

The Ripple Effect

The power of positivity, the downside of positive thinking and why our thoughts matter.
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We've heard it time and time again! Our thoughts matter. With a dramatic increase in a sense of isolation, anxiety, and fear as the lingering effects of COVID-19 continue to take their toll on our mental health, more than ever, our thoughts matter. Let's look at the upside and downside of positive thinking, and why and how our thoughts matter and play out.

We've all heard the phrases extolling the benefits of positive thinking. 'It's the thought that counts.' 'What you focus on expands.' 'Whether you think you can or you think you can't, you're right.' We've been inundated with self-help titles that espouse the power of thinking positive thoughts, from classic titles like Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking* and Dale Carnegie's *How To Stop Worrying and Start Living*, to *The Secret's* positive manifestation instruments, including its vision boards, and numerous more recent titles, all of which expound on the virtues of positive thinking and reinforce the message that it's our thoughts that counts.

Lately, we've started hearing the term toxic positivity, and discussions about the downside of positive thinking. The discourse around toxic positivity explores the folly of glossing over negative events, feelings, worries, and concerns with platitudes that fail to address the depths of pain, fears, and anxieties that are on the rise since COVID-19 has impacted the lives of people around the world. In short, calling out those who dismiss and negating real feelings and concerns with advice to "look on the bright side," or chastising people for feeling anxious, isolated, or lost during COVID, exposes the negating effect of insensitivity to others who are in pain.

Non-toxic positivity

It is important to empathize with friends and family who share the burden of their suffering and to show compassion, rather than minimize or negate their suffering. We are not here to tell others how to think and feel. It's our job to take control of our thoughts and show kindness and

empathy when people we love, and listen to and validate their feelings. Non-toxic positivity is showing up for others at your strongest and best, not to lecture or dismiss the concerns of others, but to help others carry their burden in times of trouble and self-doubt.

Here's why our thoughts count

More than ever — especially in these difficult times of COVID — it's our thoughts that can sustain us. More than ever, our thoughts matter. We are designed to hold just one thought at a time — not two contradictory ones. When the thought that we hold onto fills us with fear or adds fuel to the flames of self-doubt rather than courage, we're in for a rough ride. Self-doubt leads us into low moods, feeling lesser than, and a loss of faith and confidence in our ability to handle what life brings. We then make choices that play out in the world based on our fears rather than what serves our authentic selves.

How our thoughts play out?

Drop a pebble in still water, and watch how it impacts the surface of the water as it moves out in expanding concentric circles. Our thoughts, moods and actions play out this same way.

At one time or another, we have all felt the heaviness of someone in a negative state of mind walking into a room... from an angry parent or teacher, or a friend or colleague in a downbeat frame of mind. Likewise, we have felt the energy shift when someone in a positive state of mind enters a room and the mood lightens. Our thoughts have a ripple effect because they lead to our moods and behaviors.

And our moods and behaviors, in turn, affect those around us. When we can take control of our thoughts, we also begin to shift and change our moods, behaviors, and the people in our lives.

When we have a choice

When it comes to our thoughts, we have a choice. We can choose to reframe negative thinking by challenging the truth of our negative thoughts. For example, is that negative thought you have about online shopping a result of an isolated incident, or a long list of negative transactions? Is your anxiety around socializing based on a series of bad experiences that verifies your trepidation, or are you imagining and forecasting negative encounters and unpleasant outcomes? Does your self-doubt prevent you from seeking a better job, a new career opportunity, a healthier relationship? When our negative thoughts lead to choices that diminish us, we have a choice.

We can choose to think about the way we think about our lives and ourselves! We can choose to challenge the truth about our negative thoughts and replace those negative thoughts with positive ones. We can go for that promotion, take a leap of faith that leads us into a more rewarding career or relationship.

Ourselves, our world, our future

To a very large extent, we are what we think. If we think we can handle whatever comes our

way, we move through the world with a sense of confidence, rather than dread and trepidation. When we realize the power of how we think about ourselves and the world around us, we can begin to take control.

The past is in the past, and the future is just our imagination. We can pay attention to our thoughts, examine the veracity of our negative thoughts, and move out into the world— and the future — in a positive state of mind, at our authentically highest and best.

Pay attention to your thoughts

Remember that the future is just our imagination, so why not imagine good things coming our way.

Stay connected to your authentic feelings. Don't dismiss negative thoughts and feelings. Address them!

Notice the effect you have on others — both positive and negative.

Realize that you can take control of your thoughts, and choose to examine the truth of negative thoughts and replace thoughts that do not support you at your highest and best.



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About the author

Dr. Monica Vermani is a Clinical Psychologist specializing in treating trauma, stress and mood & anxiety disorders, and the founder of Start Living Corporate Wellness. She is a well-known speaker and author on mental health and wellness. Her upcoming book, A Deeper Wellness, is scheduled for publication in 2021. <https://www.drmonicavermani.com>

