

RESILIENCE TOOL: WHAT ARE YOU THINKING?

Please note: This tool uses an informal approach to assessing positive and negative thinking, designed to help you “zero in” on SMARTER approaches to attracting the life that is your potential. It has not been validated through controlled scientific tests, therefore results should be treated as indicative and interpreted with common sense.

The tool is based on Martin Seligman’s theory that individuals have a default style of explaining events. Seligman says we explain events using three basic dimensions of Permanence, Pervasiveness and Personalization. **For each statement below, circle the numerical value that most speaks to you.** Notice that the numerical values are in different order for some questions (12345 or 54321).

I tend to think like this question...					
Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	
1. When my boss asks to speak with me, I instinctively assume he or she wants to discuss a problem or give me negative feedback.					5 4 3 2 1
2. When I experience a real difficulty at work or home, other aspects of my life tend to be painted with the same negative brush.					5 4 3 2 1
3. When I experience a setback, I tend to believe that the obstacle will endure for the long-term (e.g., “The funding did not come through, so I guess that means they hate the project. All that work for nothing...”).					5 4 3 2 1
4. When a team I am on is functioning poorly, I believe the cause is short-term and has a straightforward solution (e.g., “We are not working well, if we can fix [_____] we will do better!”).					1 2 3 4 5
5. When I am not chosen for an assignment I really want, I believe that I just do not have the skills they are looking for right now, as opposed to thinking that I am generally unskilled.					1 2 3 4 5
6. When something happens that I do not like or appreciate, I can tend to conclude that the cause is widespread in nature and will continue to plague me (e.g., “My assistant did not ‘cc’ me on that email she sent to my boss. Administrative assistants are all out to prove how much smarter they are than their supervisors.”).					5 4 3 2 1
7. When I perform very well on an assignment, I believe that it is because I am generally talented and smart, as opposed to thinking I am good in that one very specific area.					1 2 3 4 5
8. When I receive a reward or recognition, I tend to figure that luck or fate played more of a role than my actual work or skill (e.g., “They asked me to be the keynote speaker at the conference next year. I guess the other guys were all busy.”).					5 4 3 2 1

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9. When I come up with a really good idea, I am surprised by my creativity. I figure it is my lucky day and caution myself not to get used to the feeling.					5 4 3 2 1
10. When something bad happens, I see the contributions that everyone made to the mistake, as opposed to thinking that I am incompetent and to blame.					1 2 3 4 5
11. After winning an award/recognition/contract, I believe it is because the competition is not as good as I am (e.g., "We won that large contract against two strong competitors. We are simply better than they are.").					1 2 3 4 5
12. As the leader, when my team completes a project, I tend to attribute the success to the hard work and dedication of the team members, as opposed to my skilled leadership.					5 4 3 2 1
13. When I make a decision that proves to be successful, it is because I have expertise on that particular subject and have analyzed the problem well, as opposed to being generally a strong decision-maker.					5 4 3 2 1
14. When I achieve a long term and personally challenging goal, I congratulate myself and think about all the skills I used to be successful.					1 2 3 4 5
15. When I do not get a second interview, I believe I am just too young or old. I might as well give up.					5 4 3 2 1
Total					

Score Interpretation

My score overall is: _____ out of 75

Score Comment

15-30

Yikes! It must feel as if there is a rain cloud that hangs overhead all day. You have gotten into the habit of seeing things as your fault, and you have learned to give up your control in many situations. Taking this quiz is the first step toward turning your pessimism around. Complete the rest of the assessment to see what category you scored highest and lowest. Start now!

31-51

You try to be optimistic and positive, however some situations get the better of you. Identify your triggers for negative thinking and use the Rational Thinking Exercises mentioned later in this article to become naturally more optimistic.

51-75

Great job! You have a generally positive and optimistic outlook on life. You do not take things personally and you are able to see that setbacks will not ruin the rest of your life. If you do have any negative thoughts, find out how to deal with them later in this article.

TURN NEGATIVES INTO POSITIVES

The first step in changing negative thinking is to be aware of it. For many of us, negative thinking is a bad habit—and we may not even know we are doing it! Consider this example: The guy on the subway who just made a face is surely directing his behavior at you. When the receptionist does not greet you in the morning, you must have done something to anger her... again! You go straight to the coffee machine because it is Monday morning and you just know you will be solving problems until lunchtime. When you finally get to your desk, your assistant is waiting for you. “*Oh no,*” you think. “*What has he done now?*”

If you are feeling bad after reading this, imagine how it would feel to surround yourself with that much negative energy. Then ask yourself if this is the way you tend to think in your own life.

Dr. Martin Seligman, who has been described as America's most influential psychologist, has done extensive research on thought patterns. In particular, he looks at the impact of an optimistic versus pessimistic outlook on life and success.

Seligman says we explain events using three basic dimensions of Permanence, Pervasiveness and Personalization, with optimistic people on one end of the scale and pessimistic people on the other. Let's look at how you rated yourself on these three dimensions.

Permanence, Pervasiveness and Personalization Scores

Permanence (Questions 3, 4, 9, 11, 15)

Question	Score
Question 3	
Question 4	
Question 9	
Question 11	
Question 15	
Total	

Total Out of 25

19-25: High optimism Does not think that the event will last forever or that it's ongoing

15-19: Situational optimism Sometimes thinks that the event may be permanent

14 or less: Low optimism Thinks that the event will never end

Your score shows how much you believe that something you are experiencing is either permanent or temporary. A low score implies that you think bad times will carry on forever. A high score shows confidence that you will be able to get things back on course quickly.

Pessimist: I lost my job and I will never find one as good again. No point even looking!

Optimist: I lost my job. Thank goodness there are other opportunities I can explore!

PERMANENCE, PERVASIVENESS, PERSONALIZATION SCORES

Pervasiveness (Questions 2, 5, 6, 7, 13)

Question	Score
Question 2	
Question 5	
Question 6	
Question 7	
Question 13	
Total	

Total Out of 25

19-25: High optimism Does not think that the event will impact all areas of one's life

15-19: Situational optimism Sometimes thinks that the event will impact all areas of one's life

14 or less: Low optimism Often thinks that the event will impact all areas of one's life

Your score shows how far you believe that situational factors cause an effect, as opposed to the view that the effect is evidence of more universal factors at work. A low score shows that you tend to think that if you have experienced a problem in one place, you will experience that problem wherever you go.

Pessimist: I lost my job. Companies are all the same: all they care about is money. I do not know why I bother putting in any effort at all.

Optimist: I lost my job. The company has to reinvent itself to stay competitive. Thankfully, I learned some great transferable skills!

Personalization (Questions 1, 8, 10, 12, 14)

Question	Score
Question 1	
Question 8	
Question 10	
Question 12	
Question 14	
Total	

Total Out of 25

19-25: High optimism Does not blame oneself entirely for the outcome of an event

15-19: Situational optimism Sometimes blames oneself for the outcome of an event

14 or less: Low optimism Often blames oneself for the outcome of an event

Your score shows how far you believe that *something about you* influenced the outcome, as opposed to *something external* to you causing it. A low score indicates that you tend to blame yourself for bad things, rather than attributing the cause to more general factors.

Pessimist: I lost my job. If I had been a decent employee, they would have found a new job for me.

Optimist: I lost my job. I gave it my all, however they just cannot use my skill set right now.

NEXT STEPS – RE-SHAPE YOUR THINKING

Re-Shape Your Thinking

Your answers to the questions in this quiz can show whether you have a positive or negative pattern of thinking. They are also great starting points to become more aware of your thoughts—and the effect they have on your life. When you are more aware of the way you think, you can take action to use positive situations to your advantage and re-shape the negative ones.

So, in our example, if you immediately think the receptionist is mad at you because she did not say hello, how rational is that? Could she have been busy or distracted when you walked by? Did you say hello to her? Maybe she was not feeling well, or she was in a negative mood herself. These are all more rational reasons for her behavior than simply assuming that you did something wrong.

Mastery is the art and science of optimizing your emotional brain to impact rational thought. It is breaking down your iceberg, directing a new story, and intentionally STOPPING thinking habits that derail your personal best. For further information on how to develop SMARTER habits, contact Cynthia Kivland, author of *Smart2Smarter*, at ckivland@mc.net or call 1-877-60-Coach.

Ten Questions to Challenge Your Thinking Style

1. **What am I resisting?** What we resist most are the things that force us to grow the most.
2. **What is the lesson here?** To evolve, we have to seek out the lesson to be learned.
3. **Have I been here before?** Is it just a different name and face, but the same situation?
4. **Am I losing energy to this?** Remember, every negative thought decreases your resilience, which is evidenced by decreased energy, reduced immune function and sometimes heightened depression or illness.
5. **Am I holding on to something of which I need to let go?** Resilience is bouncing back and letting go of certain outcomes and our need to be right and in control. Of what can you let go today? What baggage needs to be dropped?
6. **Am I in the present?** Regretting the past, or worrying about the future, is losing the potential of the present. Staying in the present is a full-time job.
7. **What do I need to do now?** The truth is that deliberate inaction is action, and it is often a way to allow a cloudy situation to become clear.
8. **Who is in control here?** There are times to recognize that you are *not* always in control. Paradoxically, this recognition and your acknowledgement of it can free you from the need to *always* be in control.
9. **What is my responsibility here?** Your responsibility is a level of detachment that will allow you to see the situation and how—or if—to be involved in the problem or the solution.
10. **Am I at peace with this?** Being at peace is when you can look at an issue, person or problem and feel no charge, no subtle or sudden surge of emotion. The peace-check is a key element in gaining closure when the transition is complete and not holding you back.

This piece was adapted from writing by Shale Paul. Used with permission.