

# SOME OF THE BLACKEST CLOUDS CARRY THE SHINIEST SILVER LININGS.

## Don't Accept Problems at Face Value.

When adversity hits, our innate response is to focus sharply on the dangers, difficulties, and downside. Nothing wrong with that per se. The question is, how long should we let it continue?

As soon as the initial shock wears off, we need to give equal time to the upside. Shift your focus away from what's troubling about the situation, and search intensely for what's potentially good. Reinterpret the situation from a positive slant. Look for possible benefits that equal or even outweigh whatever you see that's bad.

Now this reframing doesn't come naturally. Most of us have to train ourselves to make such a transforming shift in perspective. It requires conscious effort—mental discipline—plus an open-mindedness to the idea that good things hide in strange places.

If you look back over your lifetime, though, you'll note that some of the blackest clouds carried the shiniest silver linings. What you thought were your biggest problems maybe turned out to be the best things that ever happened to you. Positive reappraisal gives you a chance to envision the bright side so much sooner—like right now. This helps you through the stress, suffering, and uncertainty. It also positions you to turn the minus into a plus.

## How to Make a Paradigm Shift in Perspective

All of us have had the optical experience referred to as a reverse of visual field. This is a flip-flop in the way we look at something, like when the foreground and background shift places. For example, you've probably seen the black and white picture that shows the wrinkled face of an ugly old woman, but if you stare at it differently, your eyesight shifts to see the same image as that of a beautiful young lady. It's all a matter of how you look at it.

Positive reappraisal is this same sort of abrupt reversal in how you construe the situation at hand. It's a conscious, deliberate switching of your attention from worst case to best-case thinking. Instead of playing a horror movie in your mind about the future, you conjure up equally vivid scenarios of potential advantages and benefits.

This dramatic swing in your thinking—the paradigm shift from negative to positive—interrupts the barrage of destructive thoughts. The 180-degree change in focus gets you thinking about your assets. About solutions. About the potential for breakthrough to something even better than before.

Eying adversity from a positive angle opens up our field of view. We start looking at the situation with a broader and longer-term perspective. This reframing counters our tendency to overestimate problems and underestimate our ability to handle them successfully. It helps us regain emotional balance and see new possibilities we haven't considered before.

Simply put, positive reappraisal creates space for optimism. It nurtures hope. It adds to your resilience. And it leaves you much less vulnerable to the harsh realities of the moment.

## A Stumbling Block or a Stepping Stone?

Research shows that positive reappraisal is a key trait of the “survivor personality.” People who practice this technique have a way of emerging from difficulties even stronger, happier, and better off than before.

Fact is, problems almost never leave us like they find us. Ordinarily we end up either richer or poorer. Stronger or weaker. Better or worse off. Just as wind meeting an airplane wing will either lift or lower the plane, adversity confronts us with a choice. We can grow bitter, act helpless, even give up. Or we can lick our wounds, lift ourselves up, and start searching for the opportunity inside the problem.

When you go through hardship or heartache, positive reappraisal increases the odds that you'll get something good for your emotional money. Granted, the reframing exercise may feel artificial. Negative emotions may pull your attention back toward worry, anger, or fear. You might even think it's foolish or dangerous to think in terms of positive overall outcomes.

Just remember—how you construe a situation literally helps create the reality. And the way you frame problems heavily influences how effective you are in dealing with them.

## Learning to Exploit Adversity

Our appraisal of a situation, positive or negative, shapes our very future in that direction. As Greg D. Jacobs puts it in his fascinating book, *The Ancestral Mind*, “Things turn out the best for people who make the best of the way things turn out.”

Use positive reappraisal? Why wouldn't we—*always*?

People seldom get in touch with their deepest strengths and greatest abilities until it's forced upon them by major challenges. Only then do we really have the opportunity to discover ourselves and the world of possibilities.

Like the mythical alchemists who had the power to turn lead into gold, positive reappraisal gives you the power to convert negative into positive... adversity into advantage...setbacks into higher levels of success.

As Kurt Vonnegut wrote,

*“Even the bad stuff is an opportunity. There are possibilities there. In fact, I see more possibilities in adversity than in, say, lying on satin pillows.”*

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