

# Living a long and positive life

A friend of mine died the other day. He was 102, and had lived an amazing life. I've only known him for 12 years, but one day during those years, I asked him what his secret was to a long and productive life.

"Keep smiling," he said.

Initially, I thought I had misunderstood him, or that he had misunderstood me. Now, after all these years, I'm convinced that he was giving me his secret.

Keep smiling.

Over the years I've been writing this feature, at least five times, research has cropped up that all says the same thing: positive people live longer than negative people, and have fewer illnesses -- or illnesses of a lesser severity -- than those with negative outlooks.

It's not hard to realize why this might be the case. When you take a positive outlook toward the world, and your place in the world, you're less likely to have large amounts of stress. You're more hopeful, so you tend to take better care of yourself. You're more outgoing, so you tend to spend more time with friends and family. You're more loving, and attract more love -- and love itself is a powerful medicine.

In effect, having a positive outlook on life can be a powerful drug to keep us living longer, happier, and with a greater degree of health.

That never means that positive people don't have problems -- in fact, problems are one of the signs that you are alive. All of us have challenges in our lives, and all of us have problems of one sort or another. Disease can strike anyone, and eventually, both the positive and the negative people are going to kick the bucket.

That's just a part of life -- life has challenges.

But the positive people around us are more equipped to deal with those

challenges, I believe. Positive people are more likely to see solutions, and less likely to throw in the towel at the first sign of trouble. Positive people are going to believe that life can change for the better, and that they will make it through whatever challenge they have encountered.

Years ago, I spent a few hours in a chemotherapy treatment room. I was amazed at the attitudes of those people who were in the room for treatment. Oncology, by its very nature, carries its challenges and setbacks -- but in that room, everyone was upbeat, and although I wouldn't have characterized most of them as happy (except for a few people who stopped by to say hello), they were almost all positive.

Positive thinking is a therapy that we cannot afford to be without -- and it's something that can be learned by anyone, no matter how old or young you might be. It's a habit, just as brushing your teeth, and any habit can be learned. We can develop the ability to think in positive directions, look for the positive opportunities around us, and view life through a positive set of filters, no matter what our background, or our experiences.

It's common for the cynics around us to decide that people "can't change." A woman I used to work with would say that: "People are the way they are," she would say, "and that's the way they are going to stay."

Well, I never believed that woman about that. Sure, people gain basic personality traits while they're growing up, and some scientists suggest that some may be genetically based. But the habit of thinking positively is something that can be learned, and put into our personalities, just the same as we learn other positive habits, such as seat belt usage, personal grooming, driving safety, exercise, or healthy living.

Living a positive life is an option for each of us -- and the varied benefits that can come our way when we live positively are many, indeed.

Just remember the words of my friend Joseph. If you want to live a wonderful life, then "keep smiling."

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