



The Positive Power Of Negative Thinking

Julie Norem

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How often are we urged to "look on the bright side"? From Norman Vincent Peale to the ubiquitous smiley face, optimism has become an essential part of American society. In this long-overdue book, psychologist Julie Norem offers convincing evidence that, for many people, positive thinking is an ineffective strategy--and often an obstacle--for successfully coping with the anxieties and pressures of modern life. Drawing on her own research and many vivid case histories, Norem provides evidence of the powerful benefits of "defensive pessimism," which has helped millions to manage anxiety and perform their best work.

The Positive Power Of Negative Thinking Details

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Mohammad alshakhas says

This is my third reading for this book ,
This book changed my life and save my soul !!!

Beth Perry-cantrell says

Quite a relief for anxiety sufferers!

Indiana Cano says

This book is my bible!

Charity says

In *The Positive Power of Negative Thinking*, author Julie Norem compares defensive pessimism---a strategy for managing existing anxiety by identifying and addressing possible negative outcomes before undertaking an endeavor---with its counterpart, strategic optimism---a strategy used by people with low baseline levels of anxiety to relax before a big event and avoid triggering anxious feelings. Both strategies, Norem contends, can optimize performance for different personalities in different situations. Each strategy has its own risks and benefits, and the secret is knowing which is the right fit for each of us in any particular circumstance.

I've had this book on my to-read list for more than four years, since I read David Rakoff's *Half Empty*, which references Norem's research. Reading about defensive pessimism, I could easily identify situations in which I instinctively and successfully use this strategy, like when preparing for a road trip or putting together homeschool curricula for my kids. I could also identify situations in which I instead engage in avoidance and self-handicapping rather than risk feeling the full force of my anxiety, like in the case of the unfinished novel I've been thinking about daily but not writing on since 2010.

Thinking of defensive pessimism, avoidance, and self-handicapping as different responses to anxiety has caused a welcome shift in my thinking. I spent an evening this week listing in my journal all of the negatives about working on my novel, and then wrote out potential ways that I could manage the anxiety around these so that I can actually write down the scenes that play out in my mind. So far, I've not actually sat down to write on the novel, but I consider this a positive move in that direction. At the very least, when I schedule a morning writing session and then ignore my alarm and then don't have enough time to write before the kids and I need to begin our lessons, I can identify this as avoidance. (Putting a name on it has to have some value, right?)

Despite its potential helpfulness in making progress on my personal goals, there are two things that keep me

from loving this book. First, it's too long for the amount of information it includes. This isn't as extreme as in other self-helpy books I've read, but I think I could have gotten the basic idea in about half the number of words. Second, it brought up so many tangential issues that I sometimes couldn't figure out how they fit in with the defensive pessimism/strategic optimism duality Norem presents. As helpful as it was to read about avoidance and self-handicapping as ways to avoid feeling their existing anxiety, it wasn't clear how they fit. Are there corresponding negative ways of avoiding anxiety that temperamentally non-anxious people use if they're not using strategic optimism? Or do the negatives for them come in when their strategic optimism tips into the non-strategic version?

I think the book would have been stronger had Norem maintained a tighter focus and left some of the other stuff out, but I did enjoy it, and I'm glad that I picked it up finally.

Elizabeth says

The style was too self-helpy for me, but I'd definitely describe myself as a defensive pessimist whose constant consideration of the worst-case scenario destroys personal relationships.

Aaron says

I definitely liked the premise. Lots of advantages to thinking this way, anticipating failure modes helps preparedness.

Daniel Petra says

Most of us are familiar and we have probably utilized the following strategy at least sometimes: "Hope for the best and prepare for the worst!" This book deals with one of my favorite paradoxes. On the one hand, I consider myself to be a very optimistic person. On the other hand I like to be realistic and prudent and I do want to be ready for the worst ... just in case. This book has been extremely validating and empowering for me because it has helped me to overcome any guilt that I may have felt about not feeling obliged to always think positively. This book also deals with it the following paradox in Chapter 7. No Size Fits All: Different Folks, Different Strategies. This book totally complements and reinforces what I have myself written about paradox in Missing Links in Chapter 3. I strongly recommend it!

Sharon Jones says

Great read - I was on a long flight and just burned through it cover to cover. Easy to read and great insights to understanding how to channel your anxiety for good instead of evil.

Annette says

boo. not at all what I thought it would be about.

Lindsey says

Great book! This book expands the dichotomy of optimism and pessimism, to include a gray area of "defensive pessimists" whose realistic perspectives on the world/future are often misunderstood. It also helps those who fall in the category to no longer squelch their world view but rather embrace and use it to increase personal success. I definitely related to this book and I highly recommend it!

Riccardo says

Pessimists are continually told they should try to be optimistic. What if however pessimism is hard wired, and for those people trying to be optimists doesn't work, but actually makes things worse. Julie Norem contends that there are defensive pessimists who actually benefit from their pessimism. Rather than trying to become constructive optimists, they need to embrace and make the most of their pessimism. I was about three quarters of the way through the book when I left it on a plane flight to Cairns. Coincidence or a message from a deterministic universe ?

Norem provides a pleasant and highly original alternative to the sanctimonious lecturing of the nauseating positive psychology types.

Christian says

Leí este libro porque lo mencionaba David Rakoff en su fascinante Half empty. Se trata de una defensa del pesimismo frente a la dictadura omnipresente del pensamiento positivo. Norem contrapone a los optimistas estratégicos (aquellos que evitan la ansiedad pensando que todo va a estar bien y confiando que "sobre la marcha" las cosas se solucionan) a los pesimistas defensivos (aquellos que imaginan todo tipo de catástrofes por anticipado y planifican con anticipación para evitarlas), y afirma que ambas son estrategias y ambas pueden ser exitosas. En los extremos, claro, está el problema, en los optimistas totalmente ciegos a cualquier obstáculos, que tienen a ser negadores con el ego inflado, incapaces de asumir sus limitaciones y defectos. Y en los pesimistas paralizados por la idea de que no vale la pena hacer nada ya que todo está condenado a salir mal. Norem analiza en detalle las sutilezas de estas dos posiciones (el optimista estratégico evita sentir ansiedad con su estrategia, mientras que un pesimista defensivo administra su ansiedad con su estrategia, ya que para él es inevitable sentir ansiedad). El libro es iluminador y vitalizante, porque es cierto que es inútil, en la mayoría de los casos, pedirle a un pesimista que se convierta en un optimista. Lo mejor sería adoptar distintas estrategias de acuerdo al contexto, e identificarlas, como hace este libro, puede ser de gran ayuda para eso. El libro, en un estilo accesible y ordenado, tiene la contra de ser un poco anodino, y un poco estirado y repetitivo (los mismos argumentos podrían haber ocupado la mitad de la extensión en páginas). En conclusión: altamente recomendable para aquellos que intuyen que atrás de la doctrina monocorde de pensamiento positivo, gente tóxica, etc, hay pensamiento muerto y fiaca analítica.

