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There is Proof in the
Power of Positive
Thinking



By Ashley Hubbard

Good Vibes Only. Hustle harder. **NO EXCUSES.**

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*What doesn't
kill us, makes
us stronger.*

How many times have you heard these statements? Managing difficult moments in life and negative emotions using the 'good vibes only' approach has been a common movement circulating in recent years. It implies that people only want to be surrounded by positivity or that if you really try hard enough, you can always be positive. This perspective is also known as toxic positivity.

Presenting and expecting others to present only good vibes seems to have become more common amongst the era of social media. While the idea might sound good conceptually, the

reality is not healthy. Psychotherapist Haley Neidich, LCSW, states that "a majority of the people who talk about and post good vibes only content have no idea what they're doing is toxic and potentially harmful to others."

When Positivity Becomes Negativity

When an individual adopts an unrealistic level of optimism and negates facts to suppress their basic human emotions, they're setting themselves up for a deeper level of failure.

While suppressing negative emotions and focusing on the positive sounds great in theory, humans are meant to experience emotions – all of them.

“Positive thinking is an incredibly powerful tool for healing, but not when it comes at the expense of avoiding negative emotions or processing trauma. People who suffer from depression, for example, would benefit from thinking positively about things, but telling them that’s the **ONLY** thing they should be focusing on (good vibes only) is super alienating,” says Neidich.

Negative emotions should never be forced away. Neidich agrees that much of the problem with ‘good vibes only’ really comes in the ‘only’ part of that statement. Implying that someone’s mental illness, or negative feelings, will go away if they just think positively.

This invalidation of someone’s feelings and emotions denies, rejects, and dismisses their authentic human self. This can make the individual feel insignificant, wrong, and like they’re the only one who feels the way they do.

Coltrane Lord, a sacred/conscious intimacy and relationship expert, offers an alternate movement – ‘good vibe goals’ – in which good vibes are a goal, not a mandate. She explains that “we all have moments when it is essential to go through the feelings of grief or anger from traumatic or difficult experiences in order to let the process of healing release through the body.”

Lord makes a fantastic point that “a whole person is one who has the facility to express all emotions in a constructive and healthy way, never pointing fingers inward or outward, but simply allowing emotions to flow through them.”

It is not one individual’s job or place to tell another how they should or shouldn’t feel. Additionally, it is not in a person’s best interest to hide or lock away all negative emotions.

POWER OF POSITIVE THINKING

However, scientific research backs up the power of positive thinking. Studies in peer-reviewed journals found that positive thinking is good for the immune system, reduces anxiety, and increases positive emotions such as happiness.

According to Behavior Research and Therapy, the first study to investigate whether an extended practice of positive alternatives to worry has lasting effects on anxiety and worry found that significant reductions in negative intrusions occurred when replacing the usual flow of verbal worry with any alternative positive ideation.

BALANCING POSITIVE AND REALISTIC THINKING

Finding a healthy balance between positive and realistic thinking is the ultimate goal, and Lord gives an example of this.

ACTIONABLE TIPS TO BALANCING EMOTIONS

1. Understand that a human being is capable of having multiple feelings simultaneously.
2. Give yourself permission to feel both the negative and positive emotions.
3. Utilize journaling to record your feelings.
4. Try deep breathing exercises or guided meditation to work through your emotions.

If you lost your job and it feels as though the world might end, acknowledge that. If you feel worried, scared, hurt, or ashamed, honor your feelings and locate the sensations. Name these sensations in your body (my head hurts, my hands are sweaty, I have a lump in my gut, etc.). Find gratitude in the job or other experiences you had and what it taught you.

By focusing on the lesson, you can use this experience as a launching pad for your next experience that you desire, such as higher pay or starting your own business.

This is positive thinking. When you attach this desire and allow yourself to feel it as if it is already happening, it turns the thought into an experience, and experience is the reality.

“You won’t only find balance and equanimity, you will manifest your goals,” says Lord.

When positive thinking intersects with positive feelings, people feel hope. “Our thoughts become feelings, our feelings become actions, and our actions become habits, and our habits become our character,” Lord explains.

Ashley Hubbard is a Nashville-based freelance writer, focusing on sustainability, travel, veganism, mental health, and more. Passionate about animal and human rights, sustainability, and social impact, she seeks out ethical experiences at home or on the road. She shares these experiences on her website, wild-hearted.com.