

J. Michael Locke

Musings

#154: Musing November 25, 2021

Decided to do an early release this week. If you are reading this before your turkey, you are my kind of worker! Hopefully these musings provide some non-political holiday conversation.

Let's be positive on this Thanksgiving Day. Too many individuals are wired to the negative. It is easy to be so in today's hyper-partisan, conflict-oriented society. However, if you want to lead and influence, I posit that you have to be positive. No kid has ever read the Little Engine that Couldn't. Individuals and organizations need to develop confidence and believe that they will be successful.

There is some science that we are wired to be negative. *"Neuroscientist Rick Hanson has a great analogy for this strange quality of the mind. "Your brain," he writes in his book Buddha's Brain, "is like Velcro for negative experiences and Teflon for positive ones." When you lose a client, when the investors don't come calling, or when you face the hundreds of other daily disappointments of life, you're wired to forget all the good things and to instead obsess over the negative."* Train yourself to focus on the positive. [try-this-neuroscience-based-technique-to-shift-your-mindset-from-negative-to-positive](#)

This isn't just about being rah-rah. Great quote from Adam Grant – *"It's easy to be a critic or a cheerleader. It's harder to be a coach. A critic sees your weaknesses and attacks your worst self. A cheerleader sees your strengths and celebrates your best self. A coach sees your potential and helps you become a better version of yourself."*

As I wrote back in April 2020 in Musing #13, there is a growing academic field called Positive Psychology. I was first exposed to it through a fellow DePauw alum, Doug Smith, who was a very successful businessman who found himself in a battle against cancer. This battle led him to significant reflection and resulted in a book which I highly recommend as a quick read (Happiness, the Art of Living with Peace, Confidence and Joy). Yale launched a course along these lines and it was their most popular class ever. It is now being offered free online through the MOOC company Coursera.

<https://www.coursera.org/learn/the-science-of-well-being>

My experience is people do not follow someone who is negative. This is especially important in a growing, entrepreneurial company. You are building something. I am not saying you have to be Mr. Happy like the Roger Hargreaves kids' books, but positive. Especially in times of challenge (like our current environment) folks want to know it is all going to work out (which it will!) I think this is why you see more leaders coming from sales than from finance or law. Sales people skew towards the positive. They bet on themselves with unlimited compensation via commissions. They spend their time persuading others to join them. Accountants and lawyers skew more negative. They think critically and break down larger concepts into detail. They are paid to make sure things are protected from potential negative events in the future. Certainly, someone with a finance and legal background can be a good leader, but they have to fight their skeptical orientation.

Part of being positive is also being thankful. Don't underestimate the value of acknowledging a team member's good work. Do it in person, by phone or even in writing (NOT in text or email.) Most of us just don't compliment others enough. Make sure to extend our acknowledgements and thanks to "service providers." Yes they are paid to be your lawyer or accountant but they are no different in being human beings who take pride in their work and appreciate getting a call complimenting them and thanking them.

Hopefully you are gathering with friends and family on this Thanksgiving holiday. Be positive and thankful.

jml