

Special Webinar Series



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SCHOOL OF BUSINESS



Edmunson

From The Little Engine That Could to Norman Vincent Peale's The Power of Positive Thinking, we've all heard about the importance of positive thinking. But Janet Edmunson, president of JME Insight, has made a career out of it—talking about it, writing about it, and training people to be more positive.

Many workplaces today still manage with fear and negativity. But a positive workforce is a more productive workforce—and Edmunson will demonstrate how “positivity” can be achieved.

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Applying Positive Psychology To Build High-Performing Workplaces

Thursday, May 21, 12:30 to 1:30 p.m.

You Can Do It If You Think You Can

“You’ve got to accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, latch on to the affirmative and don’t mess with Mister In-Between.”
- Johnny Mercer

Janet Edmunson walks on the sunny side of the street. She is a silver lining, glass-half-full, I-think-I-can type whose product is “positivity.”

As a trainer, motivational speaker, writer, and health-promotion professional, she seeks to inspire positivity in others the way it was inspired in her by her late husband, **Charles Edmunson**, about whom she wrote a book, *Finding Meaning with Charles*, that focuses on her caregiving experience “in a way that uplifts and is positive.”

Edmunson believes a positive attitude can help individuals in work and in life, but can be especially powerful when it is instilled in the entire workforce. She will discuss how that can be accomplished during , **“Applying Positive Psychology To Build High-Performing Workplaces,”** a Special Webinar Series webinar to be held at 12:30 p.m. on **May 21, 2015. To register, [click here](#).**

As she researched positivity for her book, Edmunson found research concluding that a positive attitude can make a person not only more productive and happier, but healthier.

“If you think everything’s going to be OK, it doesn’t mean it necessarily will be,” she says, but people who are optimistic and positive have fewer colds and fewer heart attacks, and a positive attitude can even help those who have diabetes.

Research also shows that a positive attitude in the workplace can result in a positive attitude at home, while a positive attitude at home can carry through to the workplace.

Another conclusion of researchers is that positive expectations can yield positive results. In one study, Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson gave children in first and second grades IQ tests at the start of the school year. They told the teachers that the pupils who finished in the middle were the smartest in the class. At the end of the school year, they retested the class and found that the mediocre pupils had indeed become the class superstars, rising up to meet expectations.

She also cites a study by the Corporate Leadership Council showing that when companies emphasize the strengths of their employees, they perform at a level 30% above average and when they emphasize weaknesses, their performance decreases by 27%.

She also found from personal experience that a positive attitude helped her as a manager. Having served as director of prevention and wellness for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts before leaving in 2007 to start her consulting business, Edmunson says, "I always tried to be one of those positive, build-my-people-up leaders."

But her main source of inspiration was her husband, who died of a rare neurological disorder. Charles Edmunson served as vice president for manufacturing for Web Industries, Inc., in Westborough, Mass., but he saw his job as being "vice president of people."

"He was a phenomenal leader," she says. "He gave people the benefit of the doubt and, although he worked in a manufacturing environment, it didn't matter who you were. He believed in you, and in finding meaning and value in people."

Fostering Positivity

So what can you do to foster positivity in the workplace?

"When you have a team you're in charge of five days a week, you have a lot of opportunity to influence those people," Edmunson says. "People are fundamentally who they are, but they can learn ways that foster and gain strength, doing the things they like, enjoy, and are good at."

Focus on negative people.

One technique she recommends is to focus on employees who are negative and to try to identify and bring out their positive attributes. While employees who are already positive should be encouraged, those who are negative require special attention.

She remembers a team leader she worked with who was "very rigid and very critical," who used to make negative comments about other people's suggestions.

Edmunson found him difficult to work with, but "I did an attitude change. I asked myself, 'What qualities does he have that I admire?' I found that, in spite of being critical, he had a soft spot and took his two children on a humanitarian trip. When my husband died, he planted flowers at my home in his memory."

She found that by giving him clear expectations, and providing him with greater workplace freedom and security, he became more positive and more productive.

"Negativity is like a cancer," according to Edmunson. "It's easy to recognize and compliment all the good people. It's hard to do with the difficult person. That's who we need to focus on."

Change your point of view.

Sometimes, it's just a matter of perspective.

"You have to flip negativity," she says. "Ask people what they really want when they come complaining about what they don't want. Think about things from another point of view."

If you're driving your car and your brake light goes on, it's human instinct to think negatively and focus on the need to spend money on a mechanic, when you could instead be grateful that the brake light went on to warn you that your brakes are no longer safe and need to be repaired.

"We're built to go to the negative, but we don't want to stay there," she says. "Think how much happier and how much more productive we can be if we're positive."

Follow best practices that have worked.

What's worked in the past is likely to work again today. Edmunson suggests, "When you have a conflict and things are not going well, ask yourself, 'What's worked in the past and can I replicate some of that?'"

Working with emerging leaders at BP Oil in Chicago to address this way of flipping negativity, she found that a number of these young leaders were having trouble with getting their children to do their homework. These leaders were able to come up with strategies that worked in that past that they could now try again, ranging from finding a quiet space to work in to making them hot chocolate.

"All of this is part of our mind set," she says. "We need to rethink things in a different way. When we do, we create new connections in our brain."

Consider individual needs.

Sometimes people who seem negative are just introverted. Some people who have advanced technical skills, for example, may not have advanced people skills.

"When I do a training program, I give people who are introverted an opportunity to do some preparatory work, so they feel more confident," she says. "It gets them to feel a little more comfortable. I also try to provide a safe environment, such as a small group instead of a big group. The key is not to pre-judge them. Sometimes the introverts have the deepest understanding of an issue."

Hang on to your positivity.

Sometimes, a positive person may be working in an organization with a negative culture. Edmunson encourages working within your sphere of influence and spreading positivity among your fellow team members.

You may not be able to change the culture," she says. "If your positivity doesn't rub off on your team members, it may be time to move on."

"However," she adds, "you may be surprised to see the impact you can have." ■

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