

**ELEVATING CREATIVITY OVER CHAOS:
WHY WE NEED TO CHANGE OUR PERSPECTIVE**
Nir Bashan

For far too long we have dwelled in the negative.

Without embracing the positive, we can never hope to benefit from the multitude of everyday creativity that is making notable change on earth. As *The Discourses of Epictetus* teaches us:

The essence of good and evil consists in the condition of our character. And externals are the means by which our character finds its particular good and evil. It finds its good by not attaching value to the means. Correct judgements about externals make our character good, as perverse or distorted ones make it bad.

The Human impact of positivity cannot be overstated. Simply choosing positivity can have seismic shifts not only on how we view ourselves, but how we view others. I have spent the last ten years of my career in search of positivity and creativity, and learning how we can use both to solve the most pressing problems we face as humanity. In my new book *The Solution Mindset*, I outline the stories of ten amazing people using creativity and innovation to change the way we view negativity and, ultimately, how to transform it into positivity. The results are real, with tangible impacts on issues ranging from pollution to health care all over the world.

Here, I will attempt to break down the research on negativity and how it affects us in our lives and offer some insight into how we can choose to become more positive. Finally, I will highlight how that pursuit is not naive but necessary to solve our problems at work, in our communities, and beyond.

THE RESEARCH ON NEGATIVITY

Our first story about positivity and its impact on us arises in a most unlikely place: an MRI machine. Specifically, with Dr. Alexander Ritter and his team at the Hans-Berger Department of Neurology at Jena University Hospital in Germany, who put a bunch of students in an MRI machine.¹ Once inside, the researchers zapped the students with electricity to cause a sting. Yep, that's what they do in the name of research. After the zap, they asked the students questions—in some cases using positive words, and in others using negative words—and recorded their response.

In most of the cases, the students who heard positive words measured their pain from the zap as far more tolerable and less painful than those who heard negative and toxic words. The students who heard “how was that awful zap?” consistently rated their pain higher than the students who heard “was that zap okay?” It turns out that just the words we use to describe an experience matter more than we think.

In my own research,² I have found that the English language has a ratio of roughly six negative words to each positive word.³ Isn't that amazing?! So, for every let's say, “fantastic,” there are six negative words like “horrible,” “bad,” “terrible,” “troubled,” “disagreeable,” and “unbecoming”—six times more negative words than positive.

After studying multiple languages across the globe from French to Mandarin, Urdu to Swedish, I found there is always a consistent negative to positive word ratio. In every language on earth! No language has more positive words than negative words!

I wondered why that is. Is our language literally working against us?⁴ Are we doomed in our workplace communication because of it?⁵ Is our language—no matter where we are in the world—setting us up for a communication failure by steering us away from positivity and creativity?⁶

The “prevailing theory” regarding the evolutionary need to develop more negative than positive words many thousands of years ago is simple: communities that survived and thrived more often. There was a need for negativity in language because it was used as a warning to not eat this “nasty” red berry or drink that “ugly” water and so on—literally a system early humans developed to keep them alive. The negative to positive words had a purpose back then.

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But today? We are no longer driven solely by survival—especially at work. Positive vs negative language becomes a choice. A choice we make with each and every utterance. We simply have to choose more positive words if we want to see more positive outcomes. But it’s not only our language that reflects a choice of positivity. It’s how we process external events beyond our control (Epictetus and other philosophers called this simply “externals”).

Like language, our news media has a negativity bias, and it is affecting our health. More studies are now showing that the endless cycle of bad news, woe, and despair have an effect on our overall health.⁷ So, what can we do about it? How do we choose positivity in order to boost not only our wellbeing but our potential to solve problems at work and beyond?

THE POTENTIAL OF POSITIVITY

If you tell people that you are an overall positive person, they'll probably look at you like you're a crackpot. They'll figure you must be gullible or not looking at the facts. Afterall, the world is full of horrible things. How can you be positive about it? At best people assume you are naive. At worse, a lunatic.

Trust me. I know. I am one of those eternal optimists with faith in humanity to correct its ways. And I have received my fair share of strange looks, punishing emails, comments, and distancing from more "serious" or "educated" folks.

But here's the thing: While there is nothing that the skeptics hate more than hope, there is nothing more human than creativity deployed to solve problems.

There are transformational stories happening every day all around us, like the police officer who gave Katelyn Ricchini a hug instead of a ticket. Deputy Shawn Singleton realized that Katelyn's traffic violation was minor and, after talking with her and discovering that her day was just going horribly, he decided not to give her a ticket and asked if she needed a hug.

Accepting the offer, Ricchini confided that she had just moved to North Carolina to escape an abusive relationship and had to leave her 5-year-old son behind so that she could get clean and get him back. Getting a hug instead of a ticket that day helped Ricchini accomplish that, and when she did, she reunited with the deputy to introduce him to her son. "Look, this is one of the guys that saved my life," she told her son. That's creative and positive problem solving right there. Or take the example of the boss who gave his first-class ticket to a fearful co-worker who was on the verge of tears because she had a serious anxiety about flying. That one was maybe less famous, but that was me. Again, smaller scale but creative and positive problem solving. Or take the coworker who gave credit to the team for an assignment he completed. Or the worker who gave a child a free cookie at the bakery.

Is the world really going to hell in a handbasket? No. The list of good deeds and people making the right, positive, creative choice goes on and on. It is a list far longer than the lineup of negative news stories the media feeds us. Perhaps you can even add your own small dose of humanity you have witnessed at work and beyond. Hopefully you have perpetuated one of those amazing moments yourself.

The truth is that there are everyday heroes out there choosing creativity and presenting it as positivity in the world. On a small scale. On a big scale. At work. In their communities. In the world. One good creative deed at a time.

Take the example of someone like Titouan Bennicot, who is healing the world's ocean pollution one planted coral at a time. No one asked him to do it. He is just doing it.

He wasn't terribly successful at reef restoration when he first started. But he was positive about it. And creative. And each subsequent iteration got better and better. Today, he runs the largest coral restoration organization on Earth, replanting hundreds of thousands of reefs and cleaning up ocean pollution each and every day. At first, he just wanted to give back and make an impact in his community. Now he is impacting the world, replanting coral reefs one at a time. At the beginning, though, he used a creative and positive tool called "just start" which basically means that you need to start on a positive creative idea and not wait around till it's ready to go. In Titouan's case, he didn't know a lot about what he was doing at first—other than he needed to start doing something. Now he provides a positive, proven example for others who want to start doing the work.

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Or take Gil Winch. who is fighting to give disabled employees a chance at a more dignified working life. It started out as a service for his community after being diagnosed with an incurable cancer. With his cancer in remission, he's now contributing worldwide to helping people hire the perceived "unhirable" using creativity and innovation at every step.

How did he accomplish this goal? He had to change his own mindset—and it began with how he thought about his own diagnosis:

At first, the negative thoughts were a constant barrage, but I always and immediately fought back. I trained my mind to interrupt the downward spiral before it began. At first, it took minutes to flip each negative thought to a positive one, but over time, this became second nature—like an instinctive shield against fear and it took mere seconds.

As he says, “This wasn’t blind optimism or escapism; it was a deliberate practice.” It was one that helped him see the positive potential in all people as he embarked on his mission to assist chronically unemployed people with disabilities (and others) could successfully join the workforce.. If someone may see a blind person as a liability at a factory, he instead sees them as an asset—in the customer service phone center of the factory. Gil Winch has managed to change his perspective to see the positive. When everyone is fixated on whatever that candidate lacks, he sees what they can contribute instead and puts them in the right place for success in the organization.

THE TRANSITION FROM NEGATIVITY TO POSITIVITY

If we make the transition from viewing the world as negative to viewing it as positive, it opens us to all kinds of possibilities that did not exist before. Possibilities to see reality in a new way crafted by our own outlook and judgement; not that of the media or other influences.

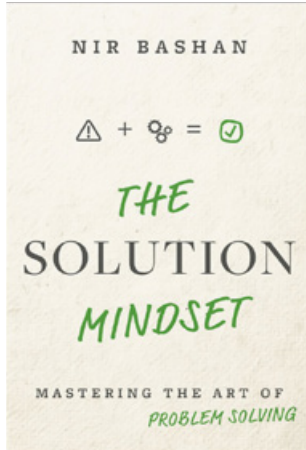
And this is happening more and more each day. People around the world are joining a new revolution where the evolution of creative thought expressed positively is more potent than negativity. People are asking themselves every day, Why not? Why not me? People are awakening to the power of creativity and positivity to help solve some of the greatest challenges of our time. They are realizing that each person on earth has an amazing capacity to heal. And they are choosing to heal whatever they deeply care about. Just like Gil and Titouan.

Hopefully, you too will give humanity the gift deep within your soul to use positivity instead of negativity to creatively solve problems. Hopefully, you too will now open your creative problem-solving positivity and spread it to what you believe in and care deeply about.

It turns out that there is far more to be hopeful for than to dread in the world. We just have to look for it. Regardless of what the media is reporting today, or tomorrow, the truth is that there is far more to be positive about than negative. **So, the next time an issue arises, or you're listening to a media report, which direction will you choose? Will you now choose to change this negativity into positivity to once and for all harness the great power of creativity to help alleviate problems and introduce a solution mindset once and for all? For problems small and large? The choice is yours. 🙏**



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Endnotes

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