

Volunteer Leader Training Guide

Attitude Is Everything

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Objectives

- To share with participants the importance of having a positive attitude.
- To share with participants how to strengthen their personal happiness.

Target Audience

- EHC leaders
- Adult audiences

Introduction

Have you ever formed an opinion or first impression about someone from their attitude? How does a person's attitude affect you? Are attitudes contagious? Attitudes can make a big difference in one's life. Let's talk about our attitudes and what makes us truly happy in life.

"A positive attitude may not solve all your problems, but it will annoy enough people to make it worth the effort." – Herm Albright (1876-1944)

"The greatest discovery of my generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitudes of mind." – William James (1842-1910)

"I am still determined to be cheerful and happy, in whatever situation I may be; for I have also learned from experience that the greater part of our happiness or misery depends upon our dispositions, and not our circumstances." – Martha Washington (1732-1802)

Main Teaching Points

Attitude really is what "we" choose to make it. We have had a movement in the past to improve self-esteem and competency through praise and self-appreciation. We've heard that if people just felt better about themselves things would be different. Self-esteem causes little by itself. Self-esteem comes from doing something well. Unfortunately, after years of struggling with the self-esteem movement, we are seeing more depression and unhappiness in our society.

Depression has been called the epidemic of modern times. One study found that 4 percent of those born in 1925 were seriously depressed by the time they were middle aged. But of those born in 1955, more than 60 percent were depressed by the time they were 30. What's the difference? Martin Seligman, a psychologist who has researched depression, believes the differences are real. He believes our culture's growing emphasis on self has made it more difficult for us to find personal meaning in life.

Earlier generations focused on their duty to God, family and nation. More recent generations have focused on finding themselves and pursuing personal happiness. Instead of focusing on achievements that are beyond ourselves, "what's in it for me?" has become the concern of many.

What makes you truly happy in life? (*Discuss as time permits.*)

Personal happiness is most likely to be achieved when we remove the focus from ourselves and focus on using our talents to help others. It is also important that we try to focus on our strengths rather than our weaknesses. Let's read a story to help demonstrate this idea. (*Read the Animal Story.*)

It is wiser to discover the strengths and talents that we have been blessed with. It's easy to get depressed when we measure our weaknesses against the strengths of others. We all have strengths that we can develop and celebrate. If we do this, it will help us stay focused on the positive.

What does a positive attitude look like? We are often unaware of the effect our automatic thoughts can have on our behavior. Automatic thoughts can be words, images or memories. What makes us fearful? What makes us resentful? What makes us happy? We have automatic reactions or thoughts to each one of these questions. We often react quickly to a situation before we think through all the options and consequences.

Let's read a story that will help us to think through situations and not react too quickly. (*Read Shoe Shine Story.*)

What does this story tell us? It tells us that we need to get out of the revenge mode quickly, trust our intuition and persist even when there are obstacles. Every adversity has a positive side, and little things can have big consequences.

It is hard not to overreact at times. It's important to first remember the following before getting upset about the situation.

- Are you reacting to your interpretation or the facts?
- What is the worst thing that could happen if your interpretation of the situation is true.
- Is there an alternate way of seeing this situation?
- Am I going to let this situation ruin my day?

According to David Myers, a happiness researcher, money does not buy happiness. Rich people are no happier than people with average incomes. Older people are neither less nor more happy than young people. And men have no advantage over women. So who is happy? Only about 10-15 percent of Americans identify themselves as truly happy. However, in the right situation, anyone can be happy and have a positive outlook about life.

To strengthen your personal happiness and add to the joyfulness of your life, try the following. (*See Handout 2, The Quest for Happiness.*)

- Work on something that challenges you.
- Do something for others.
- Smile often.
- Join a group or organization.
- Give someone a break.
- Try to keep things in perspective.
- Take care of yourself.

An optimistic attitude can do wonders for our health. A study from the Canadian Medical Association Journal that spanned 30 years looked at patients' attitudes after surgery or some kind of health procedure. The study found that the power of positive thinking was real. Patients who felt they would do well in recovery did do well. Patients who were scared or pessimistic about recovery did not recover as quickly as the optimists.

Positive habits and positive thinking can do wonders for your life. Try the following positive habits:

- Think of yourself as successful.
- Have positive expectations for everything you do.
- Remind yourself of past successes.
- Don't dwell on failures, just avoid repeating them.
- Surround yourself with positive people and ideas.
- Keep trying until you achieve the results you want.

We need to choose to be positive and to take control of our lives. There is very little in this world that we can control...other than our thoughts. Positive thinking will let you do everything better than negative thinking will.