

Staying Positive AROUND NEGATIVE PEOPLE



Christopher News Notes

NO MATTER HOW HARD WE TRY TO MAINTAIN A POSITIVE PERSPECTIVE ON LIFE, THERE'S NO GETTING AROUND NEGATIVE PEOPLE.

They're out there—in the next cubicle at work, behind the fence in the backyard, around the family table on Thanksgiving, in the bleachers at Little League games, on the Internet. So how do we keep our positive outlook when confronted, perhaps on a regular basis, with people who travel with their own dark clouds?

This is one case where the old adage, “If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em,” will definitely work against you. You may not be able to change (or beat) them; but you can change yourself, or at least the way you respond to the naysayers in your life. It’s not easy, but with a little practice, you can ensure that your positive perspective stays put.

Change the Culture

“Let us always meet each other with a smile, for the smile is the beginning of love.”

—Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Father Francis “Rocky” Hoffman, J.C.D., executive director of Relevant Radio and host of “Just Ask Father,” says that when it comes to facing down difficult people and situations, “we either change the culture or the culture changes us.” That “culture” exists not only in the world at large but in our offices, schools, homes, and even churches.

“When we are surrounded by negativity, what we’re called to do is light a candle; don’t curse the darkness. It has to come from the inside,” he explains. “The source of joy and optimism and hope is grace. We can receive grace from God directly or through participating in the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist and confession, or through prayer.”

In addition, Father Rocky suggests making a conscious decision to be positive: “We have to avoid gossip, and gossip is something almost everyone falls into unless they make a deliberate choice. We have to decide we’re only going to say positive things about people. It doesn’t mean being Pollyanna-ish or denying that there are problems. It’s a broad-minded understanding that problems and difficulties are the ordinary news of every day. Let’s talk about the positive things that are happening. Carry the light of Christ with you.”

Being aware of people’s weaknesses and moods helps as well. Father Rocky points out that some people are simply cranky in the morning or at night because they’re tired. Maybe we should give them a little extra space during those times, or at least be more understanding. If we can focus on

Tips for Staying Positive around Negative People (from writer Rucha Tadwalkar)

1. **Don't take it personally.** “Many times when people are dealing with difficulties in their lives, those around them become the targets of their unhealthy coping strategies.”
2. **Remain grateful for what is going well.** “Make a gratitude list, let people know how thankful you are for their presence, and count your blessings for the small things.”
3. **Remind yourself that everyone has their own journey.** “We all have to learn different lessons in life. Perhaps this person has come into your life for a reason.”
4. **View this challenge as an opportunity for growth and self-discovery.** “Changing our mindsets can transform our attitudes.”
5. **Spend time alone.** “Make time to pursue a hobby, journal, take a walk, or meditate. Giving ourselves time to think can create wonders on our psyches and overall attitudes.”

the mercy God shows us when we fall into bad habits, we tend to be more merciful toward others when they do the same. “The people I know who are most joyful and cheerful and positive are people of extraordinary humility and spiritual life,” he says.

Spending a lot of time on the Internet can expose us to negativity as well. An article on the website PsychCentral revealed “that using social networking sites, namely Facebook, can increase people’s stress levels, produce anxiety and negatively affect a person’s sense of self. Using these sites might even cause a person to develop a mental health disorder or exacerbate an existing one.”

Stay aware of how your time online is affecting your emotions and spirit. If you need to block or unfriend some relentlessly negative or angry people, do so.

Father Rocky adds, “What is written [online] can be heard in another voice than that which was intended...On my own Facebook page, I’ve developed a voice over time. I try to keep it only about things that are positive and inspiring and good and true and beautiful. I avoid the political. Even though I’d like to talk about it, that’s not the place and it divides people. I try to find something that will unite people.”

Know Yourself

“Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference.”
—Winston Churchill

“If you are really getting tripped up with negative people, ask yourself, ‘What does it tell me about myself?’” says Merci Miglino, a life coach from the Albany, New York area, who calls negative people “energy vampires.” For example, do you continually find yourself surrounded by people who complain? Do you tend to jump into the complaining along with them?

Miglino suggests looking at the situation to see if there’s something about complaining—or the complainer—that feeds your own needs. Is it serving you in some way by making you feel superior, affirming your own attitudes, or providing you with gossip? Once you understand your motivations, you can move forward in a positive way.

She recommends distancing yourself from negative people. But if you can’t get away from them, you have another option: acceptance.

“Acceptance is not surrender,” explains Miglino. “When I am accepting of something about myself, or a situation, or a person, wow, there’s peace and serenity in that. It takes practice, but with acceptance come possibilities.”

The Choice is Yours

"Keep your thoughts positive because your thoughts become your words. Keep your words positive because your words become your behavior. Keep your behavior positive because your behavior becomes your habits. Keep your habits positive because your habits become your values. Keep your values positive because your values become your destiny." —Mahatma Gandhi

In her book, *The Happiness Project*, author Gretchen Rubin talks about how "deliciously satisfying" it used to feel to criticize other people, restaurants, books, music, you name it. "Being critical made me feel more sophisticated and intelligent," she writes. So she challenged herself to start giving positive "reviews" in all areas of her life, an act she says required humility, modesty and innocence, but one that brought with it joy and lightness.

"One factor of human nature is that people have a 'negativity bias': we react to the bad more strongly and persistently than to the comparable good," she writes, noting that studies show it takes at least five good acts to repair the damage of one critical or destructive act.

"One consequence of the negativity bias is that when people's minds are unoccupied, they tend to drift to anxious or angry thoughts," she says. To deal with her own tendency to do that, Rubin created what she calls an "area of refuge," a mental place that pulls her out of the encroaching negativity—a funny memory, a friend, a favorite book, a beloved garden. Any one of us can do the same.

Sister Anne Bryan Smolin, C.S.J., a therapist and author of *God Knows You're Stressed*, offers this advice: "We can't always change the situation, but we can distance ourselves from the negative behavior." For instance, simply get up and go do something else—or say, "I don't want to talk about this. We're not helping each other at all." And sometimes we need to remove the plank from our own eye first.

"Research tells us that 80 percent of our self-talk, what we hear in our own heads, is negative. We put ourselves down a lot," she says, noting that even something seemingly harmless—like berating ourselves for losing our keys—can begin to change our attitude toward ourselves and others for the worse.

Alex Blackwell, author of the Everyday Inspiration blog on Beliefnet, says that the most important thing we need to understand when we're confronted with—or surrounded by—negative people is that another person's negativity is the "filter they use to see the world. I have the choice to use a different filter—a filter that sees what's right and good," he says. "I see it as a challenge, almost a game, to be the 'counter voice' for positivity. If I stay focused on my beliefs, and keep using my positive filter, then I can use it to insulate me against that person's chronic negativity."

In addition, remember to take advantage of the power of prayer. We pray for people when they're sick, and negativity can become an emotional illness. If you encounter someone with a bad attitude or notice it in yourself, call on God to bring His joy and peace to the situation. When we embody positive qualities ourselves, we encourage others to get in touch with their own best selves. Take the initiative to be the kind of person that reflects God's light in the world.


"It's better to light one candle than to curse the darkness."

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"Christians cannot be pessimists!...If we are truly in love with Christ and if we sense how much He loves us, our hearts will 'light' up with a joy that spreads to everyone around us." —Pope Francis,
"The Church of Mercy: A Vision for the Church"