

Is it Positive Thinking or Hope and Dedication?

There is an over-abundance of discussion about the importance of positive thinking today. Books, videos, sermons, and conferences are devoted to the untapped power of optimism. If you believe that you can achieve your goals, then you will attain them. However, if you fail to believe, then your goals will never be realized.

Now to be fair, I don't believe that even the greatest optimist will claim that you can do "anything" merely by the power of optimism. A small, slow, uncoordinated man is unlikely to excel in playing professional basketball.

Possessing an optimistic and positive disposition is certainly beneficial in many ways. Who would not prefer to spend time with the optimist rather than a pessimist?

But personally, I am somewhat skeptical that optimism is the primary factor in accomplishing your dreams. I believe that other factors are more integral for success.

Years ago, I began a project that I knew would take several years to complete. Unlike a tryout for a professional sports team or even a run at political office (where few can actually succeed) my goal was attainable.

I was certain that I possessed the talent to accomplish it, and I was positive I would achieve my goal. With one hundred percent certainty of success, I proceeded day after day, for years, pursuing my dream. After work, late into the night, and even during spare time on the weekends I persisted in my endeavor, never questioning the inevitability of my success.

Yet, several years later I was torn from my dreams and dragged back into sad reality. My optimism was betrayed, my goal went unrealized, and my confidence had proven inconsequential.

Of course, I am not the first person to fail to achieve their dream. However, that is not the reason I question positive thinking. It was something else that happened that opened my eyes.

During that time, my boss assigned me an unusual project. The assignment involved something that had never been achieved before in our office (or building). It also necessitated a process that was hardly my specialty – something that I had not done in over a decade. In addition, I did not believe the project was technically achievable.

I stared at my boss in silence for a few moments, and then questioned her as to why she assigned this project to me. She smiled and said she felt that I could do it. I expressed doubts about my abilities and the achievability of the project. She told me to take it one step at a time and see where it led me.

This was a project that I did not want to do, and would require a great deal of work for a goal that I believed was unachievable. So, I quickly developed a bad attitude towards it, grumbled and complained for weeks while my work led me nowhere. Yet, despite my pessimism, and continuous setbacks, I continued to do my job.

A few months later, the project was largely completed, and a success. I was amazed at what I created, and demonstrated it with a beaming smile of satisfaction to my superiors. I achieved something that surpassed anything that I thought possible, and I still consider that project my greatest technical success.

I also accomplished it without any optimism.

The key was not optimism, confidence, or faith. It was rooted in my attitude that when I was assigned a project I did it to the best of my abilities. Whether or not I wanted to do it, or possessed the talent to do it, was irrelevant. I was dedicated to completing it, and I only hoped that it could be done.

Optimism and a positive attitude are fine attributes. As I mentioned, people enjoy engaging with those who exhibit such wonderful traits. However, you do not need either to achieve your dreams. Dedication fueled by hope will get the job done just as often.

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