

# Introduction

What's the most important piece of equipment you have to work with these days? A computer? Phone? Maybe a vehicle or some other piece of machinery?

Actually, what counts most is your brain—the three pounds of gray-colored electronic equipment that sits inside your skull. This is the all-important “3-pound tool!”

Performance begins inside the head. It always has. But in today's “Knowledge Economy” it mostly stays there, because knowledge work is far more cognitive than physical:

- The mind is now the main productivity tool.
- Thinking has become the key competency.
- People's thought processes are the most important performance factor.

Work used to be so different. In times past, job performance depended heavily on muscle strength, manual dexterity, and agility or physical speed. But it's probably safe to say that knowledge work is 90 percent cognitive—that is, mental and emotional—while a mere 10 percent physical. Knowledge work mainly requires us to think. We have to perceive, reason, and remember . . . imagine, create, and conceptualize . . . organize, analyze, and decide.

These days performance is shaped by our thought patterns, mindset, and mood. By how we frame things, and how we feel about ourselves. As Donald Trump put it in a recent interview, "The mind is everything. It's all about the mind."

That's where Hard Optimism comes in. It coaches you on how to manage your mind.

The mental practices described here can make you far more effective. You'll build confidence and creativity to help you take advantage of opportunity or overcome adversity. You'll develop a buffer zone against stress, setbacks, and disappointments. These powerful thought patterns also will give you staying power and resilience when your future is fogged with uncertainty. Finally, they'll protect your health and overall quality of life.

Of course, some people distrust optimism. They consider it superficial, cotton candy thinking and pretty

risky in the no-nonsense world of business. But there's nothing soft or lightweight about this message. Hard Optimism points you toward a tough, forceful, steadfast optimism. It's not Pollyannaish. Not a rose-colored-glasses view of the world. And not just a rehash of the old-time "power of positive thinking."

- This is about taking a hard look at reality rather than sugarcoating it.
- It's about managing your thinking processes in ways that improve hard results.
- The message is based on disciplined scientific research—hard evidence.

A flurry of recent studies showcases the wide-ranging advantages of positive thoughts and emotions. Optimism proves to be a major asset across such diverse fields as business, politics, academics, leadership, athletics, and health.

Positive emotions and optimistic thinking lead to higher pay and better evaluations from supervisors.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout U.S. history, the more optimistic presidential candidates have consistently prevailed in elections.<sup>2</sup>

High-level executives use positive words four times more often than negative words.<sup>3</sup>

Pessimistic salespeople sell less and have higher turnover than optimists.<sup>4</sup>

Optimistic baseball pitchers and hitters do better than the pessimists in close games. The more pessimistic basketball teams lose to the point spread more often than the optimistic ones do. Pessimistic swimmers have more substandard times and fail to bounce back as well from poor efforts.<sup>5</sup>

Optimists are more helpful, flexible, creative, empathetic, and respectful toward customers.<sup>6</sup>

Optimism contributes to good health, healing, and longevity.<sup>7</sup>

The scientific evidence is solid: Optimism is a broad spectrum force of tremendous value to individuals and organizations. Regardless of what life leaves on your doorstep today, Hard Optimism positions you to handle it better.

**The ancestor to every action  
is a thought.**



—Ralph Waldo Emerson