

How to Overcome Challenges and Bounce Back Higher

Podcast # 35 - Phyllis Mikolaitis Sales Training Solutions

Hi It's Phyllis Mikolaitis. While presenting on Zoom to those facing the challenges of cancer, I realized the character traits and activities that help them will help you bounce back from these tough times. I became aware of these thoughts and actions in my life as I survived multiple battles with cancer, a divorce, the death of a spouse and sibling, and career changes. I want to share what I have learned from these challenges and my studies on positivity.

In tough times like these, negativity can take you on a downward spiral, as my friend says, "down the rabbit hole to an endless dark tunnel."

Bad things happen to all of us. But have you noticed, some people collapse while others bounce back stronger than ever and with new insights and a sense of purpose? What makes the difference? I read many books and papers to find the answer. Scientific studies have found that a positive attitude **fuels resilience and builds physical health**. It will help you regain perspective and focus on your goals. Positivity promotes an open mind that enables you to bounce back from setbacks and challenging situations to become the best version of yourself.

Research by doctors Fredrickson, Seligman, and others have found that the ideal ratio of positive thoughts to negative thoughts is **4 positive to 1 negative**. However, the tipping point to make a difference in your thoughts and well-being is **3 positives to 1 negative**. It is critical to strive for 3-1 as a goal because negativity or even neutrality can hold you back and significantly limit your experiences. Bad things happen to all of us. However, heartfelt positivity opens your mind to new and different possibilities. Instead of spiraling a downward, you will travel upward to higher ground. It will open your eyes and help you regain perspective.

You may not achieve the desired positive ratio every day. Still, you must meet or exceed it as an average over several days or several weeks at most. Everyone has tough times, lost a loved one, suffered an illness, experienced, or observed an injustice. Just saying positive words is not enough. It's like a fake smile, it just doesn't do anything. It's genuine positivity that matters. Your body knows when you are insincere and cheating. Insincerity can kill you.

Positivity can help you flourish and add value to yourself and to the world. A regular habit of positivity leads to success and good health. So, what is positivity? It isn't just a positive attitude. It encompasses the emotions of gratitude, hope, pride, serenity, amusement, inspiration, and awe. We have to plant the seeds of each of these

emotions to grow and reap the benefits of them and to lower the ratio of negative thoughts to positive thoughts. That is not to say that we need to become 100% positive. As my counselor during my divorce said, “ You must experience the sadness of negative experiences to experience the joy of positive experiences.” But she also said, “When life gives you lemons, make lemonade.”

Positive emotions build your emotional reserves. They develop the character strengths and traits that allow you to handle life’s challenges as well as any threats to your survival. When you have a positive mindset, you are curious and investigate new things, you’re willing to learn from your experiences. No, you don’t succeed every time, but you can look for lessons that can help you learn from them. You may not use the things you learn immediately, but the knowledge gained is stored as a resource for later.

I’d like to relate an example I will never forget; I was fortunate to work with Dr. Mary Quinn during my time at Xerox. She told me she used visualization to help her work toward positive results in her work and to relax during stressful times. She related how this lesson became useful when she was captured in Yemen by terrorists. She remained positive and visualized being rescued by US government military specialists and being home again. That’s precisely what happened. During the rescue, she remained calm. When the terrorist focused on the Navy SEALs, she grabbed the rifle and hit him in the face. She then threw her body toward her rescuer. He lunged forward to cover her body with his as he dragged her to safety. Mary was soon home safe.

When you are negative, your results and possibilities are limited. You withdraw and close your mind to learning things that can help you bounce back. The research by Dr. Frederickson confirms that positive emotions open our hearts and mind making us more creative and receptive to new ideas. She also found that positivity transforms us for the better. It helps you discover your purpose and flourish. As a result, you become your personal best.

How can you build positivity and increase your resiliency? There are multiple ways. For example, you can meditate, take a walk in nature, and observe things that bring a feeling of awe. If possible, take a mini-vacation. You can also actively investigate or try something new like art, music, baking, or studying a new language. Whatever interests you. It is essential to reduce negativity and to stop ruminating over things. One tactic is to fact check and dispute negative thinking. Another tactic is to develop the skill of mindfulness. You can find excellent help with Dr. Rudy Tanzi of Harvard University. He has both free and low-cost programs available on the Internet. Just Google him.

Another excellent tactic is to find and eliminate your negativity triggers. Some triggers are as simple as not getting enough sleep, dehydration, an unbalanced diet, or hunger. Other triggers can be things that make us angry or anxious. Some examples are unfair treatment, aggression in any form, boredom, someone being late, being bullied, or an accident. There are many other triggers. You can find presentations and questionnaires online to help you explore your triggers. I'll list the resources at the end of the transcript for this podcast. The point is to eliminate them when they arise or change your habits to avoid them. For example, build a new practice of setting a bedtime alarm to ensure you get enough sleep or change your diet to a more healthy one. You can get help from a counselor to learn how to deal with unfair treatment, bullies, or unfortunate circumstances.

Negative people are a problem. You can deal with them in several ways. You can limit your interaction with them. You can also reframe the situation, or you can show appreciation for their positive attributes. Finally, you can change your view to see where this person offers you a lesson.

Let's talk for a few minutes about your path to flourishing. Each person has their own route to achieving their destiny and flourishing. Here are some activities that can help you bounce back and achieve your personal best. First, allow yourself to savor positive and memorable moments in your life. They do not last long, so we should extend their value by looking forward to them, enjoying them as they occur, and recalling them after they have ended. I think of my vacations and how much joy it brings to plan them, enjoy them, and remember the good times with family or friends. Savoring these special moments can even change your course in life and point you in a new direction. Think of the defining moments in your life, ones that lifted you up, provided unique insights, celebrated your achievements or acts of courage, or the moments that strengthened your connections. The Heath brothers, Chip and Dan, call these defining moments. You can learn more about these moments in their book *The Power of Moments*.

Experiencing and expressing gratitude is another activity that can move you forward on your path. The thank you at the grocery store, or online has become so common that people dismiss the power of gratitude. But sincere gratitude is a choice that helps you feel more positive emotions and enjoy your good experiences. Sincere appreciation is a treasure. It doesn't create anxiety and cause you to feel that you have to pay it back. But instead, it makes you feel you want to pay it back or pay it forward.

The University of California at Berkley has been doing research on well being. It shows that people who practice sincere gratitude daily reap many benefits. For example, they develop a stronger immune system, lower their blood pressure, and experience more

joy, optimism, and happiness. They also act with more generosity and compassion, and they feel less lonely and isolated. When you acknowledge and appreciate what you currently have, it creates abundance and happiness.

How does it work? Research by Dr. Weil found that gratitude fosters hopefulness, which positively affects the immune system. Optimism and other positive emotions have been shown to reduce the stress hormone cortisol and thus reduce the risk of chronic illness. People who are hopeful have also been shown to recover from illness or emotional distress more quickly. Current research also indicates that you will also bounce back quickly from situations like the isolation associated with the current pandemic.

Buy a journal and make daily entries about the things you are grateful for. When you are feeling low, read some of your past entries. I'm sure you have collected beautiful photos, postcards, tickets from a memorable event, or cards from friends that will remind you of their friendship. Don't repeat the same activities or write the same thing in your journal every day. Research shows that doing specific things one to three days per week is the best way to get the most benefit. Reflect on your day and write things you found in your journal. But, also continue the small acts of kindness that are part of your personality.

As I mentioned, meditation is another beneficial activity. It helps you achieve serenity, a state of calm, peace, and freedom from worries. You can use guided meditation to help you appreciate your current circumstances. I have several meditation CDs, and I noticed that many people have been using the app Calm during this pandemic to help relieve their anxiety. Research shows that the more you practice meditation, the more you reap the benefits. It builds psychological strengths and increases your ability to focus. Research from multiple universities found that it also improves memory and creativity as well as providing new perspectives. And one study I read about found that people who meditated were more accepting of themselves and found their lives more purposeful. I think those are good reasons to try meditating.

I saw on television that many people were using this quarantine time to turn their interest and attention to something new. They worked on learning a language or developing their cooking skills. My granddaughter Caroline learned to quilt and began learning to play the piano. You can explore so many new things. Find something that sounds interesting to you and give it a try. There are several applications on the Internet that allow you to learn something new for free or incredibly low cost. My friend Alan and I are using the app MasterClass to learn new things.

It is my opinion that both belief and hope help you overcome difficult circumstances. When I was diagnosed with cancer, I always believed that I would recover. It does not matter what religion you practice, or if you believe in the power of the universe or a collection of the beings of this earth as a power greater than one alone. You must have

faith and belief that you overcome this challenge. You must also have hope. It is fearing the worst but believing that things will change for the better. Hope and faith will help you dig deep and access your resources and capabilities to make positive changes for a better future.

Much has been written about the power of faith, hope, and belief in a positive outcome. In fact, the Yale University class with the highest enrollment is on positivity and well-being taught by Dr. Laurie Santos. It is called the Science of Well-Being and is now offered FREE online by Coursera. I took the class and raised my happiness score, and I considered myself a happy person at the beginning of the course.

Here's another activity to raise your ratio. Relaxation/time out for fun can reduce muscle tension and anxiety. Fun and relaxation also develop your creativity and openness to new ideas. I worked with software engineers during my time at Xerox. I watched some of the most brilliant engineers include fun or a walk in nature as a means of finding a solution to a problem or to developing a new concept. It provided openness for inspiration. I remember the excitement when they discovered the clue to a new technology or a new process. You can experience not only fun and reduced stress but also exciting new ideas when you take time for fun and relaxation.

Dr. Frederickson found that awe or feeling a part of something greater than self was goodness on a grand scale and generated feelings of positivity. I think of things like the awe I felt as I saw the rocket launch from the Kennedy Space Center the other day. It caused me to remember seeing Neil Armstrong walk on the moon and how I felt that day. I also experienced awe with the birth of my daughters, my visit to Grand Canyon, and walking on the Great Wall of China. Take time to think of some things you have experienced and make a note of them in your journal.

Positivity and these activities help you discover your strengths to build your resources both physically and mentally. I am currently reading *The Power of Character Strengths* by Niemiec and McGrath. You can read the book, and you can find your strengths by taking the free questionnaire on the VIA Institute website at www.viacharacter.org) Positive feelings are created by the way you think. They are an outcome of how you interpret events. Your view controls your perception. So, if you change your perspective, you can change the outcome. I watched a TED Talk on YouTube the other day called *Celebrate What's Right With The World* by DeWitt Jones, a National Geographic photographer. I urge you to watch it as he tells you how to find the good in every circumstance. It was truly inspiring.

When you look for the good and practice positivity, you recognize that we are all one, and we can all flourish. It can help you expand your connections and together come up

with great ideas. I know when I was positive and brainstormed with my team, we came up with ideas that allowed us to win company and industry awards. Not only did we win awards, but we also developed lasting friendships. We, the core team of managers, are still friends supporting and enjoying the camaraderie of one another long after leaving Xerox. Each of those connections, as well as my many other friends, refuel me and open me to more new ideas and experiences.

I want to conclude with some additional points about resilient people. They focus on the present and have hope and inspiration for the future. They are open-minded and non-judgmental. They find the good within the bad.

Have you heard of the butterfly effect? It means that “the fluttering of the wings of a butterfly can cause a typhoon elsewhere in the earth's oceans. Of course, in reality, it does not cause typhoons, but it can disproportionately determine the conditions elsewhere.” Small positive thoughts and actions today can have a profound effect on a future date in your life.

Begin with small steps. There will inevitably be challenging circumstances, and you will have negative thoughts. But don't get discouraged. Use the tools and actions the experts and I have recommended. Slow down and mindfully appreciate your positive experiences. Follow your passion and become fully engaged in the associated activities. Dream about your future. Use visualization as it activates the areas that actually execute the performance of actions that allow you to achieve what you visualized. I offer one note of caution. Be aware that you need to have the physical and mental capabilities to develop the talents required to realize your dream. Everyone has different characteristics and abilities. I highly recommend taking the VIA Institute strengths questionnaire and then turn your focus there. Make memorable moments and savor them. You will be more positive and bounce back from life's challenges.

We Can Be Your Guide And Mentor

We are there with you in this tough time. You can focus on the positive events in your life and business and share them. To help you succeed, we made our course on *Why Storytelling is Critical to Your Success* 100% free. We also drastically reduced the cost of our course on *Capturing and Sharing Your Story in Media* to just \$99. Visit our website @ www.salestraining solutions.com. Look under courses for your selection. You can also join our bi-monthly newsletter to get our Free eBook on Storytelling: *The Secret to Sales Success*. We've filled our site with tools, tips, and resources to help you achieve success. We are available by email or phone.