

*The*  
LASTING  
IMPACT *of*  
POSITIVE  
LEADERSHIP

STAN TOLER



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## **The Lasting Impact of Positive Leadership**

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## Introduction

# What Does Your Leadership Reveal About You?

*If you believe you can, you probably can. If you believe you won't, you most assuredly won't. Belief is the ignition switch that gets you off the launching pad.*

—DENIS WAITLEY

Whether you're in the ministry business, politics, education, or community service, people are talking not only about the need for more leaders but also the need for better leaders. The rapid rate of change at the dawn of the twenty-first century has created a need for those who will lead at a higher dimension. Mere mental or physical manipulation doesn't cut it anymore; organizations and societies have evolved beyond traditional modes of influence. People want more. Effective leaders today draw from creating a

synergy for change and organizational vitality. Throughout history many great leaders have led this way with their heads, hearts, and souls. This kind of leading is not optional if the end goal is effective leadership.

Many are intimidated by the gleaming, breathing leadership icons. Yet the principles by which they lead are within the grasp of most of us.

Where are you as a leader? What defines you as a leader? Is it more about your performance versus your attitude? Is it more focused on self-leadership versus servant leadership? How do others perceive you? Are you modeling godly leadership or leadership dictated by “the pressure of achieving successful results”?

These questions (and many others) are not always simple to answer. In fact, the end result is far beyond defining just one answer. Rather it’s a process based on how a leader responds over time that reveals the leader’s true identity. And often, the simple formula for a leader’s success starts and ends with a positive outlook.

## Chapter 1

# The Power of a Positive Mind

*Great minds have purposes, others have wishes.*

—WASHINGTON IRVING

**F**or centuries medical professionals have studied the human condition through the lens of disease. That means they have generally paid less attention to healthy people than to the sick, and they have focused their attention on what's wrong with the goal of making it better. They've focused on the symptoms and root causes of illness and tried to alleviate or eliminate them. That has been true also in the relatively new medical specialty of psychology. It has been driven largely by the attempt to identify and eliminate mental illness.

However, there is an emerging focus on wellness in the practice

of medicine, and that exists within the practice of psychology as well. *Positive psychology* focuses on fostering positive attitudes toward one's experiences, individual traits, and life events with the goal of minimizing destructive thoughts and creating a sense of optimism toward life. Positive psychology examines how ordinary people can become happier and more fulfilled.

Barbara L. Fredrickson, a researcher at the University of Michigan, found that positive thinking is more than just a feel-good exercise; it actually changes the way your brain works. In her experiment, Fredrickson divided her subjects into five groups and showed each group different video clips, each intended to foster a different kind of emotional response. The first group saw clips intended to create feelings of joy, the second group feelings of hope, the fourth group feelings of fear, and the fifth group feelings of anger. The third group was the control group, so they watched videos that did not evoke any emotional response.

Afterward, Fredrickson asked each person to imagine themselves in a situation where they would experience similar emotions to what they had just seen and write down what they would do in response. Each person had a piece of paper with twenty blank lines that began with the words, "I would like to..."

Here's where it gets interesting. People who saw images that evoked fear or anger wrote down the fewest responses, but those who saw images of joy and contentment recorded many more. Fredrickson concluded that when we experience positive emotions such as love, joy, and contentment, we see more possibilities for our lives. Positive emotions actually make us think bigger while negative emotions limit our sense of possibility. Frederickson wrote that "positive emotions broaden an individual's momentary

thought-action repertoire: joy sparks the urge to play, interest sparks the urge to explore, contentment sparks the urge to savor and integrate, and love sparks a recurring cycle of each of these urges within safe, close relationships. The broadened mindsets arising from these positive emotions are contrasted to the narrowed mindsets sparked by many negative emotions (i.e. specific action tendencies, such as attack or flee).<sup>1</sup>

This means that when you dwell on negative thoughts such as complaining, worry, anger, anxiety, and forgiveness, it shuts down your brain's ability to cope with problems and find solutions. But when you entertain thoughts of hope, love, and joy, you increase your mind's ability to solve problems and create a better future. Positive thinking actually changes your brain.

There's more. Fredrickson also wrote, "Positive emotions promote discovery of novel and creative actions, ideas and social bonds, which in turn build that individual's personal resources...that can be drawn on later to improve the odds of successful coping and survival."<sup>2</sup> Positive thoughts lead to increased "social bonds," which become a resource for the future. That's a complex way of saying that positive thinking increases your influence with others.

Fredrickson summarized her findings this way:

When positive emotions are in short supply, people get stuck. They lose their degrees of behavioral freedom and become painfully predictable. But when positive emotions are in ample supply, people take off. They become generative, creative, resilient, ripe with possibility and beautifully complex. The broaden-and-build theory conveys how positive emotions move people forward and lift them to the higher ground of optimal well-being.<sup>3</sup>



While it may have taken a psychological study for many to accept these ideas, they have been obvious to positive thinkers for centuries. Positive thinking results in a greater sense of personal well-being—plus it increases your ability to solve problems, make friends, and influence others. The key to broadening your influence is something you already have: your mind. All you have to do is activate it with positive thoughts.

## **A Positive Attitude Creates Possibility**

Roger Crawford makes his living as a consultant and public speaker. He's written books and travels all the across the country working with Fortune 500 companies, national and state associations, and school districts. Those aren't bad credentials. But if that doesn't impress you, how about this: Before becoming a consultant, he was a varsity tennis player for Loyola Marymount University and later became a professional tennis player certified by the United States Tennis Association. Still not impressed? Would you change your opinion if I told you Roger has no hands and only one foot?

Roger Crawford was born with a condition called *ectrodactylism*. When he emerged from his mother's womb, the doctors saw that he had a thumb-like projection extending out of his right forearm and a thumb and finger growing out of his left forearm. He had no palms. His legs and arms were shortened. And his left leg possessed a shrunken foot with only three toes. At age five, Roger's foot was amputated. His parents were told by various medical professionals that he would never be able to walk, probably would not be able to take care of himself, and would never lead a normal life.

After recovering from the shock, Roger's parents were determined to give him the best chance possible for living a normal life.

They raised him to feel loved, to be strong, and to develop independence. “You’re only as handicapped as you want to be,” his father used to tell him. They encouraged him to do everything his heart desired. And they taught him to think positively.

Roger appreciated the encouragement and training he received from his parents, but I don’t think he really understood the significance of it or his achievements until he was in college and interacted with someone who wanted to meet him. After receiving a phone call from a man who had read about his tennis victories, Crawford agreed to meet him at a nearby restaurant. When Roger stood up to shake hands with the man, he discovered that the other guy had hands that were almost identical to his. That not only caught his attention but got him excited because he thought he had found someone similar to him but older who could act as his mentor.

However, after talking with the stranger for a few minutes, Roger discovered that this man was bitter and pessimistic and blamed all of life’s disappointments and failures on his disabilities. He had never held a job long, and he was sure this was because of “discrimination.” But as he continued sharing, it was clearly not the reason. As the man admitted, he was constantly late, frequently absent, and failed to take responsibility for his work. His attitude was “The world owes me,” and his problem was that the world disagreed. He was even angry with Roger because he didn’t share his despair.

Roger and the man kept in touch for several years, until it dawned on Roger that even if some miracle were suddenly to give this man a perfect body, his unhappiness and lack of success wouldn’t change. He would still be in the same place in his life. Obviously, the man had allowed failure to seize him from the inside.

Chances are that the adversity in your life has been nowhere near as difficult as Roger Crawford’s. And that’s why his story is such an

inspiration. Roger maintained that handicaps can only disable those that let them. This is true not only of physical challenges but of emotional and intellectual ones as well. Limitations only become real and lasting when they are created in our minds, not from our bodies.

Attitudes determine actions. What you think you are, you are. We are either the masters or the victims of our attitudes. It's a matter of personal choice—blessing or curse.

## **The Right Attitude Comes First**

Attitude makes all the difference. The development of a positive attitude is the first conscious step toward becoming an effective leader. Successful leadership cannot be constructed without this crucial building block. Check out the following attitude axioms suggested by the words and actions of Joshua and Caleb in the Bible:

- Our attitude determines our approach to life.
- Our attitude determines our relationship with people.
- Our attitude is often the only difference between success and failure.
- Our attitude at the beginning of a task will affect its outcomes more than anything else.
- Our attitude can turn problems into blessings.
- Our attitude is not automatically good just because we belong to God.

A change of attitude is like changing your mind. You just decide you are going to change the way you see things. You can't just pretend you have a good attitude. You have to have a good attitude.

You have to continually look at the bright side of situations, the

good side of people—including yourself—and the positive side of negative events.

## **Positive Thinkers Get Positive Results**

The minute you mention the word *problem*, the implication is that you are speaking negatively. But some don't see it that way.

People often asked Norman Vincent Peale, "Don't you think life would be better if we had few problems?" Norman would answer that question by saying, "I'll be happy to take you to Woodlawn Cemetery because the only people I know who don't have any problems are dead."

Norman thought it was possible that the more problems you have, the more alive you are. "If you have no problems at all," he would say, "you're in grave jeopardy!" In fact, if you really insisted that you had no problems, he would suggest that you immediately race home, go straight to your bedroom, and get down on your knees and pray, "What's the matter, Lord? Don't you trust me anymore? Give me some problems!"

## **The Power of Positive Influences**

Surround yourself with positive influences. When you are surrounded by negative thinkers, images, or materials, it is easy to get bogged down in hopelessness.

Read inspiring books and magazines. Listen to motivational recordings and speakers. Attend positive-thinking seminars or programs. Make it a point to read or watch or listen to something positive or inspiring at least once every day.

Associate with positive people. Look for friends who feel good about themselves, people who have the attitude of gratitude. People

who need to tear down others are not happy with themselves and are not good for you or your attitude.

## **The Power of a Positive Attitude**

Norman Cousins had problems, primarily health related, that affected him for much of his life. A journalist and editor, he began his career as a book critic for a magazine and soon became managing editor. In 1940, he joined *Saturday Review of Literature*, and two years later was named editor-in-chief. During his thirty years in that position, circulation increased from 20,000 to an astounding 650,000. At one time, Cousins became seriously ill and was diagnosed with a degenerative inflammatory disease, which caused him considerable pain. He also suffered from heart disease, and doctors gave him little chance of survival. But Cousins was a firm believer in the power of a positive attitude, and he refused to accept the prognosis he'd received. "Optimism doesn't wait on facts," he said, "it deals with prospects. Pessimism is a waste of time."

Cousins checked himself out of the hospital and into a nearby hotel, where he self-prescribed megadoses of vitamin C combined with laughter. He began watching classic Marx Brothers films over and over. The result? Cousins made the joyous discovery that ten minutes of genuine belly laughter had an anesthetic effect and would give him at least two hours of pain-free sleep. Short-term relief is one thing, but did Cousins's positive mental attitude have any long-range benefits? Considering the fact that he lived for sixteen productive and successful years beyond what his doctors predicted, the answer is clearly yes!

Taking the positive view requires more than simply casting out negative thoughts—although that is an important part of it. Positive input must replace negative thoughts. The quickest way to cast

out negative thoughts is to feed enough positive thoughts into your mind that there is no longer room for the negative thoughts.

People who take the positive view basically see the world as a good place. They actively look for the good in other people and situations, and they act with hope and faith.

W. Clement Stone was a successful businessman, author, and philanthropist. A strong proponent of the power of attitude, he first gained fame in 1960 as the coauthor, with Napoleon Hill, of *Success Through a Positive Mental Attitude*. During a lifetime that spanned a century, he continued to champion the philosophy that the right attitude could overcome virtually every problem: “So you’ve got a problem? That’s good! Why? Because repeated victories over your problems are the rungs on your ladder to success. With each victory you grow in wisdom, stature, and experience. You become a bigger, better, more successful person each time you meet a problem and tackle and conquer it with a positive mental attitude.”<sup>4</sup>

## **Help Others Feel Good About Themselves**

People who have positive self-esteem tend to be genuinely helpful to other people. In fact, the two tendencies go together so well that it is hard to tell which produces the other. It’s probably a little bit of both. Those who feel good about themselves long to help others feel good about themselves. The more they reach out to help others, the better they feel about themselves. Only the insecure, the frightened, the people with low self-esteem approach life with an attitude that says, “It’s every person for himself or herself.” Sadly, they find only more insecurity and lower self-esteem.

Mother Teresa stated it best, “Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier.”

## Positive Habits Predict Success

In 1989, Stephen R. Covey published the bestselling book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Covey may have been the first person to point out the link between our outlook and the habits they engender, habits that can set us up for success. These habits require little explanation. Notice how many of them are the opposite of the poor habits noted above.<sup>5</sup>

1. Be proactive.
2. Begin with the end in mind.
3. Put first things first.
4. Think win-win.
5. Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
6. Synergize (work together).
7. Sharpen the saw (replenish yourself).

What a different picture these habits draw than the negative habits we've discussed. Imagine the people who live this way. They have a positive idea of what they'd like to accomplish, and they take action on it. They don't procrastinate but have a bias for taking action. Far from being fearful of people and opportunities, they have an abundance mindset and gladly share with others, listen to others, and work together. Finally, they take care of themselves because they realize that their own well-being is their best resource.

Notice, too, that each of these habits stems from a positive outlook. To begin behaving in these ways by habit—that is, without thinking further about them—you must believe something positive about yourself, about others, and about the world. Positive habits set you up to achieve. They're the best predictor of your future success and happiness.

Covey's seven habits are well known, but there are many other positive habits that stem from a positive outlook. If you think positively, you'll almost certainly develop some of these good habits, which will in turn put you on a course for a better future.

It's all about creating the right habits. Good habits (or best practices) are hard to develop but they are easy to live with. Bad habits are easy to develop but they are hard to live with. In the end, develop good habits.