



# “Snap Out of It??”

Here’s how to put a positive spin on negativity.

BY LYNN HOMISAK, PRT

A recent conversation with a client prompted me to write about this topic. She confessed that although having a successful practice, she found herself slipping into intervals of negativity. And while she knew that staying positive was the healthier path to take, dealing with daily challenges—staff, finances, insurance, regulations, etc.—made the road ahead for her a dark and lonely one. In fact, too often it felt downright scary. The advice she received (from a loved one?) was to “Just snap out of it!”

Imagine that! With all due respects to her “loved one”, and just for the record, those offering “snap out of it” as a resolve to unhealthy pessimism, know little about the emotional suffering and often physical reactions to these stressors.

I am not in any position to tackle the psychology or physiology of negativity. I only know it exists, and de-

pending on the energy we give it along with our individual endurance to it, everyone tends to handle it differently. It is hardly a *one way fits all* solution.

Those who give it oxygen allow it to consume their work, to the point of how they treat others and arrive at key

can feel uncontrollable and yes, even terrifying. It’s like a tornado, swirling round and round, blowing things out of proportion, and hurting everyone in its path along the way—self, staff, patients, even family.

Two things are for sure: one, my

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decisions. Some sufferers completely shut down as a result. Others learn how to hide the pain with a feigned smile or glib comment. As difficult as it is at times, our well-being rests on the choices we make for ourselves; and in each case, these choices have consequences, good and bad. In the end, that which we choose to focus on becomes our reality.

When negativity grabs hold, it

client is far from being alone, and two, negativity does not discriminate. We all face some form of it or another in all walks of life and to various degrees. Even so, feeling overwhelmed is not an easy thing to admit. In many cases, sufferers will tell you that the first critical step to coping with a negative mindset is by

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far the hardest one. That is, acknowledging there is a problem.

With the problem du jour out in the open for her, it was time to make the decision to move forward; find a way out. Much as we all want to be “rescued”, she understood no one could ‘pluck out’ the negativity for her. So, after we reviewed some basic countering techniques together, she was mentally ready to get back in the proverbial driver’s seat of her life and steer herself towards a more positive attitude. She realized that although she would likely face some recurring pockets of negativity along the way, she was determined to learn how to confront them head on. A means of self-survival.

If you find yourself in a similar mindset to her, these same techniques might help. No doubt, some will be familiar. Some you may have already tested. They are in no particular order, so pick those to which you feel you can easily commit. Then put your best effort into making them happen. As always, the key is to start small. No need to eat the whole elephant in one bite. Compartmentalize.

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Or, as Mark Twain observes:

*“The secret of (progress) is getting started. The secret of getting started is breaking your complex overwhelming tasks into small manageable tasks and starting on the first one.”*

## 1. Take Care of Yourself

Although eating more nutrient-dense foods, engaging in routine physical exercise, getting plenty of rest, and drinking water sounds like repetitious rhetoric, it is not. These are necessary, fundamental building blocks of health and your health is EVERYTHING! End of story.

There is also a direct link between your emotions and your health, so neglecting or falling short of a heart-healthy routine proves detrimental to both mind and body, feeding stress, anxiety, physical breakdown, and

agreed to try to replace each negative thought in the future with a positive one. Of course, no one will ever be able to eliminate every negative thought. Finding the positive spin on things as a way of shifting our

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**Remind yourself of your purpose and why you chose this career in the first place. What were your goals?**

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even depression. If you need assistance formulating a reasonable wellness program, doctors, health specialists, and coaches are there to help. Don’t wait until a serious ailment hits or it is too late to do anything about it. The old adage, “It is better to prevent than to cure” supports taking simple measures to prevent it while we still can. Take care of YOU.

## 2. Try to Replace Negative Thoughts with Positive Ones

Just yesterday, I had a difficult conversation with my mom, who is currently undergoing chemo treat-

mindset is a step in the right direction. Positive Mind. Positive Vibes. Positive Life.

All it takes is one small positive thought each morning to shape an entire day. Mom agrees.

## 3. Appreciate Your Accomplishments, Your Success, Your Relationships

My client must have been doing something right. Her successful practice was proof of that. For the rest of us, it helps to assess exactly what actions we have taken that have resulted in our own successful outcomes. Appreciate and take pride in these accomplishments. Remind yourself of your purpose and why you chose this career in the first place. What were your goals? Did you achieve them, and have you celebrated these achievements? Stop and analyze what it is that draws your patients to you? Do you offer something out of the ordinary that other practitioners do not? Has this served you well? If you are feeling overburdened, stop to consider why, then what can be done to try to mitigate it.

Continually improving communication skills to strengthen relationships—at home and at work—is a significant game changer. Lean on these relationships for uplifting support.

Fully engage with your patients by taking the time to initiate conversations that allow you to get to know them better. Listen intently. Recognize, too, that backing up the schedule with prolonged chitchat is counterproductive. The better doable option is to talk and work simultaneously so you can finish on time and keep patient flow intact.

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Spend quality time with your staff. Say good morning and thank you, and mean it. Your position as “the boss” is an important one and key to the success of this role is staff feedback. Take

time for outside activities and responsibilities. Work is not life. It is only what we do to help us underwrite some of the things we would *like* to do with our life. Our workplace should represent one of the places where we derive pleasure. It’s the

essential tasks that could easily be delegated to qualified staff?

Work-life balance is a delicate dance that needs to be time managed. Our careers are important, it’s true. So are other slices of the pie. Depriving ourselves of activities that make us happy can have a detrimental effect on our attitude. Take charge of your schedule and make some basic modifications, including time-outs to re-energize and refuel. Take a vacation. You owe yourself some R&R. Don’t spend too much time thinking about it. This is one thing you can (and should) take command of, so as the expression goes... “Just do it!”

## **Spend quality time with your staff. Say good morning and thank you, and mean it.**

random patient and staff surveys to help you recognize your strengths (and weaknesses) as a doctor and a manager. Feed on that which is true, not just on what you *think* is true so you can make a difference where you need to.

### **4. Balance Work and Home Life**

We know we are physically nourished by the foods we eat. However, to satisfy our mental health, we also need non-food sources of nourishment to balance and satisfy our hunger for life. These activities are referred to in the nutrition world as “Primary Food”.

What is it you hunger for or feel passionate about? If we were to imagine our life in a pie chart illustration, divided into equal categories, it might include: career, spirituality, relationships, exercise, family time, social life, personal growth/hobbies, and education. Even if you re-define and prioritize your own segment labels, it’s easy to see that giving one slice of the pie a disproportionate amount of time and effort than allotted means cheating another.

An imbalance is inevitable if work seems to monopolize more time than it should, leaving little to no

people who don’t enjoy what they do that spread unsolicited negativity.

If work has become nothing more than a time hog and stress monster in your mind, identify what and where reasonable changes can be made. Days running late, too many hours at the office? Certain to upset the balance. Are you resentful of that? Is that due to inefficient scheduling

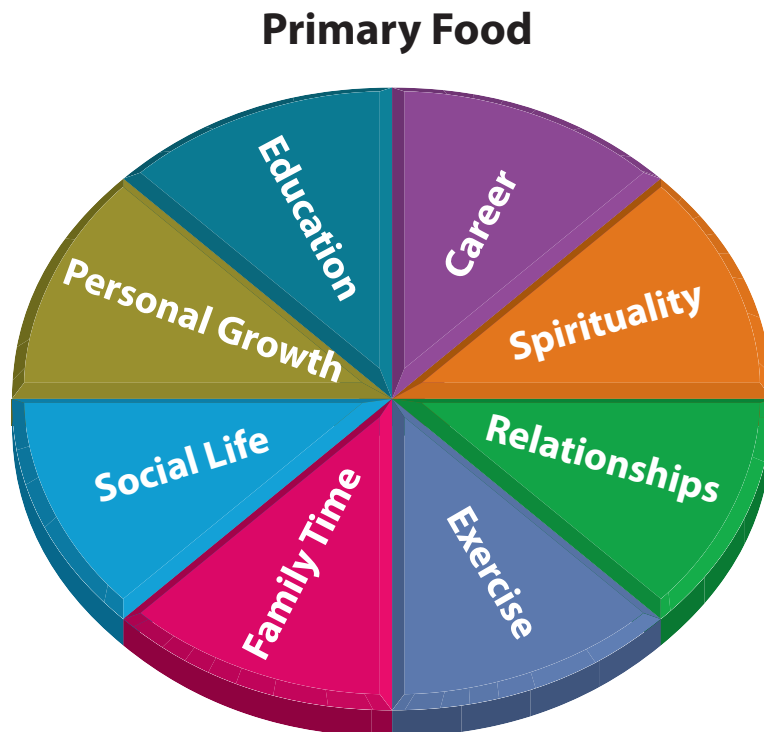
### **5. Surround Yourself with Positive, “Like-Minded?” People**

There is much to be said for Anne Frank’s remark, “*whoever is happy, will make others happy too.*” There is no denying that surrounding yourself with positive-thinking people leads to more of the same. Truth be told, I never really thought that working with “like-minded” people was not a good thing. Then I realized that “like-minded” and “positive” are not necessarily one and the same.

It could be argued that having a workplace filled with like-minded people is comfortable, compatible, and harmonious. It just might not be all that productive. If everyone agrees on everything, all the time, it becomes monotonous. Sure, there will likely be fewer arguments, less confrontation, and fewer opposing opinions.

And while it may feel easy-peasy to live in that “one mindset/singular point of view” unanimous environment, it has a tendency to result in fewer “out of the box” ideas, less improvement, and minimal progress.

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techniques? Not sticking to a sensible schedule? Arriving and starting late? Procrastination? Too much chit-chat? Unnecessary interruptions? Unproductive staff? Unexplained delays? Inappropriate telephone, email, and internet time? Charting? Doing un-

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The intent of a group approach to problem-solving—which, by the way, should include both doctor and staff,—should be to improve, not merely accept, the status quo. This can be accomplished by openly exchanging ideas that align with the values, mission, and vision of the practice. It is through these types of group discussions that individuals learn how to communicate and share innovative ideas as well as have mutual respect and kindness for each other as persons and co-workers. We need more of these qualities in our world today!

Understandably, a more diverse team is bound to have debates and different views. Don't be fooled. Just because there are differences in culture and experiences doesn't mean these individuals can't also reach out, get along, and be open to one another's perspective.

Let's say, for example, some members of the group cite legitimate reasons why an outdated policy is no longer functional within the practice. Void of discussion, they can all agree to sit back and go with the flow because "that's the way it has

might only be a temporary fix, it is worth a try.

## 6. Smile More

Did you know that children, on average, smile more than four hundred times a day? Adults, not so much. It is kind of sad if you think about it. Is it possible we outgrow smiles the more we age? We know that smiling releases serotonin, a major neurotransmitter, responsible for stimulating happy thoughts. Are we restricting our own supply of this "feel-good" chemical?

frown upside down and make a staffer, a patient, even yourself feel a little happier. Even a bit more positive? If you're really feeling it, go ahead... LOL, LYAO, and FOTFL. Let's convince children that adults can smile too!

## 7. Take Doable Action

What better time than now to ask yourself—*If I find myself slipping into a negative state of mind, am I willing and able to change it?* If the answer is yes, then creating a more positive state of mind is indeed possible.

In addition to the suggestions

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**Consider some other undemanding, albeit significant and life-altering, actions you can take.**

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If all it takes is a genuine smile to get the positive vibes rolling, what is holding us back? A genuine smile involves ALL facial muscles, not only the mouth. In other words, a convincing, not a pretend, smile. There is a difference.

Here's a really, really fancy yoga move I learned on YouTube. No need

mentioned above, consider some other undemanding, albeit *significant* and *life-altering*, actions you can take.

- Find more humor in life. It's there! Think Lucille Ball, Ralph Kramden, Jerry Seinfeld. They all seem to have a classic gift for making a bad situation one we can laugh along with. Recall the story of Patch Adams—a perfect example of how boosting a patient's morale through laughter can even promote positive healing. We would all do better to add more humor in our lives. It's not always easy to laugh at yourself. It does soften you, though.

Several years ago, immediately following a lecture I gave in Texas, I exited the room and headed straight into the ladies' restroom. Little did I know that in my hurry, I forgot to take my lav mic off. (haha "lav" mic: lavatory mic?) Can you see where this is going?

During my brief absence, the next speaker's presentation was interrupted by some "rustling" noises—the flush of a toilet and running water—heard over the sound system. The speaker quickly paused his lecture, giving the audience time to take in what they heard.

As I was about to re-enter the lecture room, I heard a loud roar of laughter come from behind the doors.

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always been done". This negative response results in zero forward motion. *On the other hand*, they can initiate a healthier, inclusive dialogue for change that can take a practice to the next level of productivity and profitability. In any business, those are considered constructive, positive attributes.

If allowing this forum of alternate views is not your cup of tea, there are other initiatives that can help to create a "comfortable" positive environment. Simply surround yourself instead with photos and music you enjoy, better lighting and color, or post a daily encouraging quote for all to see. Although it

to get on the floor. This exercise in muscle tension can be done anywhere and as often as possible. Engage the two corners of your mouth and gently lift them up towards your ears. See how simple? Hardly any effort at all. It does take more muscles to frown—about forty-seven of them—and only thirteen to smile. So there you have it. If we all tried smiling more often, we might not take everything so seriously. Certainly not to the point of Defcon-1 negativity.

Pause for a moment. Can you even imagine the possibility of living in a world with more smiles? You will be surprised how a genuine smile is contagious. It can effortlessly turn a

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My husband, who was present and, in an effort to prevent further embarrassment, ran towards me and turned my mic off. Too little, too late. What had this audience heard!?

Thankful that my bathroom visit

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was not more auditorily graphic, and bearing a very red face, I bravely walked back into the lecture room, where I was met with continued guffawing and even a standing ovation! Sadly, the latter was not for my lecture; rather, a “thank-you” for providing this audience with some un-

expected humor. It was only after one audience member shouted out, “We were just glad to hear that you washed your hands!” that I made my peace with it all. Hilarious.

- Lastly, let your keyboard remind you to Ctrl, Alt, Del and realize that we can Control, Alter, and Delete our way of thinking.

Take **control** of our thoughts because what we think, we become. Think negative, feed pessimism. Think positive, feed optimism. Finding a positive path forward only becomes clearer and achievable with the understanding that we alone control the direction of our lives.

**Alter** our thinking. Instead of grumbling that the grass is always greener on the other side, maybe we should instead be looking down at the green grass growing under our own feet. Not green enough? Water it!

**Delete** and defeat negative energy by approaching the start of each day with appreciation and hopefulness. Enter the gratefulness list. Writing down things we are thankful for each day, including little heartwarming incidents, is a simple exercise that reminds us of who and what is important in our lives.

Turning a negative mindset into a positive one is challenging, to say the least. Again, depending on the severity, it can take a lot of intentional positive self-talk, emotional resilience, and the internal fortitude to follow some helpful guidelines. In more intense circumstances, professional help may be needed to turn things around. If anyone thinks otherwise...**JUST SNAP OUT OF IT! PM**

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