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Foster Enhanced Health Through Optimistic Thinking

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Difficult financial times call for leaders to be wise, stay cool and be optimistic about the future. I've seen good and bad financial times during my life time. This is just another tough financial cycle that, in my opinion, was unnecessarily brought about by greed, crookedness and incompetence on the part of some of our governmental and business leaders and unqualified home buyers.

To help you gain and maintain optimum health during tough financial times through optimistic thinking, I'm sharing with you some insights I gained from David Sobel, MD, and Robert Ornstein, PhD in their Healthy Mind, Healthy Body Handbook..

Ever know someone who is basically cheerful and in a good mood, someone who looks on the bright side of things and lets bad situations roll off their back? It is easy to be envious of a person like this and their optimistic attitude and wish you were born with the same disposition.

People like this weren't necessarily born with an optimistic outlook, as most people cultivate it through intentionally thinking optimistically. Please know that no one is destined to be a pessimist the rest of their lives. It is a choice! You, and those you lead, can learn to be an optimist by practicing and applying healthy, optimistic thinking.

Healthy, optimistic thinking has many profound benefits to your health and the health and productivity of those you lead, not the least of which is plain feeling good rather than feeling bad most of the time.

Medical research has shown that optimistic thinking will help you:

- improve your mood and self-esteem.
- decrease depression, anxiety, and hostility.
- lessen pain and other bodily symptoms.
- speed recovery from surgery.
- enhance your immune function.
- possibly extend your life.

CONFIDENCE COUNTS - Changing the way you think is one of the best things you can do to enhance health. Research suggests that optimistic thinking, confidence, and a sense of self control has very positive health benefits. It can affect your immune system, your susceptibility to disease, and perhaps even your life span. Here are some studies that demonstrate the power of optimistic thinking.

OPTIMISM AND IMMUNITY - In one study, researchers measured chemical substances in saliva that protect us from infections like colds. Immunity was higher on days when people felt

positive about their lives than on days when they felt down.

In another study, blood samples were taken from both optimistic and pessimistic people. The optimists had a higher ratio of disease-fighting "helper" immune cells to "suppressor" immune cells than the pessimists.

OPTIMISM AND CANCER - Mice and rats were implanted with tumors in several studies, and given electric shocks. The ones who fought the tumors more successfully were those who could turn off the shock by pressing a bar. This gave them some control over a stressful situation.

Confidence and optimism also appear to help those facing life-threatening diseases. Women who had a second occurrence of breast cancer survived longer if they felt joy in living, and talked to themselves optimistically.

There is evidence that people can learn to think more positively, and so improve their physical health. For example, one group of patients with cancer was taught more constructive thinking habits. They also received relaxation training. These patients' natural killer cells showed much higher activity than patients who received similar medical treatment, but no counseling.

ATTITUDE AFFECTS LONGEVITY - In one study, seniors who believed they were in "poor" health were nearly three times more likely to die within seven years than those who rated their health as "excellent." The self-ratings more accurately predicted who would die than the doctors' objective reports.

People who thought they were in poor health (despite the fact that their doctors had given them a clean bill of health) had a slightly greater risk of dying sooner than health optimists. Those who saw themselves as well (even though doctor's reports suggested that they had poor health) lived slightly longer.

Even a sense of control over minor daily events can improve health. In another study nursing home residents who were given a choice of what to have for breakfast or what night to see a movie were happier and more active. After 18 months, they had half the death rate of those not offered as much control.

ATTITUDE AFFECTS ILLNESS - In a study of a company undergoing major reorganization, executives who felt a sense of control over their situations felt challenged rather than threatened by the change. They were less likely to get sick than the executives who saw the change as a threat, and felt powerless.

A long-term study of college graduates found that men with optimistic self-talk were physically healthier later in life, and had less chronic illness than more pessimistic alumni. Optimistic students at another college reported fewer sick days, doctor visits, and symptoms (such as fatigue, sore muscles, and coughs) than the students with negative self-talk.

In another study, elderly people were asked to list all the good and bad things they expected to happen in the future. Two years later, those with a more positive outlook had better health (including fewer physical symptoms, less tension, greater energy, and fewer colds) than people who were more negative about the future.

ATTITUDE AND SURGERY - Findings indicate that optimistic patients facing open-heart surgery develop fewer complications, including heart attacks during surgery. They recover more quickly, and return to work, hobbies, and exercise sooner than their pessimistic counterparts.

It was also found that patients undergoing surgery who were given the suggestion that they could control blood flow during the procedure cut their blood loss by half.

BELIEVING TRUMPS REALITY - Surprisingly, just believing that you have control, even when you really don't, can affect your physiological response to stress, and your health.

In one experiment, people were asked to solve math problems while being distracted by irritating noise. They showed less stress if they were told they could stop the noise by pressing a button. Even though no one pressed the button, and the button didn't really shut off the noise, they still experienced fewer stress symptoms (sweaty hands, racing hearts, ringing ears, and headaches).

BELIEFS BECOME BIOLOGY - Because optimists are more active than pessimists, they are more likely to do something for their health (go to the doctor, change their diet, or exercise). Optimists may also be more active than other people in seeking out support?another factor that's been shown to promote health.

Researchers don't yet understand exactly how optimistic thinking translates into better health. But they do know that thoughts determine moods, and moods reflect changes in both hormonal activity and immune function. However it works, the evidence clearly shows that it's worth-while to learn to think as optimistically as possible.

So, intentionally focus on fostering your own and each of your team member's optimum health by continuing to be proactive and optimistic during these difficult times rather than allow your attitudes to become reactive and pessimistic. You'll live longer and better and be a model for those around you to do the same. Consistently focus on what you are grateful for and think "half full" cup rather than "half empty" cup!

About the author:

Dr. Mac shares with business owners the practical knowledge and insights he gained as a small company CEO. He founded Sycamore Ranch, Inc. when 27 and as CEO led his partners and a staff of 100 for 16 years in developing and operating the 50 acre recreational facility. Years later, he integrated what he learned from his Doctoral program at USC with his practical business experiences and began consulting. For four decades Mac's coached business owners in mastering and applying "how to" leadership and managerial skills for: Hiring and retaining only the top ten percent producers; Optimally deploying and supervising staff to maximize their personal motivation; Developing high integrity leadership teams; Facilitating mutual performance accountability and peer coaching processes; and, Integrating his Intentional Business Integrity Process into their company operations. Mac has served leaders in manufacturing and high tech companies; accounting, banking and insurance enterprises; medical and health care organizations; service and retail oriented businesses; as well as educational, governmental and non profit organizations. Q&A ProActive Leadership 888-648-5552 or MacAdam@PALConsulting

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