

Applied Optimism

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Imagine you are faced with a challenge that threatens to overwhelm you or your self-confidence. As an Optimist, you know you can look on the bright side and think positively to make the best of the situation. Our Optimist Creed offers a remarkable set of insights to help us in our daily lives.

Working together in the Optimist Club at the University of California Santa Barbara, we developed a three-part presentation for university staff called “Applied Optimism,” which we believe will provide you with an extra boost as you work to meet your life challenges. Applied Optimism can help you be more intentional in your positive outlook, more successful and happy.

Applied Optimism:

First, we consider the science behind the growing field of positive psychology. Martin Seligman, the founder of the field and Director of the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania, believes that much of our general well-being is determined by how we interpret events in our lives.

In a series of experiments, Seligman found that some people have more resistance to “giving up” in the face of negative circumstances. He attributes this to an “explanatory style” that helps some individuals maintain their positive outlook better than others. These individuals do not blame themselves unfairly or in a self-inhibiting way by saying “these things always happen to me,” or “there’s nothing I can do to make things better.” Instead, negative events become attributable to temporary causes.

An Optimistic explanatory style instills the hope to confidently say, “I can change things for the better,” and the resilience to act to change them, regardless of current circumstances.

Secondly, we reveal a tool to be used in Applied Optimism called a “CAN-do” attitude. The acronym suggests that one should **Conceive** a goal or a plan, **Announce** it to the world, and then **Notice** who offers to help.

In our observed Optimistic view, most people have positive intentions and want to support interesting and worthwhile projects. At the very least, people love to offer advice and suggestions. With the ‘CAN-do’ attitude, we reward this natural human impulse by openly acknowledging these contributions, especially the ones that may be most helpful. If we maintain this “attitude of gratitude,” then we continue the process by deepening the awareness and appreciation of the assistance that is offered.

Finally, we outline a five-level process for intentionally applying Optimism in our lives:

1. Commit to being Optimistic.
2. Surround yourself with Optimistic cues, such as the Optimist Creed.
3. Be conscious of how you express your Optimism in the presence of others.
4. Richly manifest Optimism in your life with a goal to benefit yourself and others.
5. Expand the reach of Optimism as a way of life to as many people as possible.