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turns out that they often have the opposite effect. Many of us are more successful when we focus on the causes that we are likely to fail. This post originally appeared on LinkedIn. In a series of clever studies, psychologists Julie Norem and Nancy Cantor compared strategic optimists and defensive pessimists. If you are a strategic optimist, you imagine the best possible outcome and then look forward to making it happen. If you are a defensive pessimist, even if you have been successful in the past, you know this time may be different. You start portraying all the things that can go wrong. What if I spill coffee on an interviewer? What if I accidentally deliver a presentation in a foreign language? What if I forget my name? By nature, we are optimistic. We think we are better than most people with almost everything we do... More Most people assume that strategic optimists outperform defensive pessimists because they benefit from trust and high expectations. Norem and Kantor found that defensive pessimists were more anxious and set lower expectations for themselves in analytical, verbal and creative tasks. However, they don't perform any worse. G/O Media can get a commission First, I asked how these people were able to do so well despite their pessimism, Norem writes in Positive Strength of Negative Thinking. I soon began to realize that they were doing so well because of their pessimism... negative thinking has turned anxiety into action. Imagining the worst-case scenario, defensive pessimists motivate themselves to prepare more and try harder. G/O Media can receive a commission of \$25 Strategic Optimists and Defensive Pessimists to succeed under different circumstances. Whether you're a defensive pessimist, or you're trying to motivate one, strategies that prove effective are often the opposite of what you expect. Don't whistle while you workY's evidence shows that happiness often makes us more successful by promoting energy and creativity, it can backfire for defensive pessimists. When strategic optimists and defensive pessimists threw darts, they did equally well overall, but were most effective in opposite conditions. Before throwing darts, some people listened to relaxing tapes (hear the gentle rolling of waves on the sun-drenched ocean). Others imagined themselves darts and missed their goals. When they actually threw their darts, strategic optimists were about 30% more accurate when they relaxed rather than imagining negative results. But the opposite was true for defensive defensive they were about 30% more accurate when they thought about negative results, instead of relaxing or portraying perfect performance. Norem's research shows that positive mood impairs the work of defensive pessimists. When they are in a good mood, they become complacent; they no longer have the anxiety that usually mobilizes their efforts. If you want to sabotage defensive pessimists, just make them happy. According to the behavior of the blog Psychology Today, the culture of positive thinking creates a lot of ... MoreResponzor discourages We think it's a good idea to encourage people, but not so quickly. In one experiment, people performed a drawing task that required focus and precision. Right before the assignment, for half the participants, the researcher looked at their grades in college and said, Hmm, given how well you've done in the past, I think you'd be very confident in your work. You will probably be doing very well on upcoming tasks. These words of encouragement somewhat increased the effectiveness of strategic optimists, who made 14% better. By contrast, defensive pessimists did significantly worse when they were encouraged, scoring 29% lower. Encouragement has helped to build their confidence, quell their anxiety and intervene in their efforts to meet low expectations. As Oliver Berkman writes in The Antidote, Reassurance is a two-pointed sword. Don't worry, be unhappy when people are worried, we sometimes tell them to distract themselves. Again, this doesn't pay off for defensive pessimists. In another experiment, people completed a questionnaire about their styles and then took a mental math test that involved adding and subtracting numbers in their heads (e.g. 15 and 47 - 73). Strategic optimists did not benefit from thinking about possible results, but defensive pessimists did. When defensive pessimists were distracted with another task right before the math test, their scores were about 25% lower than when they listed the most extreme results that might occur in the test, and how they might feel. Taking the time to worry helped them generate the anxiety needed to motivate themselves. British philosopher Alain de Botton wants you to think about some parts of your life so... More Fantasies for Silver ScreenStudies show that positive fantasies discourage achievement when people imagine losing weight or pursuing a relationship with a stampede, they are less likely to perform. Also, people work worse when they say I will than when they ask themselves: Will I? Approval feels good, writes Dan Pink in Sell This Man. But that doesn't encourage you to call in resources and strategies to actually accomplish the task. / O media can get a commission of \$20 We need glass to be half full and half emptyIn the US, we stand for over pessimists. When economists surveyed more than 1,000 CEOs in the U.S., they found that more than 80 percent of those surveyed considered them very optimistic. G/O media can get a commission of \$17 Optimizers, usually thrive in jobs that require resilience and perseverance. For example, in the case of high bounce rates, optimists sold 37% more than pessimists in two years and were twice as likely to leave in the first year. In Learned Optimism, psychologist Martin Seligman reveals that when something goes wrong, pessimists view negative events as personal (I'm a terrible speaker), permanent (I'll never get better) and widespread (I'm going to lose the respect of my colleagues and my spouse). Optimists, on the other hand, recognize that when a presentation misses the mark, it is possible that the audience was not ready to post them, they can practice and improve, and they can still excel in other tasks and have a pleasant evening at home. G/O Smeed can get a commission of \$14 At the same time, we need pessimists to anticipate the worst and prepare us all for this. On average, studies show that people who never worry have lower performance than those who worry from time to time. Research also shows that when entrepreneurs are very optimistic, their new businesses generate less revenue and grow more slowly, and when CEOs are very optimistic, they take on riskier debt and are more likely to swing over fences, putting their companies at risk. (Perhaps that's why there are fewer optimistic CFOs than CEOs.) Ultimately, both styles are deadly in their extremes. Pessimism becomes fatalistic and optimism becomes toxic. The key is to find a sweet spot, more moderate ranges that combine the benefits of both approaches. According to Richard Pyne, the best leaders, including presidents, know that too much optimism is a dangerous thing, that wise and productive leadership means a balance between the view of the optimists on the blue sky at the world and a clearer assessment of any situation by pessimists. Take one seller part, one part inventor, one piece attorney, one piece security engineer, stir gently, and you have a great chief executive. If you are the kind of person who always tells other people to look on the bright side, you may want to reconsider. Whether people will be able not to think positively or negatively, but whether they choose strategies that correspond to their thinking. As psychologists Heidi Grant Halvorson and Tori Higgins write in Focus: It fits that matters. G/O Media can get a commission of \$8 And if you're a defensive pessimist, when preparing for a performance that really matters, you list your weaknesses, not your strengths, and drink a glass of anxiety rather than a shot of confidence. Positive power of negative thinking Grant is the author of Give and Give, a best-selling book by the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal. Follow him on Twitter @AdamMGrant.G/O Media can get a \$18Want commission to see your work on Lifehacker? Write to Tessa. If you can't do a push, the key may be forgetting for a moment about pushing yourself up. Instead, lower yourself down from the push-up position, and reap even more benefits. The same trick works for pull-ups and other complex exercises: it is the power of negative repetitions. As Negative Reps Build StrengthWhen you do regular, pushing the type of push-ups, your muscles perform what is called concentric contraction: muscle cells are shorter as they contract. The same idea is when your hands pull you up for a pull up, or when you lift weight off the floor. But when you lower yourself (or weight) down, your muscles perform eccentric contractions. That means they try to stay contracted until they lengthen. Even if it's the same work in reverse, it's harder for muscle cells to perform without damage. This can make eccentric cuts, also known as negative reps, sound like a bad idea. Additional damage causes more soreness, for example. But damage is a normal part of learning: damaged muscle is the one that needs to heal, and the healing process is what makes the muscles bigger and stronger. Weightlifting, then, is just a habit of carefully damaging the muscles a bit at a time and reaping the rewards. G/O media can get commissionEd a hard workout, there is a certain sense of pride that comes along with the pain... MoreIf you have the ability to exercise anyway, it's great to do both: lift the weight and put it down-slowly enough that it feels like you're controlling its descent. Some negative exercises to TryEven, if you can't lift weight (or your body weight), you can probably control it enough to slow it downhill. Here's how you turn the impossible exercise into a possible one. When I first started working towards pull-ups, for example, negatives were a key part of my routine. Auxiliary pull-ups with the gravitational apparatus probably helped me build strength, but I didn't start to see improvements until I made the negatives. I would go over to grab a pull up bar and then slowly go down. I once told someone I couldn't do real pull-ups, and as an explanation I took a bar to show that I couldn't pull myself out. Except... Yes. Keeping your first pull up is an amazing thing. But as you go about making the best of... More Same technique can work for push-ups, and it's a great option for people who can't do full push-ups. Instead of ton of reps from the knees, start in the board position and lower yourself down. When your belly is on the ground, go back to the fours and reset. You Are You have to push yourself up, but you're still learning all the same muscles as if you did. Knee push-ups are a classic modification for those who can't do full push-ups, or can only do... Read moreAnother's great use for negatives is the descent works. It won't help you uphill runs (we have other suggestions for this), but it will help prevent the soreness and cramps that can come with the descents in the race. Work down runs in your usual little-by-little, and soon you'll be protected from these unwanted surprises if they turn in a race or a casual run. Running hills is great for your strength and stamina, and it's inevitable in some parts Read more What a side effect, you'll build more strength to help your running overall. You can also adopt the principle of negative repetitions and use it for any exercises you find challenging, but make sure to always take precautions for safety if you are trying something you are not sure you can handle. For example, if you want to try negative squats, make sure you are in a squat rack with safety bars set properly. And no matter what exercise, never pile on the huge amount of weight that are outside of your ability to control. The first time you try the negatives, you may be sore the next day, so it's easy and see how it goes. Over time, however, the impossible may well become possible. Illustration by Angelica Alzona. Alzona. negative prefixes exercises with answers pdf

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