



Episode 32: One word to help you stay positive

Welcome to In the Right Direction podcast, where we believe you get to choose what's on your plate, you can manage the overwhelm, and that change is possible. I'm your host, Deb Elbaum, and I'm here to share insights and strategies to increase your happiness, one baby step at a time. Let's dive in.

Hi everyone, it's Deb. Here are today's questions: Are you someone who puts a lot of pressure on themselves to get everything done, and done well? Or do you treat yourself kindly, thinking more positively about all the things you're working on?

Personally, I tend to be hard on myself, even though I know that it's not helpful for my thinking. After all, when our brains are below the line in that place of hopelessness, fear, or frustration they're not as able to do their best thinking.

That's the irony. We want to achieve, we put pressure on ourselves, and too much pressure stresses our prefrontal cortex and impedes our effective thinking. It can cause a vicious cycle.

Can you relate?

The good news is that there's a way to shift a negative thinking pattern to an upwards and more positive thinking process. The even better news is that making this shift is easy. It involves one word we can intentionally use.

One word can help us tap into more expansive thinking and refocus our thoughts in a more positive direction.

That word is opportunity.

The word opportunity is almost magical in its ability to help us think and stay more positive.

Using this word to reframe our thinking helps our brain shift from constricted and worried thinking to more creative and productive thinking. The great thing about the word opportunity is that it's easy to put into practice. It's easy to use for yourself, to shift how you think and feel, as well as for coaching others, to help them think and feel differently.

Here's a personal example.

Toward the end of each month, my brain starts to think about what I'll write for my upcoming newsletter, which comes out at the beginning of every month.

I don't usually have a clear topic ready, so when I start to think about what I'll write, my inner dialogue goes something like this:

Oh, no, another newsletter is coming up. What am I going to write about? I have to come up with a topic. I have to find a photo. I have to make it interesting.

I feel that pressure in my gut and in my brain, as my initial thoughts are that it's going to be an unpleasant chore that I have to and need to do.

These phrases have to and need to clue us in that we're starting to fall below the line into more negative thinking.

If I want to think more positively about writing my newsletter – and remember, choosing a new way of thinking is a choice! – I can deliberately reframe my thinking about the opportunities I have.

I can coach myself and ask, what are some opportunities I have with creating this newsletter?

As my brain ponders that question, it's invited to shift how it's thinking.

Here's how that inner dialogue would sound.

Well, I have an opportunity to ask someone how my column can help them with a current tricky situation. I have an opportunity to walk around my neighborhood to take a photo to put in the newsletter. I have an opportunity to think about all the books I've read recently and choose one I really liked to share in the What I'm Reading Section. And I have an opportunity to imagine someone reading the newsletter and finding a helpful idea.

Do you hear how that word opportunity dramatically opens up my thinking? It helps open up the tasks on my brain from perfectionist have to dos to ways to bring fun and purpose into the work at hand.

There are always opportunities hidden in the challenges and situations we're facing and thinking about. Using the word opportunity reminds us that we get to see a situation through a different perspective, to bring in more joy, learning, and meaning.

Using the word opportunity to reframe a situation brings ease to the brain and relaxes our body. When our body and brain relax, our thoughts can flow into more effective thinking.

That's an example of how you can coach yourself. Let's talk about how to coach others to help them see the opportunity in the midst of uncertainty and chaos.

A leader recently shared with me that his organization was feeling a bit chaotic. They're having a lot of turnover and the directives from above seem to change with minimal explanation. Although he wants to support his team, he himself feels overwhelmed.

That's the situation. As a coach, I hear the difficulties – and I hear lots of opportunity.

I said to the leader, let's talk about the opportunities you have, right now.

What are your opportunities around managing your stress? He answered, I have an opportunity to make sure to exercise to sweat out my stress. I also have an opportunity to ask others how they're taking care of themselves during this time.

In our conversation, we discussed other opportunities in front of him. For example:

- the opportunity to clarify and communicate to his team what they can count on him for during this time
- the opportunity to advocate for resources for his team
- the opportunity to network outside the company, in case he wants to look for a new role
- the opportunity to bring lots of gratitude to his team and colleagues

As we identified and named opportunities, his energy shifted, and he felt more empowered and in control, even in this uncertain situation.

That's the power of opportunity.

To take it one step further, I invited him to coach his team and ask them about the opportunities they see during this time. I suggested he first set context and give some examples. That's because when we do something different from what those around us expect, we have an opportunity to share our new approach and thought process. Otherwise, the brains around us go on alert and make up their own, usually incorrect, stories.

After setting context, he can pose some coaching questions. Here are some examples. He could ask his team: Where's an opportunity for us to communicate more internally and externally? What do we have an opportunity to think more deeply about? What's our opportunity for bringing more connection and fun to our group?

The word opportunity is powerful. My clients who adopt it in their language share with me that it significantly helps them think more positively, both for themselves and when working with others.

Let's bring this to you.

Where do you have an opportunity to bring the word opportunity to your life and leadership?

Think of an aspect of your life where your thinking is full of pressured have tos and need tos, and then ask yourself, what is one opportunity I have with this? What's another? And another?

See how your thinking expands, and see what new thoughts surface that you might then be able to act on.

Thank you so much for listening and being part of my community. Here's an opportunity and ask I have of you. Will you please forward this podcast to someone who could use help with thinking more positively? I greatly appreciate it. And if you need help with your thinking and communicating, please email me at Deb@DebElbaum.com. I'm here to help you create your best self at home and at work, so that you're confident you're moving in the right direction for you.

Until next time!