

Careers

Staying positive: If you keep saying you can't, you probably won't

By Beth Braccio Hering, Special to CareerBuilder



Let's face it: Staying positive isn't always easy. From job seekers frustrated by rejections to workers dealing with everything from long hours to crabby co-workers, many people are finding it hard to put on a happy face.

Yet the ability to see the good side of things can be one of your strongest assets, both for your career and for your well-being. Here, experts explain why and offer tips on staying upbeat.

The power of positivity

Who would you rather be around each day: a sullen colleague or one with a can-do attitude? Positive people radiate an energy that makes others see them as more competent and likable. Studies also show that optimists tend to be healthier, more creative and better performers.

"Companies look to hire and promote employees who can see opportunities in challenging situations," says Lisa Quast, president of Career Woman Inc. in [Seattle, Wash.](#), and author of "Your Career, Your Way!" "[Managers](#) want employees who bring solutions to problems, not who bring problems and then look to their manager to solve them."

A positive attitude also can turn out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. "I often have people come to me for advice on how they can get a raise or promotion," Quast notes. "Those who come with a positive attitude that they are worthy are much more likely to accomplish their goal because their self-talk reinforces that they can figure out a way to make it happen. For those with an attitude of doubt that they will ever get what they want, negativity ends up surrounding them to such an extent that they become demotivated and don't want to go through the steps necessary to map out an action plan to accomplish their goal."

This doesn't mean becoming a Pollyanna. "A positive attitude is not the same as living and working in a state of euphoria. That's unrealistic," says Roy Cohen, a [career coach](#) and author of "The [Wall Street](#) Professional's Survival Guide." "It's about being upbeat and optimistic and knowing that you'll get through and beat the odds. That's what motivates the team that reports to you, and as a team member that's what inspires your colleagues. When you don't waste time and energy on negative thoughts and behaviors, you'll have the potential to channel all of that 'lost' energy into activities that produce success."

Changing your outlook

To nurture a positive attitude, Elizabeth R. Lombardo, a [psychologist](#) and author of "A Happy You: Your Ultimate Prescription for Happiness," suggests:

- **Looking for the good:** As a society, we have a tendency to focus on what is wrong, such as what we don't like about our job, what others need to change, what we dislike about ourselves. Instead, try to look at what is going right and what you do like about others and yourself.
- **Finding a purpose:** Research shows that when people have a sense of purpose and meaning in their work, they are more positive towards it. What are some of the greater-good elements about your job?
- **Focusing on team-building:** Develop bonds with your co-workers. Share a walk around the block during breaks. Have lunch together occasionally. Volunteer as a group to help those who are less fortunate. When we have a sense of belonging to a group, we are more positive and motivated to help that group.

"Another way to stay positive at work is to think of yourself as a [consultant](#)," Quast says. "Consultants, by nature, are hired to assess the difficult situations and then create and implement action plans for improvement. They are required to remain positive and unbiased (or they risk being fired). By thinking of yourself as an 'internal consultant' you can use this same mental frame of reference to help you stay positive, no matter what the situation."

Noelle Nelson, a [therapist](#) and author of "The Power of Appreciation in [Business](#)," adds that it helps to take the last 15 minutes of the day to organize your workspace for tomorrow. "Jot down a to-do list and tidy your desk. The task will give you closure for the day and help you start tomorrow on the right foot. You also can look over the day's to-do list and feel a sense of accomplishment about what you completed."

One final way of developing positivity: hang around like-minded, glass-half-full people. And when you do encounter the most miserable grouch, strive to remain pleasant. "Like energy attracts like energy," Nelson notes. "Your co-worker may not understand what's going on when you no longer get frustrated or angry over his comments or behavior, but after awhile your appreciative attitude will often be reciprocated."

