

3 ingredients to Be Your Best: Be positive, play to your strengths and toot your own horn!

How does being positive make a difference to your thinking and the results you get?

Whether you are thinking positively or negatively impacts the blood flow to the brain and therefore your ability to think well. Dr Noelle Nelson (an American clinical psychologist), Dr Daniel Amen (a psychiatrist and neuroscientist) and Jeannine Lemare conducted research using a neuro-imaging technique called the SPECT scan. They studied the connection between blood flow patterns to the brain and thoughts and feelings. The research showed that **less blood flows to the brain when a person is thinking negatively compared to when they are appreciating** (in particular the cerebellum, cingulate gyrus and the left basal ganglia which enable the brain to function fully). Dr Noelle Nelson explained that, **“When you are in a negative state, for example when you’re angry, your brain pretty much shuts down. When you’re appreciating your whole brain lights up”**.

What’s the impact? It could be up to 50% improvement in performance.

Psychologists asked a group of four-year olds to construct a simple building using some bricks. One half of the children had been “positively primed” beforehand, i.e. moments before completing the task they were asked to “think of something that made them feel happy”. Some examples were very simple, others more moving. For example, one boy chose to recall the memory of jumping into the arms of the uncle he hadn’t seen for 5 months. The “positively primed” children performed their task 50% more effectively than those who weren’t primed.

And it works just as well for adults. In a similar study, a collection of doctors were asked to undertake a normal consultation and their diagnoses were independently assessed afterwards. Each of the three groups was asked to prepare differently.

- The first group were asked to do whatever they would normally do
- The second group were asked to read a scientific journal
- The third group were “positively primed” by a present of chocolate

The first and second groups performed similarly to each other, whereas the third group were **50% more accurate in their diagnosis and three times more creative in their treatment plans** and they weren’t even allowed to eat the treat until afterwards!

So what?

With clients: Starting and finishing client meetings with positive questions or topics will set the tone for the discussion. This could mean discussing a positive event (like a holiday) rather than the nightmare journey you had in the snow! You could ask early on “What’s going well in your business at the moment?” or finish with “What have you valued about this discussion?”.

In your own work: If you are working on something (especially if it's hard or your energy for it is low), why not start with a positive question "What would I like to achieve?" "What will help me to get there?" "What ideas, resources and talents can I bring to this?"

Playing to your strengths makes life easy

Martin Seligman is a US based Psychologist, leading light in Positive Psychology and author of Learned Optimism and Authentic Happiness. He's interested in hard data and facts (and not fluffy touchy-feely unsubstantiated ideas!). His research into happiness has found that lasting happiness is most strongly linked to 2 elements:

An engaged life – where you are doing things that absorb you, energise you and play to your strengths. You can be in 'flow' and become absorbed in what you're doing and it's easy.

A meaningful life – knowing what you are best at and using your strengths and talents to serve something that is bigger than you are.

Questions to explore

- **What are your strengths and talents?**
- **What are you good at?**
- **What energises you/ do you find easy?**
- **What's important to you in your work and life and why?**
- **What do you want your legacy to be?**

Tooting your horn!

Think about something significant/ important you've purchased recently where you had several options. Why did you choose to buy it where you did? Evidence says that we tend to buy from people we like, trust and believe understand our needs – we feel like we matter (obviously it depends on the product – the tin of baked beans at the supermarket isn't the same!). So, when talking to clients, one of the things that is important is showing your passion for your business and your confidence in your ability to fulfil their needs. Knowing your strengths and being able to confidently talk about what you are good at (without going over the top) makes a difference.

Lessons from Peggy Klaus – author of *Brag! The art of tooting your own horn without blowing it!*

"It's OK to brag about someone else, just not about myself."

That's a shame, because what you're really saying is that you're not as proud of yourself or your achievements as you are of those of others.

12 Tooting Tips

1. Be your best authentic self
2. Think about to whom you are tooting
3. Say it with meaningful and entertaining stories
4. Keep it short and simple
5. Talk with me, not at me
6. Be able to back up what you say
7. Know when to toot
8. Turn small talk into big talk
9. Keep bragalogues and brag bites current and fresh
10. Be ready at a moment's notice
11. Have a sense of humour
12. Use it all: your eyes, ears, head and heart

BRAG! Take-12 Self-Evaluation Questionnaire (Peggy Klaus)

You can start anywhere and skip around. As you complete it you may think of things you overlooked when answering earlier ones. In fact, you'll probably want to go over your responses again after you have completed the evaluation. The more time you put into this exercise, the more specific details you provide, the easier it will be to create brag bites and bragalogues that will be crystal clear and interesting to those who don't already know you well.

1. What would you and others say are five of your personality pluses?
2. What are the ten most interesting things you have done or that have happened to you?
3. What do you do for a living and how did you end up doing it?
4. What do you like/love about your current job/career?
5. How does your job/career use your skills and talents, and what projects are you working on right now that best showcase them?
6. What career successes are you most proud of having accomplished (from current position and past jobs)?
7. What new skills have you learned in the last year?
8. What obstacles have you overcome to get where you are today, both professionally and personally, and what essential lessons have you learned from some of your mistakes?
9. What training/education have you completed and what did you gain from those experiences?
10. What professional organisations are you associated with? In what ways (member, board, treasurer, or the like)?
11. How do you spend your time outside of work, including hobbies, interests, sports, family, and volunteer activities?
12. In what ways are you making a difference in people's lives?

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