



The Business Case for Positivity

As scientists study the brain and learn more about how we achieve optimal functioning, the term *positivity* has finally captured business leaders' interests. What researchers are discovering about positive emotions at work is essential knowledge for anyone who wants to lead individuals and organizations to high performance.

One study of CEOs showed that positivity training could boost their productivity by 15 percent, and managers improved customer satisfaction by 42 percent. Positivity training programs have demonstrated excellent results with tax auditors, investment bankers and lawyers.

Briefly, here's what these groups are taught to reduce stress and raise their levels of happiness and success:

1. How to develop a positive mindset
2. How to build their social support networks
3. How to buffer themselves against negativity

Despite such training's amazing results, many leaders remain completely unfamiliar with the concept. Maybe there's a stigma attached to positive thinking and happiness.

Being positive isn't simply about being nice and giving in, nor does it mean suppressing negative information and emotions. Both are critical for optimal performance. Apparently, however, a 3:1 positivity-to-negativity ratio is the tipping point for individuals and business teams to go from average to flourishing.

When you experience and express three times as much positive as negative emotion, you pave the way for excellence and high performance. Most of us (80 percent) experience a ratio of 2:1.

In business, positive emotions yield:

1. **Better decisions.** Researchers at the UC Berkeley Haas School of Business studied how positive moods affect managers. Managers with greater positivity were more

A Message from Nancy...

I have a couple of questions to ask you:

1. Is your healthcare organization or established business as successful as you think it should be?
2. Are you and your team able to pinpoint the solutions necessary to create positive changes to get where you need to go?



Proffitt Management Solutions can help...

In today's highly competitive environment, it's no surprise that "*what got you here may not get you there.*" Patients, clients, and employees expect nothing less than 100% satisfaction.

At **Proffitt Management Solutions** we are fully committed to help you and your company become more focused, motivated and successful in reaching your full potential.

Find out how services such as individual or team coaching and development, motivational workshops, seminars and keynote speaking may benefit you...

www.ProffittManagement.com

You can share this article on Facebook or LinkedIn or forward to people who want to make a positive impact.

Proffitt Management Solutions
326 Maddock St.
West Palm Beach, FL
www.ProffittManagement.com
561-582-6060
info@proffittmanagement.com

accurate and careful in making decisions, and were more effective interpersonally.

2. **Better team work.** Managers with positive emotions infect their work groups with similar feelings and show improved team coordination, while reporting less effort to accomplish more.
3. **Better negotiating.** At Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management, researchers learned that when people negotiate complex bargains, positivity again surfaces as a contributing factor for success.

Negotiators who strategically display positivity are more likely to gain concessions, close deals and incorporate future business relationships into the contracts they seal. Those who come to the bargaining table with a cooperative and friendly spirit strike the best business deals.

Positive emotions directly correlate with:

- Increased creativity
- More curiosity and interest in the world
- Better health
- Better social relationships
- Optimism and perseverance
- Longevity

The business benefits of positivity include:

- Lower turnover
- Improved customer service
- Better supervisor evaluations
- Lower emotional fatigue
- Higher job satisfaction
- Better organizational citizenship (ethics)
- Fewer work absences
- Improved innovation
- Better safety records

Emotions' Role in Business

For businesses and organizations, emotions are functional. Both negative and positive emotions work to drive results. Negative emotions serve to limit our thoughts and behaviors, helping us to act more decisively in times of stress or crisis.

Positivity broadens your outlook, opens you to new solutions and ideas, and brings more possibilities into view. Positivity fosters vital human moments that go beyond optimism and a smiling face. It infuses your mindset and outlook, affects your heart rhythms and body chemistry, reduces muscle tension and improves relationships.

The Broaden-and-Build Model

Unlike negative emotions, which narrow our focus with respect to possible actions, positive emotions achieve the opposite: They open us. Positivity expands our social, physical and cognitive resources.

Psychologist Barbara Fredrickson, PhD, has conducted extensive research in this area. She outlines her "broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions" in *Positivity: Groundbreaking Research Reveals How to Embrace the Hidden Strength of Positive Emotions, Overcome Negativity and Thrive* (Crown Archetype, 2009).

Dr. Fredrickson suggests that positive emotions (enjoyment, happiness, joy, interest and anticipation) broaden our awareness and encourage novel, varied, and exploratory thoughts and actions. Over time, this expanded behavioral repertoire helps us build skills and resources.

In contrast, negative emotions prompt narrow, immediate, survival-oriented behaviors. For example, anxiety sparks a primal fight-or-flight response, which we needed to survive during our caveman days. When anxious, we narrow our focus to shut out distractions—important for cavemen, but often counterproductive in business.

On the other hand, positive emotions take your mind off stressors. Over time, the skills and resources you have built through broadened awareness serve to enhance your professional survival. (They are essential for innovation, customer service and employee engagement.)

Dr. Fredrickson conducted studies in which participants watched films that induced either positive (amusement, contentment), negative (fear, sadness) or no emotions. Viewers who experienced positive emotions showed heightened levels of creativity, inventiveness and "big picture" perceptual focus.

Dr. Fredrickson emphasizes two core truths about positive emotions:

1. They open our hearts and minds, making us more receptive and creative.
2. Consequently, we can discover and build new skills, ties, knowledge and ways of being.

Positivity and High Performance

For years, organizational psychologist Marcial Losada, PhD, studied the characteristics of high-performing business teams. As part of his work, he designed a meeting room to capture the real-time behavior of business teams in action.

The room resembled any ordinary boardroom, but it was fitted with one-way mirrors and video cameras that allowed research assistants to record every statement during company teams' hour-long meetings.

In particular, Dr. Losada tracked whether individuals' statements were:

1. Positive or negative
2. Self- or other-focused
3. Based on inquiry (asking questions) or advocacy (defending a point of view)

By the mid-'90s, 60 different teams had been observed and coded. At the same time, each team's performance level was identified based on independent data. Twenty-five percent met the criteria for high performance based on three distinct indicators:

1. Profitability
2. Customer satisfaction ratings
3. Evaluations by superiors, peers and subordinates

About 30 percent scored low on all three factors. The rest had mixed profiles. Dr. Losada also rated team behavior on connectivity (how well tuned or responsive members were to one another).

When he later divided the teams into high, low and mixed performance levels, striking differences emerged. High-performance teams stood out by their unusually high positivity-to-negativity ratios: about 6:1. Mixed-performance teams scored ratios of 2:1, while low-performing teams scored 1:1.

High-performing teams also had higher connectivity ratings and an interesting balance on other dimensions. Members asked questions as much as they defended their own views, and they cast their attention outward as much as inward.

Low-performing teams, however, had far lower connectivity, asked almost no questions and showed almost no outward focus.

The positivity/negativity ratio has been found to be a critical parameter in ascertaining what kinds of dynamics are possible for business teams. It is

measured by counting the instances of positive feedback (e.g., "that is a good idea") vs. negative feedback (e.g., "this is not what I expected; I am disappointed").

Dr. Losada's findings can be summarized as follows: If a team is highly connected, its members will tend to maintain an equilibrium between internal and external focus, as well as between inquiry and advocacy. They will also maintain a positivity/negativity ratio above 3:1.

If connectivity is low, the team will be more internally focused, it will advocate strongly, and its positivity/negativity ratio will be below 3:1.

The Tipping Point: 3:1 Positivity Ratio

Dr. Losada's research correlates with Dr. Fredrickson's, in that both independently arrived at a 3:1 positivity-to-negativity ratio for optimal functioning (whether for individuals or teams).

Psychologist John Gottman, PhD, an expert on marital relationships, found similar data for successful marriages. In flourishing marriages, positivity ratios were about 5:1. Similarly, research by clinical psychologist Robert Schwartz, PhD, cites an optimal positivity ratio of 4:1.

Most people (more than 80 percent), when reporting their experiences over the course of a day, report about a 2:1 positivity/negativity ratio.

For a small percentage, however, the ratio will be over 3:1. This correlates with high performance, life satisfaction and other measures of flourishing.

Improve Your Ratio

You can take a self-evaluation of your positivity/negativity ratio at Dr. Fredrickson's site, www.positivityratio.com. To improve your ratio, you must decrease the number and intensity of negative moments, increase the positive moments, or both.

The goal is not to eliminate bad thoughts. Negative emotions are appropriate and useful. Properly used, negativity keeps us grounded, real and honest. It provides energy at crucial moments.

We need to become aware, however, of gratuitous negativity. For example, if you work with someone who's annoying, you probably plug into negativity with each encounter. This is an entrenched emotional habit—and while it may be justified, it's detrimental to your success and well-being.

Fortunately, simple awareness of negativity has a curative effect.

Positivity Ratio, continued

Once you learn to spot negativity, you can defuse it. This is similar to the practice of mindfulness meditation, where you observe your thoughts without judgment.

To reduce negative thinking, adopt these useful techniques from the field of cognitive behavioral psychology and Dr. Fredrickson's book:

1. Dispute negative, black-and-white thinking habits.
2. Break ruminative thinking (use distractions to change mood).
3. Become more mindful (observe without judgment).
4. Reduce bad news streams.
5. Avoid gossip and sarcasm.
6. Smile more often at people.

Raise Your Positivity

Scientists are experimenting to discover new ways to boost positivity. Because of the brain's neuroplasticity, we can rewire it to create new thought habits and become more positive.

Like any new activity, this requires practice. It may take a while for positive thinking to become natural and habitual. Try these three frequently cited exercises to create positive thinking habits:

1. **Practice gratitude.** Keep a daily gratitude list. Ask yourself questions like "What went right?" and "What was the best part of today?"
2. **Practice positive feedback.** Catch people doing things right. As you practice this skill and express your appreciation more often, people will shine. You'll also become more aware of what works.
3. **Envision your best possible future.** When you daydream about your future, you set yourself up for goal-directed behaviors. Having a vision for the future is reassuring when the going gets tough. Envisioning your best possible future helps you persevere and provides hope and energy.

Unfortunately, few leaders pay attention to positivity in the workplace. Positivity training programs don't seem serious enough for business allocations, and some leaders may think they're already pretty positive.

Indeed, most people score about a 2:1 positivity/negativity ratio. While it's rare to find people who enjoy a 3:1 ratio, remember that it's the true tipping point between average and flourishing.



326 Maddock St.
West Palm Beach, FL 33405
561-582-6060
info@proffittmanagement.com
www.ProffittManagement.com