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Don't-Worry-Be-Happy Strategy Can Pay Off

By Dr. Woody

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"Don't ever put a period on a negative thought," exclaimed Henry Winkler as he addressed last week's Society for Human Resource Management's (SHRM) annual HR Florida state conference. His point was that every time you put a period on a negative thought you are acknowledging, legitimizing and completing it.

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The actor, producer and author most known for portraying the eternally cool Arthur "Fonzie" Fonzarelli on the ABC sitcom *Happy Days*, was essentially telling us to stop being victims of ourselves. He pointed out that all too often we embrace the negativity around us instead of pushing it away. He told his own tale of overcoming struggles with dyslexia by focusing on his strengths and keeping a positive attitude. Instead of worrying about the negatives of his situation, he said he sought out the positives. This choice in mentality is the foundation of his success.

As I listened, his words reminded me of the constant negativity we are all being barraged with on a daily basis. Whether it's newspaper headlines, Web banners, or talking heads, we can't escape the "doom and gloom" associated with this emerging new economy. I'll be the first to admit that I have been a perpetrator in those barrages. A quick search will reveal that many of my recent columns and blogs have lead with some sensational statement about unemployment, jobless claims and/or home sales.

The fact is there is no shortage of negativity out there. However, Mr. Winkler is right, it's going to be up to us as individuals to decide whether to put periods on the end of those negative thoughts. So, here is some advice on how to flip those frowns upside down.

Be Your Friend, NOT Your Enemy!

Just as autoimmune diseases cause the body to attack itself, negative thoughts cause the mind to do the same thing. Whenever you allow the poison of negative thinking to pervade your thoughts, you are giving up control and allowing yourself to fall into the role of victim.

Dr. Martin Seligman, University of Pennsylvania researcher and the founder of Positive Psychology, believes that regardless of your circumstances, you can actually find satisfaction, joy, and meaning in your life. The key is knowing yourself and knowing how to focus your thinking.

Three Things You Can do for You!

Whether you are a struggling business owner, professional in transition, or recent grad, your success is up to you. The following are three simple tips for fighting negativity.

Consider Your Strengths: Life is full of choices, and happiness is one of them. When you find yourself worrying about what's going wrong, stop for a moment and consider what's going right. A successful life, just like a successful business, is built on bolstering strengths and not harping on the weaknesses.

Management guru and best-selling author Marcus Buckingham has spent his career researching and promoting the need for American society to get away from our obsession with shoring up weaknesses. Buckingham's research finds that the vast majority of Americans rarely focus on what we are good at, which causes us unnecessary struggle. In turn, this constant battle with defeating weakness develops into frustration and ultimately a negative attitude. It's not hard to fall into the negativity trap when you are banging your head against the wall. Whatever your pursuit in life, focusing on strengths will always help foster a positive attitude.

Commit to Yourself: Once you have decided to focus on positivity and personal strength, it's time to make some commitments. In my recent book, *The YOU Plan*, I talk about the value of creating a personal plan and developing a roadmap for making it happen. A key component to positivity is hope. Creating a plan is about committing to a destination and drawing a roadmap for getting

there. Ultimately, it's about creating your own hope. When you have a solid plan and a destination, it's much easier to combat the negativity of minor daily setbacks.

Engage Your Friends: Don't ever go it alone, because it's just not healthy. In his best-selling book, *Who's Got Your Back*, Keith Ferrazzi talks about creating lifeline relationships to keep ourselves in check. We all suffer from living in our own heads, which means that our perspectives can often be flawed. It's important to check yourself with those you trust to help keep those pesky negative thoughts from snowballing during tough times. Remember, even the Lone Ranger had his trusty friend Tonto.

As Mr. Winkler put it, it's up to you to decide whether or not to complete every negative thought with a fatal period or just let it slip away.

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