

**The Walch Real Life Series**

# **More Power to You**

**Building Confidence  
and Self-Esteem**

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## CHAPTER 2

# Learn to Steer Your Mind: Become an Optimist

In this chapter, you will learn that:

- What you say to yourself in your head affects how you look at the world.
- How you see the world can make you depressed or happy.
- How you see the world affects how well—or how poorly—you do in it.

And:

- You can speak to yourself in a way that will help you, not hurt you.
- You can argue against your negative thoughts.
- You can feel good about yourself and succeed in life because of your positive attitude.

\* \* \*

That sounds like a lot to learn. Some people go through life and never learn these things. But you have an edge. This chapter will help you.

Optimism (OP-ta-mizm) is the tool we're talking about here. It is a way to deal with your successes and setbacks. You don't have to be born with this skill. You can teach yourself to use it. Then a problem becomes a chance for you to empower yourself. You can turn the situation around, or move on.

When would you need to use optimism? Well, we looked at some examples in Chapter 1, under “Everyday Problems” (pages 2–5). In many of those situations, optimism would be helpful in facing rejection.

Maybe you’ve felt rejected. That often happens when you ask for something and someone says no.

Have you asked for a job, a favor, or a date lately? Or did you try to make a sale, and failed? What happened? \_\_\_\_\_

How did you feel afterward? \_\_\_\_\_

Maybe you can’t change how the person that you’re asking feels, what he says, or what he’ll buy from you or give to you. But you can change how a rejection makes you feel. You don’t have to be downed by it. You can pick yourself up quickly and get on to the next challenge.

### **Hint**

Many jobs today involve sales. When you even apply for a job, you’re trying to sell yourself to the employer. In today’s tight job market, you may be turned down again and again. But you need to learn how to see that for what it is and go on, not give up. Perhaps sooner than you think, you’ll interview with a fellow optimist. You will impress him or her with your positive attitude—and your skills to match. Employers want problem solvers, not people who give up easily.

## Who Sounds Like You?

**Directions:** Read each story that follows and answer the questions that follow it.

Ali applied for a job that he really wanted. His résumé looked good and he got an interview with the supervisor. A few days later, however, the company hired someone else. Ali's rejection letter said that they hired someone who suited their specific needs. Ali didn't understand how exactly that might be. He wasn't sure why he didn't get the job. Still, he felt depressed.

"Shoot!" he thought. "Why didn't they like me? Maybe my clothes looked bad. No, I was too dressed-up. I looked like a nerd. I was too nervous. I blew it. No, the truth is, I don't have what it takes, and they saw that. I'm just not good enough. I can't compete on that level. I don't blame them for not hiring me."

Ali's mind went on and on like that. It took several weeks for him to get his courage back for another interview.

Whom does Ali blame for the fact that he wasn't hired?

\_\_\_\_\_

Does he really know why someone else got the job? \_\_\_\_\_

Is he better prepared to interview for future jobs? \_\_\_\_\_

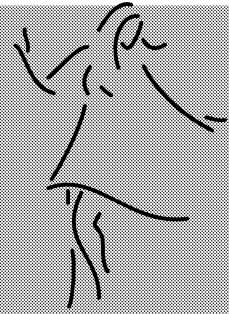
What action does he take to get over his disappointment?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How does Ali see himself? Does he think he has faults that are permanent parts of his character? \_\_\_\_\_ What does he say about these "permanent" faults? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Keshia also applied for an entry-level job. But she didn't even get an interview. When she got the rejection letter, Keshia felt let down. But she took a breather and then she called the company. She politely asked why they wouldn't consider hiring her. An assistant there told her the company had a firm policy against hiring recent grads who didn't have much full-time work experience.

"Well," thought Keshia, after she got off the phone, "it's their loss. I wasn't asking for a high salary. I have good grades and good recommendations. All I need is a chance to prove myself. Their policy doesn't make sense. They could hire me for less money than a person with more experience. Then they could train me to suit their needs. Oh well, onward and upward!" The next day Keshia started looking for a company with an entry-level training program.

Whom does Keshia blame for the fact that she wasn't hired?

\_\_\_\_\_

Does she know why she didn't even get an interview? \_\_\_\_\_ How did she find out? \_\_\_\_\_

How does she deal with the letdown of the rejection letter?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Does Keshia think she has faults or problems that are a permanent part of her life? \_\_\_\_\_ In her mind, who is at fault for her failure to get a job with this company? \_\_\_\_\_

Which of the two people above, Ali or Keshia, do you feel is most like you? \_\_\_\_\_ Why? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

When something bad happened, which one blamed himself or herself?

\_\_\_\_\_ Which one blamed things outside himself or herself?

\_\_\_\_\_

Do Ali's thoughts sound similar to what goes through your mind after rejection? \_\_\_\_\_ Then this chapter should be very helpful.

Are you more like Keshia? \_\_\_\_\_ You're already pretty optimistic. You can get good practice in applying your skills from this chapter.

One of the secrets of being an optimist is to not take rejections too personally. Optimists tend to blame an outside source for an "unlucky" event. That lets optimists get on with their lives quickly.

Now, this is not always a "realistic" way of looking at things. Often, we are at fault for our problems, to some degree. Taking some responsibility is good. But an optimist avoids getting bogged down in bad feelings. And an optimist doesn't believe he is no good in general because of one failure. He doesn't feel helpless after a setback.

The great thing about this is, everyone can learn to behave like an optimist. What do you think about this? \_\_\_\_\_

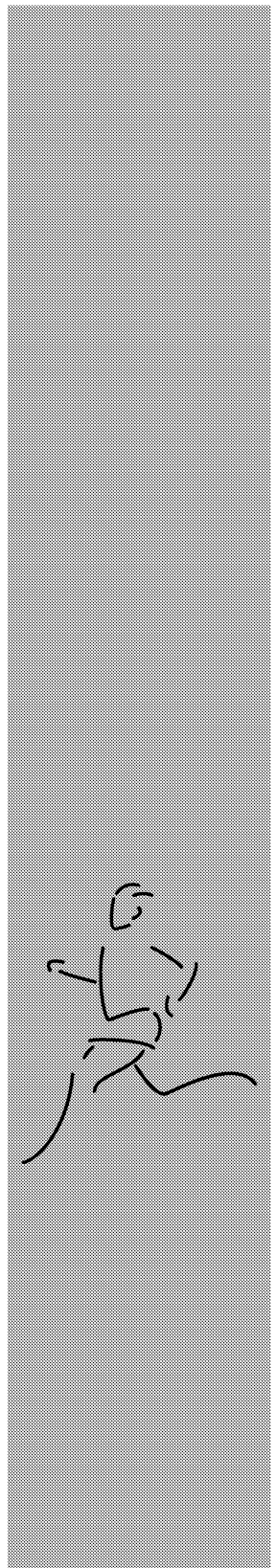
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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### *Three Steps to Optimism*

Do you identify, at least somewhat, with Ali? Then you can take steps to turn your thinking around.

#### ***Becoming More Optimistic—Step One***

The first thing you need to do is stop your negative train of thought. Some of the ways to do this seem absurd. Still, one may work for you.



- When you start to think bad things about yourself, you can yell STOP! This is not a good idea in a crowded crosswalk. Try “yelling” it mentally, not out loud, unless you’re alone.
- You can also wear a rubber band around your wrist. Snap it when you start to think bad thoughts about yourself. Or pinch the back of your hand. Don’t cause bruises. Just remind yourself to stop being negative.
- You could take a deep breath and try to make your mind a blank. Or come up with something else that would work for you. The idea is to bring yourself back into the present moment.

Which of these methods do you think would work for you?

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- So, first stop those thoughts. Then, make a note of them and set a time to deal with them later that day. And get back to what you’re supposed to be doing right now.

### ***Becoming More Optimistic—Step Two***

Later, at the time you have set, review your notes. Then argue against your negative thoughts.

This is about being logical. It is not logical to think that the world despises you. It doesn’t single you out for rejection. Have you ever felt that way? \_\_\_\_\_ That makes you the center of the universe. It is more logical to realize that the world is not hanging on your every thought and deed. The world is not sitting in an armchair with its feet up, waiting for you to make a mistake.

Nor is it logical to think that you’re a complete loser just because you didn’t link up with a certain company or friend. A small wardrobe doesn’t make you a “nerd.” A lack of education doesn’t make you “stupid.” Do these feelings sound familiar? \_\_\_\_\_ Those feelings are too general. They can spread over your whole life like a dark cloud blocking out the sun. Like a plant without sun, you won’t grow.

Let's look at how Ali, a now recovering pessimist, could argue with his bad feelings about himself.

Ali said: "Why didn't they like me?"

Argument: "Who said they didn't like me? Nobody said that at all. Besides, hiring is based on more than liking. It's a business decision."

Ali said: "Maybe my clothes looked bad."

Argument: "Were they dirty? No. Were they wrinkled? No. Were they good interview clothes for this job? I thought so. They seemed like clothes that people at that company were wearing. Besides, hiring is based on more than wardrobe."

Ali said: "I don't have what it takes."

Argument: "Don't be so hard on yourself. I must have looked pretty good, or they wouldn't have called me for an interview. Maybe I need to practice my interview skills. That would help, anyway. And besides, they probably wanted someone with more experience. I'd better work on getting some—even if it's part-time."

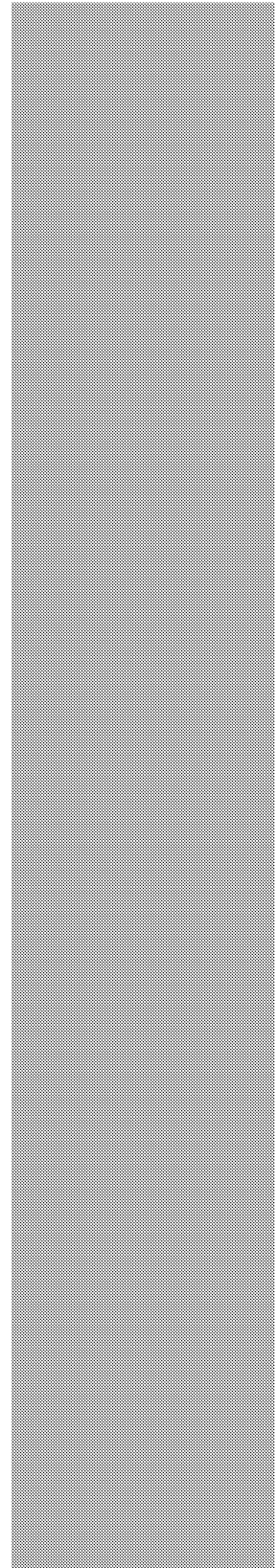
Now you try. Here are some more of Ali's negative thoughts. Argue against them in a way that would give Ali energy to get back into the job search.

Ali said: "I looked like a nerd."

Argument: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Ali said: "I can't compete on that level."

Argument: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



Ali said: “I’m just not good enough.”

Argument: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Have you had a negative thought like Ali’s recently? \_\_\_\_\_ What was it? \_\_\_\_\_

How could you argue against it? What could you say to yourself?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

***Becoming More Optimistic—Step Three***

The third step to becoming more optimistic is to take some positive action. Stop your bad train of thought. Argue against those thoughts. Then get going on your next challenge.

Like Keshia, move right away from rejection to action. You could:

- Pick up the phone and get some information that would help you in the future.
- Complete and mail your next application.
- Talk with a friend who has good advice.

The important thing is to not stay down for long. If you have a goal, keep moving toward it. Take a small step, then another and another.

What is one of your current goals? \_\_\_\_\_

What is something you could do today to get closer to that goal?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Review

When you have a setback, your mind may churn out various thoughts and beliefs. Those thoughts and beliefs will affect what happens next. If those thoughts are basically good, you will feel good about yourself and take the setback in stride. You won't have too much trouble getting going again. You may experience success soon. If you are harder on yourself and your "failure," it will be harder to get going again. Success may take much longer.

Three steps to becoming more optimistic are:

1. Stopping the negative train of thought
2. Arguing against negative, depressing thoughts
3. Doing something to keep moving toward your goal

### *The Other Side of Optimism*

We've seen that optimists:

- Don't take one setback as total failure
- Don't take a rejection personally
- Don't believe a bad situation is permanent

Do you understand these concepts? \_\_\_\_\_ (If not, review this chapter up to this point before going further.)

Where do you fit in? Are you able to act like an optimist in any of these ways yet? Which, if any? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What about when something good happens? Optimists believe they have control over their lives. That is why, when something good happens to them, optimists take the credit. They don't call it "pure luck." They don't think they just happened to be in the right place at the right time. They say to themselves, "I'm smart and hardworking. I could see this coming. That's why I'm in the right place at the right time."





What do you say to yourself when something good happens to you?

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Taking credit for good things helps optimists keep their self-esteem up and running. They've had success in the past and taken credit for their part in it. This gives them the energy and confidence to try new things—and succeed again.

People without this frame of mind just see a good event as random. They think they had little to do with it—even if it's something they worked hard for. But that's a missed opportunity to build self-esteem.

What good thing has happened to you lately? \_\_\_\_\_

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What did you have to do with it? \_\_\_\_\_

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### *A Place for Pessimism*

Can you think of any times when it would not be good to be an optimist? An optimist expects a good outcome and acts as if she will get one. But is that reasonable when her plans are dangerous, illegal, unrealistic, or could be hurtful to someone or something else?

Terri was at a party and had a bit too much to drink. When it finally came time to leave, she offered her friends a ride home. They liked Terri. She was usually an upbeat person. But they didn't want to go with her. "You're wasted," her friend Hector said. But Terri insisted. "C'mon," she said. "You know I'm a great driver. I've gotten you there before and I'll do it again."

Should Terri's friends, who really like her, go with her? Why or why not?

Is Terri right to believe in her ability to drive? \_\_\_\_\_

Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

What could be the “costs” to Terri if she is wrong about her ability to drive safely? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Charles decided to start his own catering business. He had just finished school, but he was very confident of his skills. His first three clients were referred to him by his former cooking teacher. After his first month in business, Charles decided to buy a new car for his personal use. He already had a secondhand van for his work. The payments on the car were really quite a bit more than he could afford. But he knew that he’d be making more money soon.

Is Charles’s optimism here reasonable? \_\_\_\_\_ Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

What could be the costs to Charles if his business doesn’t grow as fast as he expects? \_\_\_\_\_

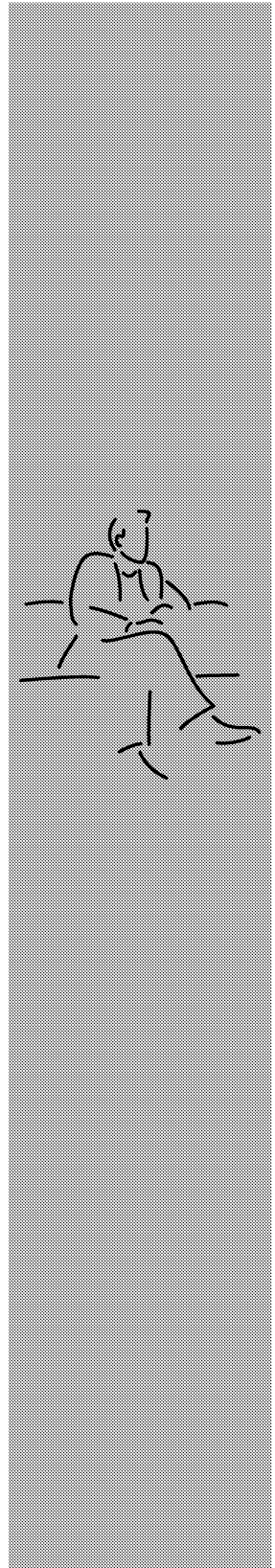
### ***Optimism or Pessimism?***

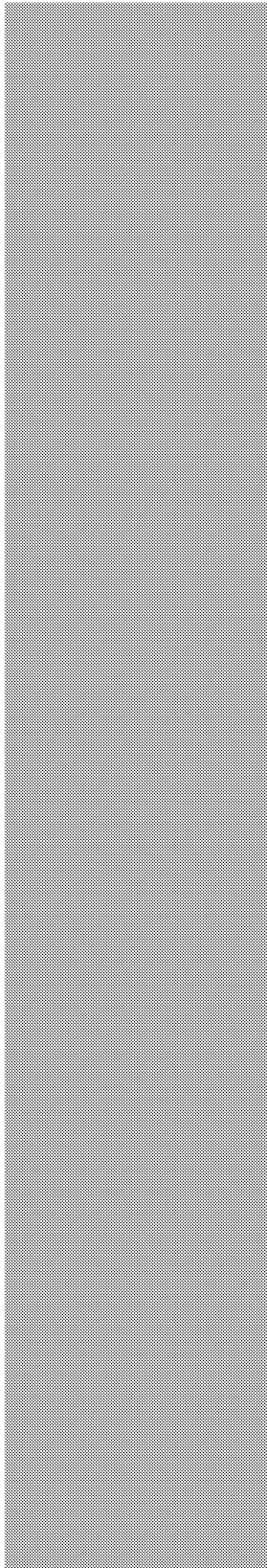
For each situation on this page and the next, tell how the person should deal with his or her problem. Should he or she be optimistic or pessimistic? Give a reason for your answer.

1. Sheryl works on the city road crew. She has to figure out how much road salt (to melt snow and ice) to order for next winter. (Road salt is hard to get during the winter.) Her boss just told her that the road crew is on a tight budget.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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*(continued on next page)*





2. Glenn is about to take a hard entrance exam for a job-training program. He knows for a fact that a lot of the people taking the test have a better education.

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3. Troy, Glenn's classmate, took the same test last week. He won't get the results for a month. He's very worried about what grade he'll get. He doesn't do anything but go to school and then come home and watch TV.

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4. Maria supervises a crew of good workers at a mill that makes paper. The crew is competing with one at another plant to see which can produce the most during a one-month period. The deadline is close and Maria's crew wants to work overtime to see if they can win. Her crew is well trained. But the machines can be dangerous.

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5. Tomorrow, Tobias will meet with his boss about a raise. He thinks he has done a good job in the past year. But he is very nervous. He knows that the company is allowing very few raises.

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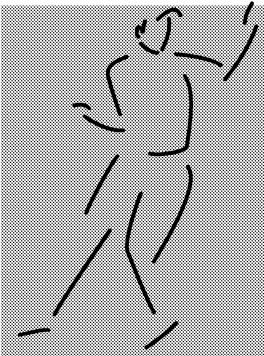
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## Which Is Which?

Would you say that each of the people below is being optimistic or pessimistic? Put an **O** or a **P** in the blank before each one to show your choice.

- \_\_\_ 1. Cara has tried everything to get along with her supervisor, but Ms. Jones is driving her crazy. The job market in Cara's city is very bad right now. But she decides to resign from Ms. Jones's company.
- \_\_\_ 2. Each year the company Tyrone works for gives a free trip to the best employee. There are many good people at this company and they all compete for the prize. When Tyrone won, all he could think was "Wow! Am I lucky or what?" He was amazed that he was singled out for attention.
- \_\_\_ 3. Susan's mother yells at her a lot, and often strikes her. The counselor at Susan's school offered to speak to her mother, but Susan refused. She doesn't want any more trouble than she already has. She does everything she can to keep her mother from getting upset.
- \_\_\_ 4. Shelby got a rejection letter from the college he applied to. "I didn't really want to go there, anyway," he thought. "The recruiter I spoke with didn't seem too cool. Besides, my guidance counselor said the place was flooded with applications."
- \_\_\_ 5. Tony works in the sales department of a big company. He just heard that the production department won a major award. Production has invited everyone in the company to a party to celebrate. Tony doesn't think he'll go. His sales for the month are down and he needs to make a lot of calls. "The best thing I can do for the company right now is my own work," he says to himself.





### **Hints—How to Grow Your Optimism**

- When good things happen to you, tell yourself that it is at least partly due to your own hard work and intelligence.
- Share your successes with others. This doesn't mean bragging. It means letting people know when something good has happened for you. And it means asking about and listening to their successes as well.
- If you have a problem, take it one step at a time. Don't wallow in hopelessness. Write down and argue against your negative thoughts. Then take a positive step.
- Imagine your success. Try to picture yourself achieving what you want. Rehearse these scenes in your mind.
- Share your energy and enthusiasm with those in need. Give of yourself to someone who needs help. You'll feel better too.

### **Chapter Checkup**

In this chapter, did you:

- \_\_\_ See that what you say to yourself after a bad event affects how you look at the world? (pp. 17–19)
- \_\_\_ See that how you look at the world can affect how well you do in it? (pp. 17–19)
- \_\_\_ Learn to speak to yourself in a way that will help you? (pp. 20–22)
- \_\_\_ Learn how to argue against negative thoughts? (pp. 20–22)
- \_\_\_ Learn that you can feel good about yourself and succeed with the help of a positive attitude? (pp. 22–24)