimism scale and increase our happiness and effectiveness. We'll look at a few reframing examples to avoid P-ing ourselves.

As Seligman writes, "our world, emerging at last from its vale of tears, now stands on the brink of a Florentine moment... it is perilously easy to forget these huge advances and to slip into our glib and quotidian catastrophizing about what 'terrible times' we live in now. I exhort us to be more fully conscious of these positives... we have much more to aspire to than less suffering. We can also aspire to more PERMA, more well-being, and more happiness."

Cognition and Mindfulness: Thinking About Our Thinking



Last month 100-year-old **Aaron Beck** passed away after an incredibly productive life. Beck was an Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania. The American Psychologist has called him "one of the five most influential psychotherapists of all time." Beck is the founder of

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Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT). CBT approaches are now widely used to help people recognize and reframe spontaneous, negative thoughts and cognitive distortions. These approaches have been clinically proven to be more effective than antidepressant medications and other therapies for treating depression.

University of Pennsylvania psychology researcher, author, and professor, Martin Seligman, built on Beck's work to lay the foundation for **Positive Psychology**. His autobiographical book, ***The Hope Circuit: A Psychologist's Journey from Hopelessness to Optimism***, outlines how he learned to build optimism, leverage strengths, and apply positive psychology.

In 2005, Beck met the Dalai Lama to compare the core principles of cognitive therapy with Buddhism. Beck also gave the Dalai Lama a copy of his book, *Prisoners of Hate*, which outlined his findings that hatred imprisons individuals who harbor it.

The two agreed on these overlaps between their two approaches:

Similarities between Cognitive Behavior Therapy and Buddhism

I. Goals: Serenity, Peace of Mind, Relief of Suffering

II. Values:

1. Importance of Acceptance, Compassion, Knowledge, Understanding
2. Altruism vs. Egoism
3. Universalism vs. Groupism: "We are one with all humankind."
4. Science vs. Superstition
5. Self-responsibility

III. Causes of Distress:

1. Egocentric biases leading to excessive or inappropriate anger, envy, cravings, etc. (the "toxins") and false beliefs ("delusions")
2. Underlying self-defeating beliefs that reinforce biases
3. Attaching negative meanings to events

IV. Methods:

1. Focus on the Immediate (here and now)
2. Target the biased thinking through
 1. Introspection
 2. Reflectiveness
 3. Perspective-taking
 4. Identification of "toxic" beliefs
 5. Distancing
 6. Constructive experiences
 7. Nurturing "positive beliefs"
3. Use of Imagery
4. Separating distress from pain
5. Mindfulness training

The Oxford dictionary defines cognition as "The mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses." And metacognition is "knowledge

about cognition itself and control of one's own cognitive processes."

We all have cognition. BUT...we often don't have metacognition or awareness of our automatic thinking patterns. Aaron Beck modernized ancient wisdom on the value of paying attention to how our mind works and our thinking.

Over 2,500 years ago, as the "awakened or enlightened one" Gautama Buddha taught, "All that we are is the result of what we have thought. The mind is everything. What we think, we become."

Cognitive Psychology: Choosing Our Reality



Aaron Beck pioneered the field of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). This approach was a major change to helping depressed patients focus on underlying negative beliefs. It upended traditional psychoanalytical theory and opened up a powerful new field of treatment.

University of Pennsylvania psychology professor, **Martin Seligman** built on CBT theories and approaches. He began his distinguished psychology career in the late sixties studying pessimism, learned helplessness, and depression. In 1990 Seligman published his seminal book, ***Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life***. It's loaded with extensive and solid research drawing from and advancing CBT -- within the larger field of cognitive behavioral therapies. *Learned Optimism* proved that "optimism is essential for a good and successful life."

At the core of Seligman's findings are the interconnected concepts of "learned helplessness" and "explanatory style." Seligman explains, "Learned helplessness is the giving-up reaction, the quitting response that follows from the belief that whatever you do doesn't matter." Explanatory style is the manner in which you habitually explain to yourself why events happen. It is the great modulator of learned helplessness. An optimistic explanatory style stops helplessness, whereas a pessimistic explanatory style spreads helplessness."

Learned Optimism is one of my all-time favorite books on personal growth and self-leadership. It laid the foundation for the new and rapidly growing field of **Positive Psychology** founded by Martin Seligman. This is the study of positive emotion, positive character traits, and positive institutions to raise the importance of psychological health around the world. This involves changing our focus from what's wrong or where we're lacking to building on our strengths and what brings us the

deepest meaning and purpose.

Here are a few key points from *Learned Optimism* showing how we choose the frames that create our reality:

- Pessimistic prophecies are self-fulfilling and create a downward spiral -- often into depression.
- Depression is a symptom of conscious negative thinking and does not come from underlying disorders, unresolved issues, unconscious anger, or brain chemistry.
- Pessimism is not fixed and unchangeable. Anyone can become optimistic by learning a new set of cognitive skills.
- Our thoughts aren't just reactions to events; they often change what causes or follows those events.
- Self-direction rather than outside forces explains our actions and gives us control over our lives.
- For the first time in history, many people have a significant amount of choice -- societal rights, in fact -- and personal control over their lives.
- During a time of dramatic increases in material wealth, severe depression is ten times worse in North America than fifty years ago.
- We all have automatic thoughts or styles of explanation that we try to impose on others for the good and bad events in our lives.
- Our explanatory style develops in childhood and determines whether we're pessimistic or optimistic (wallowing, following, or leading ourselves and others).
- Cognitive behavioral therapy can permanently reset our explanatory style to optimism, with a low relapse rate.
- Attitude, motivation, and optimism are key predictors of future success.
- Sports teams with optimistic explanatory styles perform better.

Seligman's found that "the key to disputing your own pessimistic thoughts is to first recognize them and then to treat them as if they were uttered by an external person, a rival whose mission in life was to make you miserable."

To see beyond what is, to what could be, we need to become "learned optimists." It starts by working with our teams or on our own, to "reframe" negative situations and problems by looking for the improvement opportunities buried in them.

Explanatory Style: Don't P and Should Yourself



Martin Seligman's groundbreaking book, *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*, laid the foundation for the rapidly growing field of Positive Psychology that Seligman went on to establish during his presidency of the American Psychological Association.

In his follow up book, *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment*, Seligman wrote,

"Pessimists have a particularly pernicious way of construing their setbacks and frustrations. They automatically think that the cause is permanent, pervasive and personal: 'It's going to last forever, it's going to undermine everything, and it's my fault.'...Optimists, in contrast, have a strength that allows them to interpret their setbacks as surmountable, particular to a single problem, and resulting from temporary circumstances or other people."

It's all too easy to listen to others tell us how we "should" feel about positive or negative events in our lives. We think and act according to our deep-rooted habits about what we think we "should" do in response. Unless we become more aware of our own thoughts, we don't realize how automatic -- and possibly destructive -- they've become.

Positive psychology builds on and extends the Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (**CBT**) approach pioneered by Aaron Beck to treat depression to help non-depressed people increase their happiness and flourish. A key component of CBT is our automatic explanatory style. This is defined by the "three Ps" of permanence, pervasiveness, and personalization define our explanatory style.

Our explanatory style establishes the glasses or frames through which we create reality. If we build the skills or habits of using an optimistic or leading style, the three Ps are a stairway to ever higher effectiveness in our personal and professional lives. If we've habitually chosen a negative or wallowing style, we slide ever deeper into the swamp of unhappiness, despair, and lowered leadership effectiveness.

Permanence

Explaining Bad Events:

Permanent (Pessimistic/Wallowing)

"I am such a loser."

"My boss is a jerk."

"You're always late."

Temporary (Optimistic/Leading)

"I was really off my game today."

"My boss really messed up this time."

"You've been late three times in the past week."

Explaining Good Events:

Temporary (Pessimistic/Wallowing)

"I caught a lucky break."

"Looks like they gave in on this one."

"My competitor messed up."

Permanent (Optimistic/Leading)

"My luck's holding up again."

"I am persistent and persuasive."

"My service is clearly better."

Pervasiveness

Explaining Bad Events:

Universal (Pessimistic/Wallowing)

"All (managers/workers/_____) are idiots."

"I am a terrible parent."

"I am useless at figuring out technical problems."

Specific (Optimistic/Leading)

"He was really off the mark on this one."

"Our teenager is going through a tough phase."

"These instructions are very poorly written."

Explaining Good Events:

Specific (Pessimistic/Wallowing)

"That turned out surprisingly well."

"Wonder what got into them this time."

"Guess somebody was actually listening."

Universal (Optimistic/Leading)

"I am a strong leader."

"We're an effective team."

"I am a good communicator."

Personalization

Explaining Bad Events:

Hopeless (Wallowing)

"I am just not smart enough."

"Just like a man/woman."

"With my luck, this is likely cancer, and I'll be dead next month."

Hopeful (Leading)

"Emotional Quotient (EQ) is much more important than Intellectual Quotient (IQ)."

"I caught him/her at a bad time."

"The odds are in my favor, and this is likely benign."

Explaining Good Events:

Hopeless (Wallowing)

"We barely made it this time."

"I wonder what my spouse is really up to."

"That was a lucky fluke."

Hopeful (Leading)

"We're good."

"My spouse is considerate and caring."

"My hard work paid off."

During one of my workshops, we were discussing keys to building responsibility and ownership. One participant told us that he and his wife had their four-year-old grandson, Tyler, stay overnight at their house. In the morning, he came running down the stairs and reported, "Grandma, Grandpa, somebody peed in my bed!"

Who do you think did that? Was it Grampa the trickster!? Part of a kid's growth is learning to take responsibility for their actions. However, it's too easy to grow older and become an adult without growing up.

The good news is that you can stop P-ing and should'ing yourself! But after years of walking around with "opticalrectumitis" -- and maybe even wet pants -- it's not easy to change your **crap glasses**. You may need a coach, mentor, training, therapy, a support group, structured personal growth program or other such help. By thinking about our thinking, we can become more aware of the reality we're creating for ourselves and change our world.

Bridging the Distance: Reading, Leading, and Succeeding



Leaders bring hope, optimism, and positive action. That's really tough to do while social distancing and facing an uncertain future. We multiply misery if we allow the pessimism plague to infect us as well.

To counter Headline Stress Disorder and strengthen resilience, I actively scan a list of resources for research, articles, and tips on leading ourselves and others through these turbulent times. I post those articles every day.

Let's shorten our social media distancing. Follow or connect with me:



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Together we can Learn, Laugh, Love, and Lead -- just for the L of it!

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If you read each blog post (or issue of *The Leader Letter*) as it's published over twelve months, you'll have read the equivalent of a leadership book. And you'll pick up a few practical leadership tips that help you use time more strategically and tame your E-Beast!

Feedback and Follow-Up

I am always delighted to hear from readers of *The Leader Letter* with feedback, reflections, suggestions, or differing points of view. Nobody is ever identified in *The Leader Letter* without his or her permission. I am also happy to explore customized, in-house adaptations (online these days) of any of my material for your team or organization. Drop me an e-mail at jim.clemmer@clemmergroup.com or connect with me on **LinkedIn**, **Twitter**, **Facebook**, or my **blog**!

Let's leverage our leadership strengths to work together and get through this challenging time.



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