



Live Your Strengths

Welcome to the September 2009 edition of *Live Your Strengths*, the monthly e-newsletter from In Search of Excellence.

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Live Your Strengths *Monthly Challenge*: Focus on the Positive

Rose Coloured Glasses May Be The Key To Successful Change

Change, whether in one's business or personal life, can be a scary thing for many people. Often, the idea of change is wrapped up in negative emotions – perhaps change means facing an unknown future, sometimes it means confronting a current reality that is unpleasant.

Too frequently, people become stuck in the 'problem zone', where they are so focussed on the problem and the negativity around it that they are no longer able to see productive ways to move forward.

A recent study, published this summer in the *Journal of Neuroscience*, pointed out some of the physiological reasons this may happen. And more importantly, it leads us to think about ways to more successfully embrace change.

The study found that our perception (what we see in our visual field) is literally being shaped by our motivation and emotions. It's not even as simple as people in positive moods seeing positive things and people in negative moods seeing negative things.

Rather, our mood changes how we physically *perceive* the world – when we are in a good mood, we actually have a bigger window onto the world. Positive moods expand our visual fields, whereas negative moods are like wearing blinders that limit how much information we can take in.

This expanded visual perception is connected to creative thinking – it makes the way we think more open, less filtered, and more exploratory. People in positive moods tend to solve creative problems more effectively. Likewise, when we are in negative moods it becomes hard to create new ways of viewing problems.

So how does this information relate to change? If we are meeting challenges with fear or negativity, it will reduce the chances of finding a successful solution to the problems we face because our brains are simply not at their peak functioning for finding creative solutions. As Einstein said so many years ago, "problems cannot be solved by the same level of thinking that created them."

On the other hand, if we can find ways to bring optimism and a positive outlook to the challenges we face, we increase the likelihood of finding novel solutions and are more likely to create an ideal future.

Are you ready to bring this open, positive mind set to your change initiatives? Join me in September's *Live Your Strengths Monthly Challenge* (see below).

Fall 2009 Women in Business Series

Time is running out to register for the Fall 2009 Women in Business Series – secure your spot now!

Meeting Focus #1: Personal Productivity – October 16

Distinguish between essential and time-critical tasks

Tips for avoiding procrastination

Deal with interruptions productively

Meeting Focus #2: Coaching Your Employees For Success – October 23

Understand the value of incorporating coaching techniques into your management skill set
Learn how to conduct a One-on-One coaching session with your employees
Gain tools for dealing with performance issues

Meeting Focus #3: Managing Stress – November 6

Manage your own stress and help others respond to their stress productively

Meeting Focus #4: Goal Setting – November 27

Get a head start on 2010!
Master effective goal setting
Document important goals and the relevant measures of success
Define expected results when goals are kept alive and relevant

For more information or to secure your spot, please contact me denise@insearchofexcellence.ca or 519-923-9968.

Live Your Strengths *Monthly Challenge*: Focus on the Positive

There are a number of fairly easy and practical techniques that you can use to create the positive atmosphere necessary for successful change:

Focus on what you want to happen

Often discussions about change focus on the problem: how we got here, who to blame, and what we don't want to happen. Instead, shift the focus to what you *do* want to create. If you had a magic wand and could create the ideal outcome, what would it look like?

This shift to focussing on what you want will help in two ways – it will help to direct brainstorming/problem solving in a positive manner and it will alleviate some of the fear around change by keeping the focus on the benefits you will experience as a result of the change.

Focus on what you can control

Often when looking at changes initiatives, people get sidetracked by all the elements that are out of their control. This leads to a downward spiral of feeling helpless or unwilling to act, which in turn leads to negative moods, causing a lack of creativity and a narrowing of possible solutions.

In reality, we know that in the vast majority of situations there are many things that we can directly control. Even if they may sometimes seem like small steps toward trying to achieve the desired change, they are still heading in the right direction. By continually focussing on what you can achieve and celebrating these victories along the way, eventually even dramatic changes can be accomplished.

Always start meetings/discussions on a positive note

One way to ensure that people are in the right 'head space' to have a productive discussion about change is to ask them to talk about something they feel happy about or proud of accomplishing. This can be as easy as starting meetings/discussions with a ritual of asking each person to briefly state what their biggest success was since you last met.

In a very short period of time, this simple ritual can bring people into a more positive mood and get them focussed on what success looks like. This positive focus is also important because people's level of intrinsic motivation for change is much greater when they are focussing on their past successes and building on these strengths to create the desired future.

In fact, 20 years of research have concluded that a clear focus on strengths and successes can lead to a higher quality of learning, better task performance, reduced stress and tension, and a more productive approach to challenges.

Although these ideas don't take a lot of time, they do take some commitment. It is easy to fall into the trap of focussing on the problem instead of having an effective discussion about solutions, especially in challenging times. However, by creating a focus on the end goal and keeping people's mood positive, open and creative, change can be viewed as an exciting opportunity for growth and innovation.

Could you use some guidance to achieve positive change in your life or business? Call Denise for a free 30-minute coaching session to make this your best year yet!

Cheers,

Denise Cornfield-Furlong
In Search of Excellence
www.insearchofexcellence.ca
Tel: 519.923.9968
Fax: 519.923.9997
"Creating the Path to Your Potential"

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In Search of Excellence
RR#1 Proton Station, ON N0C 1L0
Email: denise@InSearchofExcellence.ca
Phone: (519) 923-9968

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