

"The ABCDE's of Staying Optimistic"

(Adapted from Martin E.P. Seligman, Ph.D., *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1991)

Martin Seligman, a renowned psychologist and clinical researcher, has been studying optimists and pessimists for 25 years. **Pessimists** believe that bad events are their fault, will last a long time, and undermine everything. They feel helpless and may sink into depression, which is epidemic today.... **Optimists**, on the other hand, believe that defeat is a temporary setback or a challenge--it doesn't knock them down. "Pessimism is escapable," asserts Seligman, by learning a new set of cognitive skills that will enable you to take charge, resist depression, and make yourself feel better and accomplish more.

--Joan Price, Editorial Reviews, Amazon.com

1) 'Adv^{er}sity' = that situation or event which triggers your pessimism. Could be almost anything—a leaky faucet, a frown from a friend, a baby that won't stop crying, a rejection letter, no returned call, few job ads in the newspaper, etc.

2) 'Belief' = how you interpret the adversity. Be sure to separate thoughts from your feelings. (Feelings will go under Consequences below.) "I just blew my diet" and "I'm incompetent" are beliefs.

3) 'Consequences' = what you did/how you acted/behaved and how you felt. Record those things.

4) 'Disputation' = effort to argue with yourself and dispute your beliefs, i.e. redeploying your attention. That is, to interrupt the habitual thought pattern regarding the adversity and your belief about it.

5) 'Energization' = outcome or effect of redirecting one's thoughts and attention.

RECORD

CHANGE

Example

1) **Adversity** (= *that situation or event which triggers your pessimism. Could be almost anything—a leaky faucet, a frown from a friend, a baby that won't stop crying, a rejection letter, no returned call, few job ads in the newspaper, etc.*)

- ▶ I sent a resume and cover letter to XYZ Company. I never heard back from them. So, I called them just to check that they received them and learn their selection process and time table. The person answering the phone was angry that I had called.

2) **Belief** (= *how you interpret the adversity. Be sure to separate thoughts from your feelings. Feelings will go under Consequences below. "I just blew my diet" and "I'm incompetent" are beliefs.*)

- ▶ They didn't like me. My chances of getting an interview just evaporated.

3) **Consequences** (= *what you did/how you acted/behaved and how you felt. Record those things.*)

- ▶ I felt disappointed and angry at myself. I was so embarrassed and angry that the person answering the phone was so unable to understand the reason I was verifying my resume and cover letter had been received. Obviously, events weren't going as I had hoped.

4) **Disputation** (= *effort to argue with yourself and dispute your beliefs, i.e. redeploying your attention. That is, to interrupt the habitual thought pattern regarding the adversity and your belief about it.*)

- ▶ This is ridiculous. The person who answered the phone may just have been busy and had too many things to do. They may have had previous job seekers be very annoying, pestering with too many calls. I was clear that I needed to know two pieces of information that are reasonable to ask of them: one, did they get my email with cover letter and resume and were they able to open them, and two, what is their selection process and time table projected to be. And I thanked the person for the information. I'll call them back when I know they said they'd be at their next step if I have not heard from them.

5) **Energization** (= *outcome or effect of redirecting one's thoughts and attention.*)

- ▶ I didn't feel embarrassed or angry, and I realize that everyone has bad days. I'm a reasonable person and make an effort to communicate clearly, including doing follow up that is reasonable. In so doing I am demonstrating my follow up skills and self-discipline. Basically, I can relax and not let my imagination get me down and ruin my chances for this position. My qualifications match their stated requirements for the position. Let's see if we agree that there is a match and go from there. I'll keep job hunting. I only need one organization to say, "Yes, we want you."