Changing the way we think

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Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference. Winston Churchill

I am currently in the very privileged position of having attended a lot of meetings and conferences, which interestingly enough have all had a common theme: attitude and change. These meetings have caused me to give some thought to these two small words: attitude and change. The Oxford dictionary defines attitude as “a settled way of thinking or feeling about someone or something, typically one that is reflected in a person’s behaviour”. Quite often, the way we feel about a situation comes from our attitude towards that situation.

Anyone who has ever had a 2-year old fully understands the ‘terrible twos’ and the attitude a 2-year old can give you. Luckily, not all attitudes are as intense as a little 2-year old, but they are indeed present in every person, and are part of who we are. Our attitudes are shaped by our experiences, and as we experience more, our attitudes can change. You see, attitudes are a way of thinking, and they shape how we relate to the world both at work and in our personal life.

Before I share with you my thoughts on attitude, we need to understand attitude. Attitude consists of three components:

1. **Cognitive component**: This component represents what we think, what we believe in and our ideas on how we think about certain things. These are normally generalisations and stereotyping; for example, some people will think that all Rottweiler dogs are dangerous or that all taxi drivers do not drive in a civilised way. These thoughts, beliefs and ideas awaken certain feelings within us which leads us to the affective component of attitude.

2. **Affective component**: The affective component represents the feelings that are brought to the surface due to the thoughts and beliefs we have. These feelings could be positive or negative, such as laughter and happiness or fear, hate and anger, to mention a few. Looking at the Rottweiler dog example….this will most definitely awaken an emotion of fear in most of us and the taxi will most likely create emotions such as anger or frustration.

3. **Behavioural component**: This component reflects the way you react once you experience the emotion. In most instances, these reactions are spontaneous and we do not give them a lot of thought. Our behaviour in the Rottweiler example would most likely be to run as fast as possible, and in the taxi example it could result in obscene words or gestures.

This process sounds quite simple…. certain thoughts nurture certain feelings which end up in my acting and behaving in a certain manner. In most instances this process happens unconsciously, and at other times the process may happen consciously. When our feelings and thoughts are conscious, we have the opportunity to control them, but when our choices are unconscious, they appear to just happen. Think back to the last argument you had with your wife, husband, child or colleague. I can guarantee that your thoughts unconsciously lead to anger or frustration which resulted in you most probably raising your voice. Most of our choices, words and actions are conscious decisions. Regrettably, some of our choices, words and even attitudes are unconscious, and unconscious decisions tend to become bad habits.

We face the challenge of recognising the negative thoughts, feelings, emotions, actions and attitude that we have unconsciously adopted. Your attitude towards people, places or situations determines the choices that you make and what you say to people.

One of your most important choices is the choice of your attitude. Do you realise that you, and only you, choose your attitude? Your attitude is either your greatest asset or one of your greatest stumbling blocks. It’s completely your choice and it’s a choice you need to make every single day.

**Positive thinking is a way of life**

Pleasant and happy feelings result from a positive attitude. Our eyes are brighter. We have more energy, and even more happiness. Our whole being signals happiness and success. Even our health is affected in a positive way. Our voice becomes more powerful, our body language more open, and we walk more upright and smile more.

**Positive and negative thinking are contagious**

We influence, and are influenced by the people we meet daily, in one way or another. This happens automatically on an unconscious level, through words, thoughts, feelings, body language and attitude. Is it any wonder that we want to be around positive people, and
prefer to avoid negative ones? People are more likely to react positively to us, if we are positive. Negative thoughts, words and attitudes will create negative feelings, moods and behaviour, and we will inevitably be unhappy. Negative thoughts cause toxins to be released into the bloodstream, which cause unhappiness and negativity. This is the way to failure, frustration and disappointment. But most importantly the opposite is also true, positive thoughts words and attitudes create positive happy feelings and behaviour.

The impact of positive thinking on your work, your health and life is about much more than just being happy or displaying an optimistic attitude and it really creates value in your life. It helps you to cope more easily with the tasks and activities of daily life (even difficult meetings). It brings brightness into your life, makes it easier to avoid worries and foster positive thinking. If you adopt it as a way of life, it could bring constructive changes into your life, make your life happier, brighter and more successful. It is certainly a state of mind that is well worth developing.

According to Remez Sasson, a positive attitude manifests in the following ways:

- It fosters positive thinking
- It assists with productive thinking and problem solving
- It ensures creative and innovative thinking
- It develops cheerfulness
- It ensures motivation and energy to do things and accomplish goals
- It fosters an attitude of happiness

Can you imagine what would happen around board room tables, and in our pharmacies, if we all adopted positive attitudes?

Sasson also indicates that the results of a positive attitude can include:

- Success in the workplace and in your private life
- Feelings of motivation
- Persistence, to overcome the obstacles you encounter
- Believing in yourself and in your own abilities
- Easier demonstration of self-worth and confidence
- Recognition of opportunities
- Use of creative and innovative ways to obtain solutions to difficult problems

A positive attitude leads to happiness and success and can change your whole life. This affects not only you and the way you look at the world – it also affects your environment and the relationships you have. Strongly positive attitudes become contagious.

Positive thinking instructions and advice

I want to challenge all of us to re-wire our thoughts, feelings and attitude towards a positive thinking process. In order to do this, each of us needs to consciously do some inner re-wiring, since attitude and thoughts do not change overnight. Remez Sasson in his article “Positive thinking” gives us a few practical ideas how we can change and re-wire our thoughts, feelings and behaviour.

1. Use your imagination to visualise only favourable and beneficial situations.
2. Use positive words in your daily conversations, or when talking to others.
3. Smile as it helps with positively thinking.
4. Once a negative thought enters your mind, you must be aware of it. You need to make a conscious attempt to replace it with a positive one. If the negative thought returns, replace it again with a positive one. Sasson indicates that persistence will eventually teach your mind unconsciously to think positively, ignoring all negative thoughts.
5. Focus only on beneficial, good and happy thoughts in your mind.
6. It doesn't matter what your circumstances are; think positively, if you persevere, you will transform the way your mind thinks. It might take some time for the changes to take place, but eventually they will.
7. Use repetitively positive affirmations. The more you think or hear a positive thought the more it will sink into your sub-consciousness becoming an unconscious action. It is like practising playing the piano, the more you practice the easier it will be for you to play the piano and eventually you will be able to sit in front of the piano unconsciously gliding your fingers over the keys.

When was the last time your attitude made a difference? To put it simply: Seek joy, actively look for it in the world around you, and you will find it. I will leave you with the words of Dr Anil Kumar Sinha “Nothing can stop the man with the right mental attitude from achieving his goal, nothing on earth can stop him to reach his cherished goal. The big difference is whether it is positive or negative.”

References

5. Remez Sasson. 2015. The power of positive thinking can change your life. [Accessed on 2015.10.01], http://www.successconsciousness.com/positive_attitude.htm

Picture references

4. http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-802zFmOdAdE/UKJqtxT9RHI/AAAAAAAAD9g/E7J0D3/NGuFg/s640/positive+attitude+quotes.jpg