

The Art of Hope: Seligman's 5 Step Approach to Becoming More Optimistic Application Activity

Martin Seligman, a research psychologist, discovered that what separates optimistic people from pessimistic people is how we explain events and outcomes to ourselves. If something good happens, how do you explain it? Was it luck? Or, was it due to your deliberate actions? If something bad happens, how do you explain that? Conditions just weren't right? Or, you are worthless and bad things always happen to you? As a leader your explanatory style becomes the explanatory style of the school.

Pessimists tend to attribute failure and bad events to permanent, personal and pervasive factors; i.e., bad things always happen to me. Optimists tend to attribute bad events to non-personal, non-permanent and non-pervasive factors; i.e., our team didn't win the game this time, but with a few tweaks, we'll win the next one. The converse is true for good events and outcomes. Seligman says, "Finding temporary and specific causes for misfortune is the art of hope...Finding permanent and universal causes for misfortune is the practice of despair."

- Seligman suggests this five-step process to increase optimism. When you encounter adversity, you react by thinking about it; thoughts rapidly become beliefs and beliefs have consequences. The five-step process includes:
 - A= adversity (how we define the problem)
 - B= belief /thought about why the adversity happened (how we interpret that adversity)
 - C= consequences (what we say and do as a result of the belief)
 - D= dispute (challenge the negative interpretation/belief or identify alternative thoughts)
 - E= energize (the positive feeling that occurs after the negative thought/belief is changed)

Example

Step	Application
A	Your school budget gets cut.
B	You believe that the district/state never supports education.
C	You become discouraged and angry.
D	You ask yourself if your belief about the district/state not supporting education is true; you remember that a year ago your school received extra funding for a new program.
E	You treat the adversity (budget cut) as a challenge and realize your school can continue to produce students who are successful in spite of having less money.

Your turn

Step	Application
A	Your school's test scores are the lowest in the school district.
B	

C	
D	
E	

Step	Application
A	Only 50% of your students graduate from high school.
B	
C	
D	
E	

Step	Application
A	
B	
C	
D	
E	

Step	Application
A	
B	
C	
D	
E	

Step	Application
A	
B	
C	
D	
E	