

Learned optimism

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October 2019





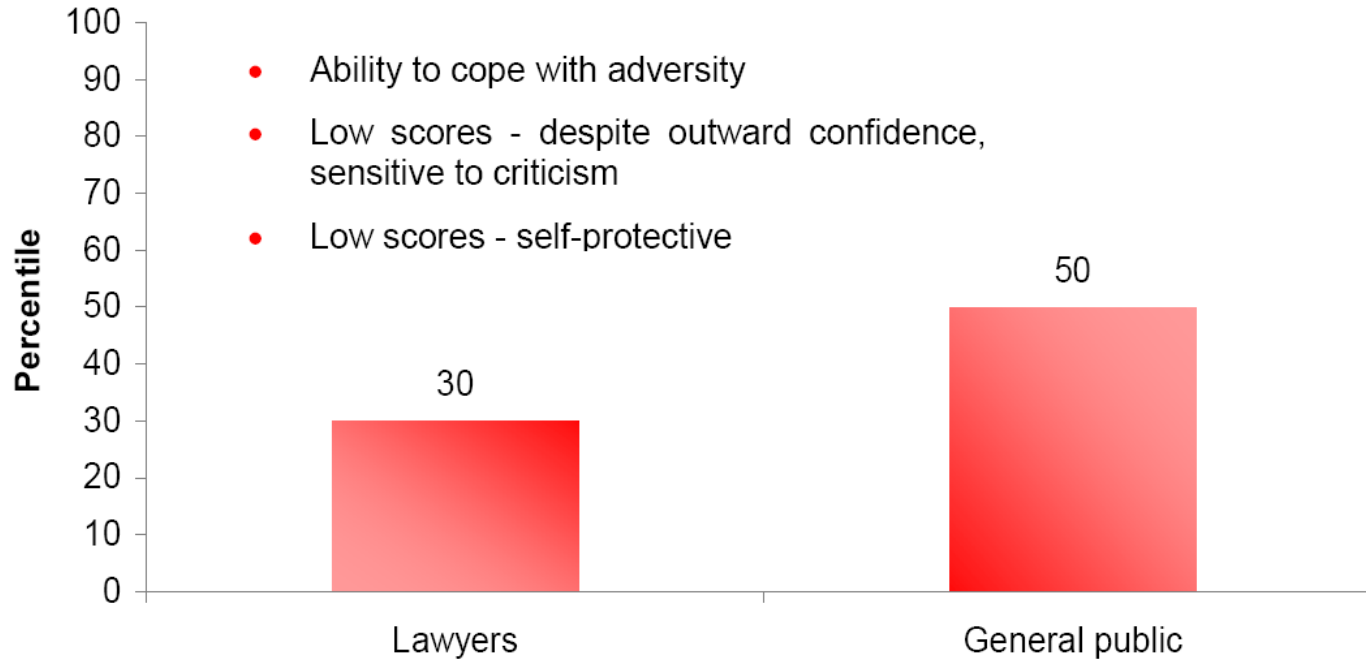
*There is nothing either good or bad,
but thinking makes it so.*

Shakespeare

Learned optimism



Resilience



Herding Cats: The Lawyer Personality Revealed, Dr Larry Richard (2002)

Objectives

**When is it
helpful?**

**How can it
contribute to
success at
work?**

**Practical
techniques**

Exercise: Identify recent bad events

Individually, identify three recent bad events/situations and, for each event, write down:

1. An objective description of what happened
2. How you interpreted the situation/event
3. Your feelings about the situation/event and any actions taken by you



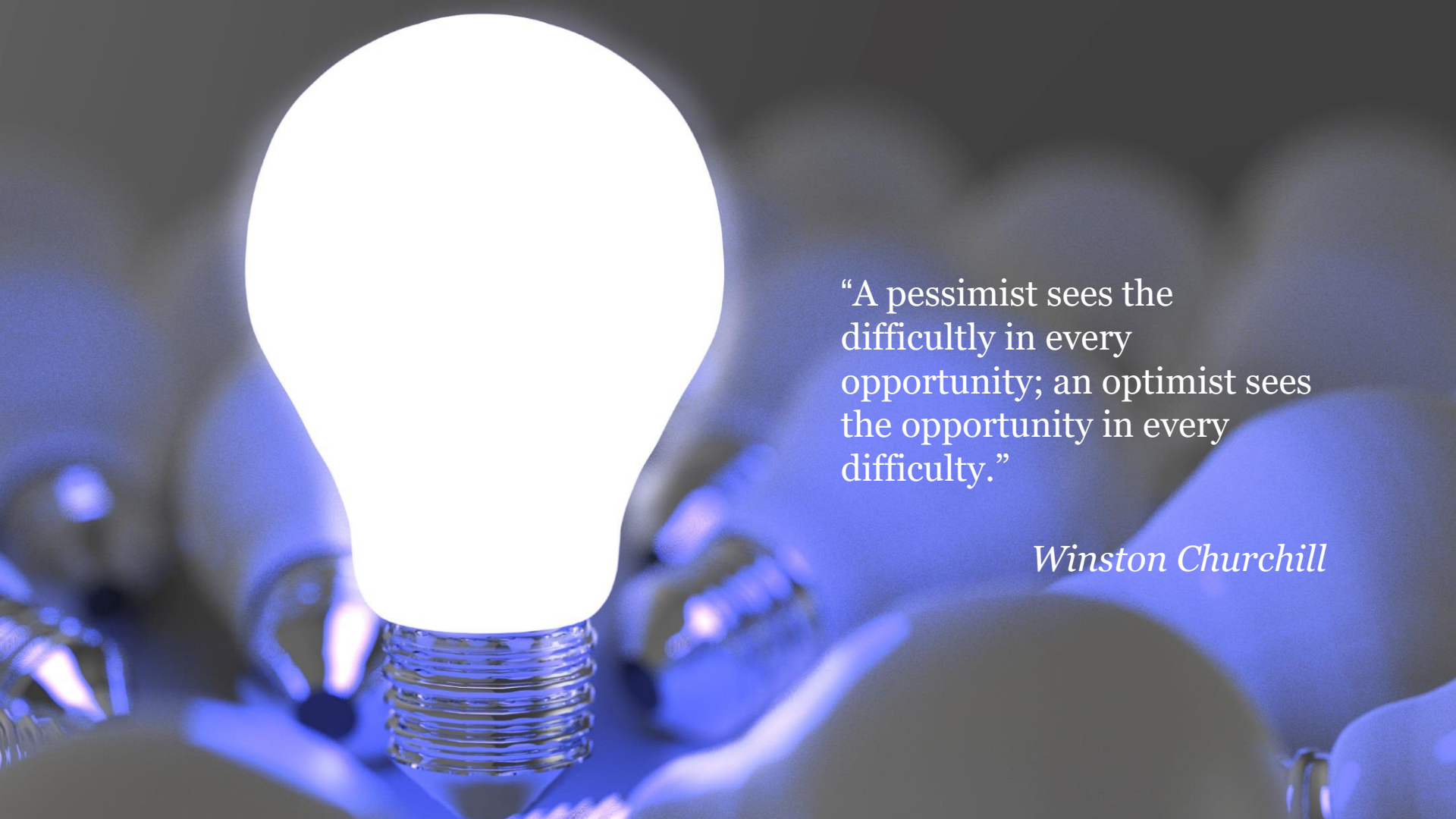
Definition

Learned optimism is the idea in positive psychology that a talent for joy, like any other, can be cultivated. It is contrasted with learned helplessness. Learning optimism is done by consciously challenging any negative self-talk.

Wikipedia, March 2012

Optimism is the hopefulness and confidence about the future success of something.

Oxford Dictionaries, 18th century

A glowing lightbulb is the central focus, emitting a bright white light. It is surrounded by numerous other lightbulbs that are unlit and appear as soft, out-of-focus blue and white shapes in the background. The overall scene is dimly lit, with the primary light source being the single illuminated bulb.

“A pessimist sees the
difficulty in every
opportunity; an optimist sees
the opportunity in every
difficulty.”

Winston Churchill

Three dimensions



Permanence

Pervasiveness

Personalisation

Permanence: Permanent v temporary

Some people think about bad events in '*always*' and '*never*' and in *permanent traits*.



Others think about bad events in '*sometimes*' and '*lately*' and use *temporary qualifiers*.

Pervasiveness: Specific v universal

Some people put
their troubles *neatly*
into a box



Others allow their
troubles to *bleed*
into all parts of
their life

Personalisation: Internal v external

Some people blame
themselves when bad
things happen



Others blame
circumstances
when bad things
happen

Optimistic explanatory style

In the optimistic explanatory style problems are seen as temporary, specific and external.

In the pessimistic explanatory style problems are seen as permanent, universal and internal.



Exercise: Calculating your results

1. **PmB** (Permanence Bad) score questions: **5, 13, 20, 21, 29, 33, 42, 46**
2. **PmG** (Permanence Good) score questions: **2, 10, 14, 15, 24, 26, 38, 40**
3. **PvB** (Pervasiveness Bad) score questions: **8, 16, 17, 18, 22, 32, 44, 48**
4. **PvG** (Pervasiveness Good) score questions: **6, 7, 28, 31, 34, 35, 37, 43**
5. **PsB** (Personalised Bad) score questions: **3, 9, 19, 25, 30, 39, 41, 47**
6. **PsG** (Personalised Good) score questions: **1, 4, 11, 12, 23, 27, 36, 45**

Authentic Happiness, University of Pennsylvania, USA

Exercise - Calculating your final score

1. Add the three B's ($PmB + PvB + PsB$) together - *this is your total **B**ad event score*
2. Add the three G's ($PmG + PvG + PsG$) together - *this is your total **G**ood event score*
3. Subtract **B** from **G** - *this is your overall score*

Authentic Happiness, University of Pennsylvania, USA

What your totals mean

If your **Bad event** score is:

- 3 - 6 you are marvellously optimistic
- 6 - 9 you are moderately optimistic
- 10 - 11 is about average
- 12 - 14 is moderately pessimistic

Anything above 14 cries out for change.

Authentic Happiness, University of Pennsylvania, USA

What your totals mean

If your **Good event** score is:

- 19 and above you think about good events very optimistically
- 17 - 19 your thinking is moderately optimistic
- 14 - 16 is about average
- 11 - 13 indicated that you think quite pessimistically

Anything 10 or less indicates great pessimism.

Authentic Happiness, University of Pennsylvania, USA

What your totals mean

If your **Overall** score (*G - B score*) is:

- Above 8 you are very optimistic across the board
- 6 - 8 is moderately optimistic
- 3 - 5 is average
- 1 - 2 is moderately pessimistic

A score of 0 and below is very pessimistic.

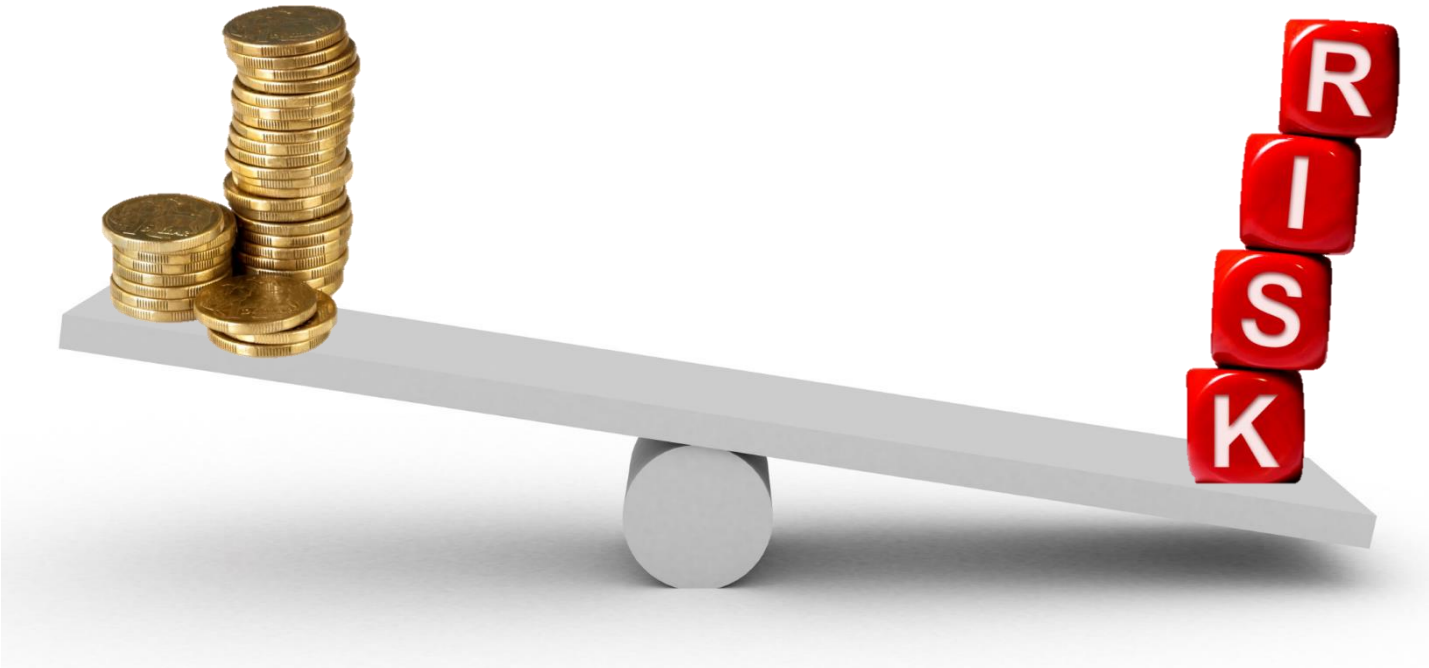
Authentic Happiness, University of Pennsylvania, USA

Exercise: Flexible optimism

In pairs, identify **five** work situations when **mild pessimism** needs to be exercised and **five** work situations when **optimism** needs to be exercised.



The rule of thumb



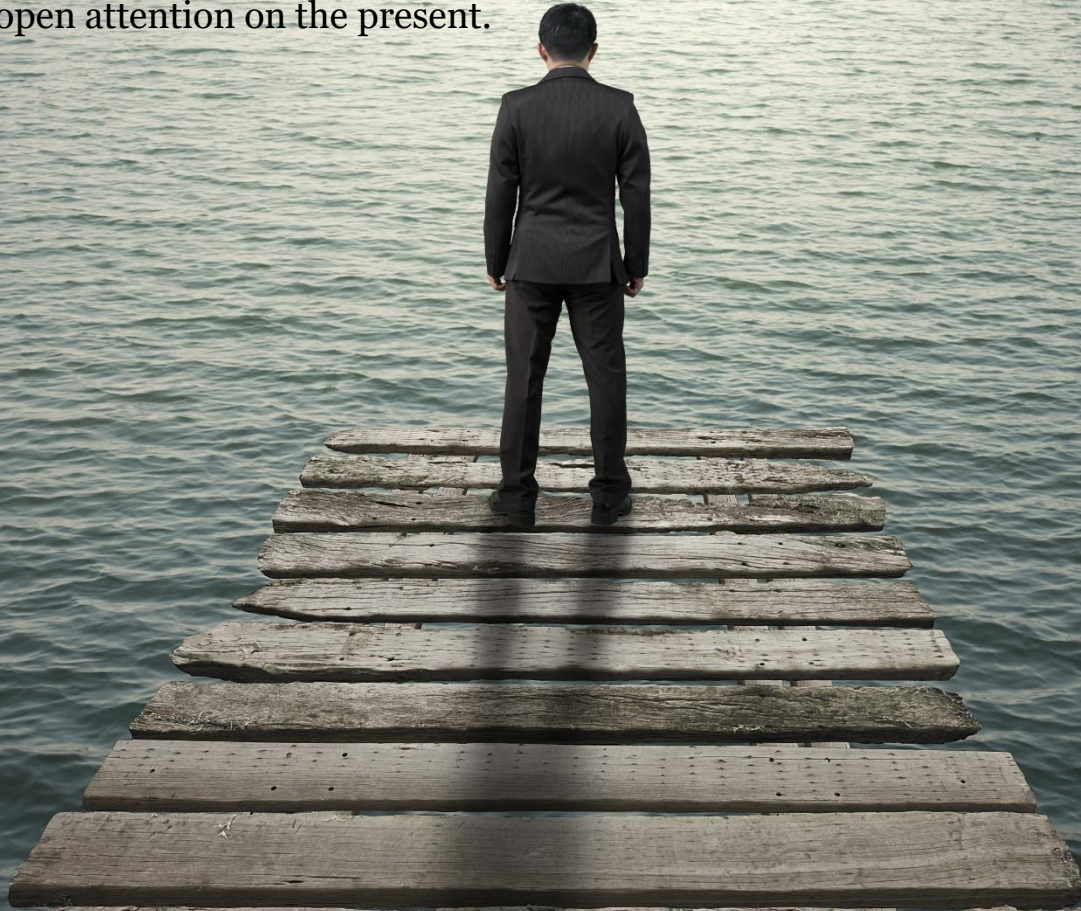
Stop negative thoughts

1. Become more aware of your conscious thought processes and identify where negative thoughts are unwarranted
2. Distract yourself from the thoughts - don't allow yourself to think about them by directing your mind elsewhere



Mindfulness

The state of active, open attention on the present.



ABCDE technique

- A. Stands for **Adversity**. Record a description of what happened
- B. Stands for **Beliefs**. Record how you interpreted what happened
- C. Stands for **Consequences**. Record your feelings and what you did
- D. Stands for **Disputation**. Dispute the unwarranted thought like any good lawyer would!
- E. Stands for **Energization**. Occurs when you dispute your negative beliefs successfully

Four ways to dispute

1. **Evidence** - show yourself that the belief is factually incorrect
2. **Alternatives** - most events have many causes
3. **Implications** - even if my belief is correct ask - what are the implications?
4. **Usefulness** - question the usefulness of your belief



Exercise: Disputation

Go back to the three examples that you identified earlier and choose one to work with for this exercise.

In pairs, discuss how you will dispute the bad event/situation.



The background of the image is a dense, festive pattern of falling gold confetti and streamers. The streamers are long, thin, and wavy, while the confetti consists of small, irregular gold-colored pieces. The overall effect is one of celebration and joy.

Three good things

Top tip techniques

- Fight hard to find solutions and regain a sense of control
- Fail wisely
- “Drag your thoughts away from your troubles...by the ears, by the heels, or any way you can manage it.” – Mark Twain
- Use the ACT method:

A

Active

C

Calming

T

Thinking



Objectives revisited

**When is it
helpful?**

**How can it
contribute to
success at
work?**

**Practical
techniques**

Recommended resources

Reading

Learned Optimism: How to Change your Mind and Your Life - *Martin E. P. Seligman*

Watching

The new era of positive psychology - Martin E. P. Seligman

The optimism bias - Tali Sharot

The surprising science of happiness - Dan Gilbert

Rainy Brain, Sunny Brain, Elaine Fox



Questions