

Positive Thinking? Or Just the Truth

There's a lot of discussion about "positive thinking." Quips from motivational speakers like "affirm the positive, visualize the positive and expect the positive, and your life will change accordingly." "Think positive and you will be positive." Of course, Norman Vincent Peale's classic book, "The Power of Positive Thinking" that years later spawned "The Secret." Not to be outdone, Herm Albright wrote, "a positive attitude may not solve all your problems, but it will annoy enough people to make it worth the effort." On it goes and we've probably heard it all, or most of it.

Let's establish that there's some real value in all of this. Decades of working with people has taught me that there's something to positive thinking that's valuable enough to work it into our worlds and the lives of those around us. However, the concept of positive thinking may miss something much more valuable and significantly more fundamental. It's good, but it's only a piece . . . not a whole.

The Obvious Being Obviously All There Is

Sometimes we park ourselves on statements or principals or ideas because they work. Because they do work, we assume they're good enough, they're adequate and they're somehow complete. So we just park ourselves right there, wherever they are. We look no further and we assume no more. But by parking ourselves there, we tend to pull up and stop way too quickly. If something works, we seldom ask if there's something more behind it. For us it works, and that's plenty.

Yet, life is a rich and complex mystery to be searched out and explored. Life is made up of layers that always lead us to deeper layers. Just when we assumed that we've "arrived," we'd be wise to realize that we've "arrived" at a place that's likely a step to yet another place. We can go further if we chose to expend the energy to do so and forfeit the comfort that parking ourselves too often affords us. There's always more. That's both the wonder and perplexity of life.

Positive Thinking Verses Simple Truth

Sometimes "positive thinking" tends to sound like a worn cliché; thin, anemic and scripted. Sometimes the gravity of a situation makes positive thinking sound something like a cheesy or simplistic remedy for a violently difficult or even terminal issue. At times, we throw the whole concept of positive thinking at things because we don't know what else to do, and we hope that it's broad enough to actually be effective, or at least somewhat worthwhile. Yet, there's much more.

What about truth? What about the power of truth? What about simply asking what the truth is in a situation? Not that we label whatever the truth might be as "positive," but we see the truth as containing a power within it that is immeasurably more powerful than positive thinking. That's not to say that the positive in our lives and in the lives of others is not truth. More often than not it is. Yet, if we look at the truth, we encompass far more than just whatever the "positive" might be. We embrace the wholeness of our situation. We embrace it with a wholeness that empowers us to deal with it comprehensively.

The Power of Truth

How much power is there in truth anyway? Truth eliminates all the sordid stuff that we attach to our lives, or our opinions, or our points of view. It keeps life pure,

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undiluted and sharp. It can serve to eliminate all the decisions or directions that would errantly arise from skewed perceptions drawn from things other than truth. It keeps us tight, clean, accurately directed and clearly focused. That's powerful.

Truth may not be pretty at times, and in fact it might be downright ugly in some instances. But it has a relevance to it that is entirely unparalleled. Truth will never fail us, deceive us, misguide us or detour us. It might be soft or it might be harsh, but it's never wrong. It can be gentle and it can be ruthless, but it always seeks out that which is true and honest and solid and dependable. Truth is not interested in playing games or advancing by means of manipulation. It's not savvy or crude. Truth is not interested in promoting anything other than the truth, and because that's the case it's entirely reliable and completely trustworthy. It's simply truth, and because it is, anything other than what it is would be something less . . . typically much less. That's what truth is and that's what it does. And that's powerful.

Why wouldn't we want to base our lives on that? Yes, positive thinking is a great thing. But simply asking what the truth is would seem significantly superior and much more constructive. It grounds us when we face trials, obstacles, that which is known and that which is not. It places before us the realities that allow us to deal with reality. It's unalterable, consistent, always timely and ever strong. While positive thinking is powerful indeed, truth would appear to be much more so.

What is Truth?

I suppose the challenge is to ask, as Pilate did, "what is truth?" At what point has our mindset, our histories, our personal predispositions, our culture, our biases or our own knowledge shaped something in our minds that is more our minds and less the truth? Endless books have been written on the subject and many far, far superior to myself have researched and discussed this topic. Clearly, wading into the timeless question of "what is truth" is far beyond the scope of this article.

However, I think that we can at least consider the following in enhancing our understanding of truth: First, we are prone to make the truth whatever best suits us or our situation. Second, whatever truth is we can be certain that we skew it either intentionally or unintentionally. Either way, we need to pursue the question of truth cautiously. Third, we often prefer to ignore the truth if we don't want to hear what it says. Therefore, we need to realize that a hallmark of truth is not that it will necessarily be something that we like. Fourth, truth typically challenges us. If whatever we believe doesn't challenge us, it may very well not be the truth.

Try truth. It's powerful. It's life-changing. It's dependable and it never fails. As someone in history said, "the truth shall set you free." Positive thinking is a great thing. But when it comes to rigorous and transforming transformation, also try truth.