

EQ CONNECTIONS

An Emotional Intelligence Newsletter by E.I. Assessments



“I ALWAYS LIKE TO LOOK ON THE OPTIMISTIC SIDE OF LIFE, BUT I AM REALISTIC ENOUGH TO KNOW THAT LIFE IS A COMPLEX MATTER.”

– Walt Disney

OPTIMISM:

Practicing Positivity

Written by

John J. Hughes

During tough, challenging times, do you find people being attracted to you to hear your opinion, outlook or point of view about the future? Are people seeking you out more today than usual? Do you find yourself helping others identify their needs and encouraging them to take action? If you answered YES to these questions then you would probably score very high on *Optimism* on the EQ-i 2.0.

These days as we adjust to the reality of COVID, the Emotional Intelligence skill of *Optimism* is needed by executives, managers, coaches and consultants. However, being optimistic needs to be balanced with *Empathy*, *Problem Solving* and, most importantly,

Reality Testing. When leaders are able to harness and align these Emotional Intelligence skills, they go beyond being positive and supportive of their people and actually become inspirational. They want their life experiences and actions to encourage and inspire others.

WHAT IS THE SKILL OF OPTIMISM?

I believe *Optimism* involves a person's ability to look beyond his or her current circumstance, continue to comprehend new information and construct a realistic action plan.

WHAT DOES OPTIMISM LOOK LIKE?

People who score high in *Optimism* on the EQ-i 2.0:

- have a high level of persistence to achieve a goal or an objective they believe they can accomplish it
- are very good at assessing situations and view current setbacks or impediments as temporary situations
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OPTIMISM & REALITY TESTING



The most effective leaders I have met and worked with have a strong balance between their ability to accurately analyze a situation, *Reality Testing*, and their skill to take people in a positive direction, *Optimism*. They can acknowledge the real difficulties of their current circumstance but will not concede to being helpless or powerless. These leaders believe in themselves, trust others and

understand that pessimistic thinking can create distractions.

When you consider positive thinking, do men or women score higher in *Optimism*? If you wanted a realistic, objective point of view, would you seek out a man or a woman? Do more men or women have that balance between *Optimism* and *Reality Testing*?

After reviewing the EQ-i data from **1,356** reports, it appears that **33%** of this group of

professionals (**288** women and **243** men) have that balance between *Optimism* and *Reality Testing*. Their objectivity is balanced with a strong commitment to achieving the goal.

It appears that neither gender scores higher in *Optimism*, since **27%** of this group (**191** women and **180** men) may have an inclination to be positive about an idea without having all of the necessary facts and information. There are individuals who approach life as all positive. Some people in this group might be natural cheerleaders who continue to applaud even when the team has lost the game and left the field.

The rest of the group, **40%** (**301** women and **243** men), prefer to lead or act primarily based on information. Some of these people like to really ask questions, probe and drill down into an issue until they uncover relevant information. I would not be surprised to learn if many of these people were lawyers, engineers or financial professionals since they all focus on reality and need objective information.

“DO NOT ANTICIPATE TROUBLE, OR WORRY ABOUT WHAT MAY NEVER HAPPEN. KEEP IN THE SUNLIGHT”

– Benjamin Franklin

THE OPTIMISM PITFALL

It was a phone call that no consultant enjoys. The client asked me to work with an executive, Bob, who was going to be removed from his current position and leadership was hoping to place him in another position within the corporation. Since he was considered to have high potential, the question was why he was failing.

Bob expected my call and was very enthusiastic to learn about his Emotional Intelligence skills. Actually, when I told him we would be meeting in person, his response was, “Awesome!” I sent him access to take the EQ-i and we scheduled a meeting at his office to discuss the results.

Based on success at headquarters, Bob was made the general manager of a new start up business



unit which was completely dependent upon the successful launch of their commercial website to take advantage of the holiday buying season.

Since this type of a position was new to him, Bob hired a consulting firm to implement the online strategy he inherited. Throughout the project, the consultants were positive, optimistic and reassuring. Even though Bob was missing all his deadlines and the launch was in danger, he remained confident and upbeat.

Bob was informed that he was going to be reassigned before we met in his office. He had not seen it coming. A more experienced executive stepped in and the first thing she did was fire the consulting firm.

I reviewed Bob's EQ-i report with him and it reflected low scores in *Reality Testing*, *Problem Solving*, *Empathy* and *Self-Regard*. This often means the client may not be process-oriented, know the right questions to ask or be a very good listener. Bob was not a confident executive.

While Bob had two very high EQ-i scores in *Flexibility* and *Optimism*, these strengths needed to be balanced with an equally high level of *Reality Testing*. Without the ability to be objective and to know the right questions to ask, Bob had become overly reliant on consultants who were failing and who had already been paid.

Bob's own, high *Emotional Self-Awareness* was letting him know his career could be derailed if he was unable to balance his *Flexibility* and *Optimism*. He was very open to a developmental suggestion. The recommendation I gave was for him to seriously consider studying and pursuing his Six Sigma Black Belt training and certification.

Bob needed to balance his naturally positive and optimistic outlook with data gathering and process mapping. I thought he would benefit from training in process management tools and techniques and then leading a few project teams. Bob was given too much responsibility very quickly. He was especially open to the Six Sigma idea and, as you would imagine, very enthusiastic.

“DIFFICULTIES ARE JUST THINGS TO OVERCOME.”

– Sir Ernst Shackleton

SHACKLETON: AN EXPEDITION IN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Researchers and historians often cite the connection between leadership and emotional intelligence which occurred 100 years ago in Antarctica. Once the Norwegian Roald Amundsen had discovered the South Pole, the final challenge for polar explorers was to cross the continent from end to end.

Sir Ernst Shackleton would organize and lead the British Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition with the crew of the ship, *Endurance*, into uncharted territory. However, rather than leading an expedition that was supposed to be completed in a few weeks, the journey began a test of survival for 19 months.



Instead of the landing they had hope for, the *Endurance* became trapped and surrounded by an ice floe on January 18, 1915. Gradually, the ice continued to engulf the ship building up increased pressure on all sides. Shackleton and his crew settled into the *Endurance*, which became their home for the next nine months. On the night of Oct 27, Shackleton gave to order to abandon ship as it became uninhabitable due to the crushing pressure.

Shackleton and his 27-crew members would survive by establishing camps on the ice floes where they applied creative survival techniques. Using the three lifeboats from the *Endurance*, Shackleton set sail for Elephant Island on April 9, 1916 since the spring thaw began to break up the ice floes making them unsafe. Four days later, they arrived at Elephant Island, a barren, inhospitable stretch of land 800 miles away from the nearest port.

While Elephant Island offered minimal protection, the decreasing food supply required a plan of action to save the crew. On April 24, after refitting one of the lifeboats to withstand a voyage in the open ocean, Shackleton set sail with five crewmembers to the whaling station on South Georgia, 800 miles away. The 22 crewmembers remained waiting on Elephant Island, under the leadership of first mate Frank Wild, while maintaining the discipline, routine and camaraderie instilled in them by Shackleton in order to survive under increasingly harsh conditions.

By May 20, Shackleton with two crewmembers reached the whaling station in South Georgia where he immediately set about making plans to rescue his crew. After three attempts, due to the weather and increasing ice floes, Shackleton reached the Elephant Island men on August 1, just 14 weeks after setting sail.

When you think of the knowledge, skills and attitude needed to survive such an ordeal, *Optimism*, *Reality Testing* and *Problem Solving* all play a major role in balancing the facts with the possibilities. As you read the description of the expedition in Alfred Lansing's book *Endurance: Shackleton's Incredible Voyage*, you get the sense of Shackleton's unique leadership style in the way he selected, prepared and lead his crew under constant life-threatening circumstances.

INCREASING YOUR OPTIMISM

I consider one of the best articles on increasing your optimism is "Learning Optimism with the 24x3 Rule" by Anthony K. Tjan which can be found in the July 2011 issue of *Harvard Business Review*. This simple and powerful tool requires a level of consciousness and practice in order to use it effectively.

You have noticed that experts, some managers and really smart people can be very quick to shoot down a new idea. When leaders are not open to suggestions and immediately critique new ideas, it can have a stifling on creative thinking. If you are a leader, quite often, it is not about increasing your *Optimism*. Rather, it's about decreasing your immediate negative response when you hear new ideas or information.

The article suggests the next time you hear a new idea and have a negative thought or reaction, give yourself 24 seconds before actually responding. By waiting 24 seconds, it allows you to truly listen to what you heard rather than just delivering a negative response. The next levels are waiting 24 minutes or 24 hours to respond which give you more time to consider the possibilities of a new idea.

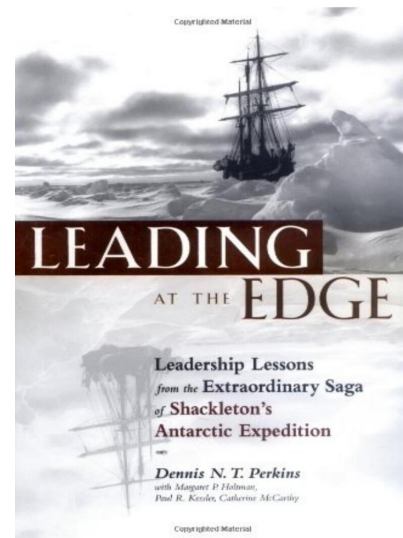


Instead of trying to be more positive, perhaps you and the people you lead would benefit if your response to, for example, new COVID news was not immediately negative. If you are a leader and know that your responses tend to be negative, you might find this 24x3 rule to be a useful tool.

Remember, negative emotions, like fear and anger, can be contagious. Effective leaders begin their day with a positive outlook and understand how to manage their perspective as the world changes.

OPTIMISM AND LEADERSHIP

The book that I find most useful in applying some of the lessons was written by Dennis N. T. Perkins entitled *Leading at the Edge: Leadership Lessons from the Extraordinary Saga of Shackleton's Antarctic Expedition*. In the end, there was something inspiring and unique about Shackleton's style as he did have a very strong ability to connect with, to lead and to take care of his crewmembers.



“BOTH OPTIMISTS AND PESSIMISTS CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIETY. THE OPTIMIST INVENTS THE AIRPLANE, THE PESSIMIST THE PARACHUTE.”

– George Bernard Shaw

NEXT ISSUE:
Issue # 17 The COVID Gap