

How to Stay Positive: 11 Smart Habits

Henrik Edberg | [Positivity Blog](#)

“Having a positive mental attitude is asking how something can be done rather than saying it can’t be done.” – Bo Bennett

“To avoid situations in which you might make mistakes may be the biggest mistake of all.” – Peter McWilliams

*“We don’t see things as they are, we see them as we are.”
– Anais Nin*

One of the very first things I started to work on consciously with my own personal development was to improve my outlook on life.

It was over 10 years ago that I started to delve into this topic and to step by step – and while sometimes tumbling backwards – build a more optimistic outlook.

An attitude that would over time become more and more stable so that I could not only look at the world in a positive way during good days. But also so I could stay positive and constructive even during tough times and keep working towards something better.

In this article I’d like to share 11 of the best, smartest and most effective habits for doing so that I have learned during over more than a decade.

I hope you will find something helpful here.

1. Find the optimistic viewpoint in a negative situation.

One of the simplest but most effective ways to build a more positive outlook has in my experience been to ask more helpful

questions as often as possible.

When I am in what seems like a negative situation – maybe I have made a mistakes, I have failed or stumbled in some kind of way – then I like to ask myself questions like:

- What is one thing that is positive or good about this situation?
- What is one opportunity within this situation?

Doing so is a whole lot better than what I used to do in such situations. Because back then I usually asked myself how much I sucked and how things could get even worse now.

I do however not always use these questions right away. Oftentimes I need a bit of time to process the thoughts and feelings that arise in situation before I can do that. Trying to force optimistic thinking when you are still in an emotional turmoil or a bit shocked usually don't work that well.

2. Cultivate and live in a positive environment.

Who you choose to spend your time with and the input you get from further away like the TV, the internet and magazines will have a huge effect on your outlook.

To be able to stay positive it is essential to have influences in your life that support you and lift you up instead of dragging you down.

So carefully consider what you let into your mind.

You can for example ask yourself:

- Who are the 3 most negative people I spend time with?
- What are the 3 of most negative sources of information I spend time on?

Consider the answers. Then think about how you can start

spending less time with one of those people or information sources this week.

And how you can spend more of the time you have now freed up with one of the most positive sources or people in your life.

3. Go slowly.

I have found that when I go too fast, when I try to think, talk, eat and move around in my world really quickly then things don't go too well.

Stress builds up. Negative thoughts about just about anything start to well up and I feel like my own personal power decreases.

But if I slow down just for a few minutes – even if I have to force it by walking, talking and eating slower – then my mind and body calms down too. It becomes easier to think things through clearly again and easier to find the optimistic and constructive perspective.

4. Don't make a mountain out of a molehill.

It's very easy to lose perspective, especially if you are stressed and you are going too fast.

And so a molehill can become a big and terrifying mountain in your mind.

A simple three step way to handle these situations so they don't get out of hand is to:

- **Say stop.** In your mind, shout "STOP!" or "NOPE, we are not going down that path again!" as soon as thoughts of this kind starts to spin in your head.
- **Breathe.** After you have disrupted the thoughts by shouting stop sit down and just be still. Breathe with your belly and focus on just your in-breaths and out-breaths for a minute or two to calm your mind and body

down.

- **Refocus.** Question your mountain building thoughts by talking to someone close to you and getting a more grounded perspective on the situation by just venting or by getting his or her input. Or simply ask yourself this to widen your perspective and to chill out: Will this matter in 5 years? Or even 5 weeks?

5. Don't let vague fears hold you back from doing what you want.

Sometimes you may want to take a chance in life. Start a new habit that feels unfamiliar, your own business on the side or ask someone out for a date.

A common trap when you want to do one of those things is to get lost in vague fears about what could happen if you actually took action.

And so the mind runs wild fueled by fear and it creates nightmare scenarios.

I know. I have been there many times.

So I have learned to ask myself this: honestly, what is the worst that could happen?

When I have figured that out I also spend a bit of time on trying to figure out what I could do if that that often pretty unlikely thing happens.

I have over the years discovered that the worst thing that could realistically happen is usually not as scary as the nightmare my fear-fueled mind could produce.

Finding clarity in this way doesn't take much time or effort and it can help you to avoid much mind made suffering. And help you to get going, step outside of your comfort zone and take that chance.

6. Add value and positivity to someone else's life.

What you send out you tend to get back from the world and the people in it.

Not from everyone. And not every time.

But what you send out there matters a whole lot.

What you give them and how you treat them is what you'll get back. And the way you treat others and how you think of them also tend to have a big effect on how you treat and think about yourself.

So give value and spread the positivity by for example:

- **Helping out.** Lend a hand when moving. Give a friend a ride in your car. Or if he or she needs information then help out by checking it up on Google or asking a friend of yours.
- **Just listening.** Sometimes people don't want any direct help. They just want someone to be there fully and listening as they vent for a little while.
- **Boosting the mood.** Smile. Give hugs when appropriate. Play uplifting music when hanging out with a friend or suggest an inspiring movie for your movie night. Or encourage when someone has had a bad day or are going through a tough time.

7. Exercise regularly and eat and sleep well.

This is very obvious of course.

But I know the big, big impact a good night's sleep or good workout can have when my thoughts are pessimistic and I have a lot of tensions on the inside.

And I know how much simpler it is to think clearly and optimistically when my belly is not empty.

So I highly recommend being careful about these basic habits that may sound boring. Because they do have a huge effect either way depending on how you manage them.

8. Learn to take criticism in a healthy way.

One of the most common fears is the fear of criticism. It can hold people back from doing what they want in life. Because having negativity flowing out of someone's mouth or email and it being about you can hurt. And being rejected can sting quite a bit.

But if you want to take action on what you deep down want then criticism is pretty much unavoidable. So the key is learning to handle it in a healthier way. By doing so your fear of it will lessen and it will hurt less if you do get criticized.

I usually use four steps when I get some criticism. Maybe they can help you out too:

- **Step 1: Don't reply right away.** When you are angry, upset or riled up then is time to calm down a bit before you reply. Take at least a couple of deep breaths or a little time to process the message before you respond.
- **Step 2: Really listen to the criticism.** Try to remain open and level-headed and figure out how this message can help you. Ask yourself: Is there one thing I can learn from this criticism? Is there something here that I may not want to hear but could help me?
- **Step 3: Remember that the criticism isn't always about you.** Some criticism is helpful. Some is simply attacks or someone lashing out because they are having bad day, year or job. To lessen the sting of such criticism – often really angry or overly critical in an unconstructive way – I try to be understanding. I think to myself that this person might not be feeling so good at the moment.
- **Step 4: Reply or let go.** No matter the content of for

example an email I try to keep my reply level-headed and kind. I may add a question or two to get more specific feedback that is helpful. And if they don't reply or I have simply gotten a nasty attack then it is time to delete it and to let that situation go.

9. If something still gets under your skin then know what to do.

Sometimes something can still get under your skin and hurt you. Even if you use the steps above.

Two things that have helped me with that challenge are:

- **Let it out.** Just letting that issue out into the light talking it over with someone close can be very helpful to see it for what it actually is. And to find a healthier perspective on the situation.
- **Improve your self-esteem.** I have found over the years that with a stronger self-esteem things drag me down less and they don't ruin my day as much anymore. Negativity from others bounces off me much more often instead. If you want to practical help with this then have a look at my 12-week, step-by-step Self-Esteem Course.

10. Start your day in a positive way.

How you start your day usually sets the tone for the rest of your day.

So be careful about how you spend your mornings. If you get going at full speed, lost in future troubles in your mind then the stress, perceived loss of power of over your life and negative thoughts will ramp up quickly.

If you on the other hand start your day by moving slowly, by having an uplifting conversation with your family or friend or you spend some time with reading or listening to inspiring and

helpful articles or podcasts over breakfast or during your bus ride to work then that can make a big difference for how your whole day will go.

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