



Susanne Gaddis, PhD



Susanne Gaddis PhD
The Communications Doctor

"Prescriptions for Effective Communication"
www.CommunicationsDoctor.com
Gaddis@CommunicationsDoctor.com

How to Cure a Pessimistic Outlook

Dear Communications Doctor,
I have always been somewhat of a pessimist. Is there any advice that you can give someone who sees the glass as half empty?
M.J. – Dallas

Dear M.J.
To me there are three kinds of people: optimists - those who see the glass as half full, pessimists – those who see the glass as half empty, and those who would argue until they are blue in the face as to whether there is a glass at all. "That's not glass, it's plastic! It's a tumbler!"

Fortunately, since like any other behavior, pessimism is learned, it can also be unlearned or changed. The good news is that in recognizing your pessimist outlook, you have already taken the first step to curbing this negative habit.

Like every behavior, pessimism carries with it a reward. Here's pessimist logic 101. "If I think good things are going to happen and they don't, I'll be disappointed. But, if I think things are not going to turn out right, and they do, I'll be surprised and happy. However, my happiness will be fleeting because in the back of my mind I'll still worry that something bad is going to happen to mess things up again."

Another reward comes in the form of the reassurance and nurturing offered by others in response to a pessimist's draining comments.

Pessimist: It's not going to work.
Optimist: Sure, it will. It worked before.
Pessimist: Just because it worked before, doesn't mean it's going to work this time.
Optimist: Look, we've got plenty of time and if we just pull together it will get done.
Pessimist: Ok, if you say so.

So what would happen if a pessimist's comments were met with equally pessimistic comments? The answer? Not much. controlling behaviors.

Pessimist: It's not going to work.
Optimist: I agree.
Pessimist: Just because it worked before, doesn't mean it's going to work this time.
Optimist: You're right.
Pessimist: Ok, if you say so.

To illustrate what a waste of time and how taxing a pessimistic outlook can be at work, I offer the following true story. Recently a close friend of mine who works at a local hospital shared that she asked one of her colleagues for help in taking some important paperwork to the lab. Later that day, she checked to see if the job was done. Instead of assuring her that the paperwork would be taken to the lab, her colleague began to complain about all the things she had to do and the many reasons why she hadn't taken the paperwork. After several minutes of listening to her say things like, "I'll never get all of these things done. It's ridiculous what they expect me to do around here. It will take me *forever* to get down there to the lab," my friend picked up the paperwork, and took it down to the lab herself. Five minutes later she returned and said to her colleague, "Seems like my five minutes and your forever are the same."

So how can one curb a pessimistic attitude? Again, the first step is to recognize that you that you have one. The next step is to train your brain to accept a more positive outlook. This is achieved by taking inventory of your internal dialogue or self-talk. Begin to notice the 1000 to 3000 words per minute you speak to yourself. When your thoughts are not of use or of benefit to you, tell yourself, "CANCEL." When you start this process you may need to say "Cancel," a lot.

Because your brain will continue to dialogue with itself, the next step is to substitute positive, affirming messages. In time, by stopping negative self-talk and by substituting with positive thoughts, you can develop a better outlook, leading to better relationships which will yield you a better life.

Susanne Gaddis, PhD, known as the Communications Doctor, is an acknowledged communications expert who has been speaking and teaching the art of effective and positive communication since 1989. Gaddis' workshops, seminars, and keynote presentations are packed with tips and techniques that can be immediately applied for successful results. Gaddis also provides quality training and executive coaching for organizations, corporations, and associations across the United States. For more information, call 919-933-3237 or visit www.CommunicationsDoctor.com.