



ENHANCING WORKPLACE CULTURE

What Makes You Crabby at Work? What You Can Do to Turn Your Day Around

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Negativity in the workplace, and in everyday life, is common. It is easy for anyone to get into a negative mindset. One reason for this is that negativity has been hardwired into our brain through evolution.¹ Having a negative experience can help someone avoid danger in the future.

Sophie Standing



For example, an adorable cat comes into the clinic in a carrier. You reach into the carrier to pet the cat and it scratches you. That hurts a lot! The next time a cat comes into the clinic in a carrier, you may use a towel or remove the top of the carrier to get the cat out so you don't get scratched. Another reason people may find themselves in a negative mindset is that expressing negativity can bring them more attention. For example, if someone asks how your day is going, you may say, "Oh my gosh, this day is just the worst. Do you know what a client said to me?!" The person then replies, "Oh my, I'm so sorry that happened to you. I can't believe that! Are you OK?" However, if you say your day has been great, you may only hear a response of, "That's awesome!" and the other person keeps walking. The brain will realize that it received more attention expressing a negative interaction.

In the past few years, I have learned that it takes a lot of effort and energy to become more positive in everyday life, especially when surrounded by negative talk. I have a great friend who always reminds me to "assume good intent." Having a positive mindset and assuming the best of those around us can help to decrease stress and depression and increase overall health and wellbeing. While it may seem easy, constant negative feelings can take more energy than assuming good intent.

Each of us is responsible for our own actions. It is important to look within to change your attitude and control what can be controlled. You can control your attitude, your goals, how you speak, how you act, and how you react to situations and challenges in your life. You cannot control the past, the future, others' actions, others' opinions, what society thinks of you, and how others handle themselves.

There are some of us who think we are positive people, but in reality, tend to focus on the negative while not wanting to believe we are negative. According to the Mayo Clinic, there are many forms of negative self-talk, including those listed in **BOX 1**.

The first step in becoming a more positive person is to recognize that bad days happen. Pretending to be positive in a rough situation (and thereby ignoring reality) will only worsen the problem. Feel the feelings. Process those feelings and learn from them. Be cautious not to focus only on the negative, but look for the positive parts of the situation. For example, a manager woke up to a resignation email from a staff member. This staff member has been struggling with burnout.

The manager tried to help but nothing seemed to work for the employee. After receiving this resignation, the manager cannot stop thinking about it. "Where did I go wrong?" "This employee is quitting because of me." "What is going to happen to the rest of my staff?" This puts the manager in a terrible mood for the rest of the day. Alternatively, let's focus on the positive parts of this situation. What positive? Think about it. This employee is helping themselves and getting out of a nonideal situation. It will help morale because they have been bringing down the team. The manager can then focus more on growing the team and is in a much better headspace to do so.

BOX 1

Forms of Negative Self-Talk²

- **Filtering** is when someone focuses on the minor negative aspects of the day even though nothing *really* bad actually happened.
- **Personalizing** is when someone automatically blames themselves for situations that are outside of their control.
- **Catastrophizing** is anticipating the worst-case scenario all the time.
- **Blaming** is faulting something or someone else for a situation that happened instead of looking within oneself.
- **Thinking the "royal you" should do something** means thinking about all the things you should have done and then blaming everything or everyone else for not doing them.
- **Magnifying** is making a huge deal out of small problems.
- **Perfectionism** can be negative if someone focuses too much on controlling every aspect of their day and having unrealistic expectations. Nobody is perfect, and we all need to stop setting ourselves up for failure by putting unachievable standards on ourselves.
- **Polarizing self-talk** is when someone can only see good or bad and nothing in-between. For example, a veterinary nurse is known for placing a catheter in every vein they touch but missed one today. Now they feel like they are bad at their job and refuse to try to place another catheter that day.



The more negativity someone surrounds themselves with, the more their thoughts will become negative.²



In order to find the positive in a situation, it's important to take the time to sort one's feelings. Identify and allow yourself to feel scared, stressed, sad, or disappointed and then move toward learning from the situation. This can be a "15-minute pity party" or take a couple of days. Depending on the intensity of feelings, it might not be wise to experience them in front of the team; therefore, finding quiet, alone time is an important step. Even if that's in the backyard at the end of a frustrating shift, taking that time is important so that focus can be shifted to the learning process.

It is important to surround oneself with positive people.³ The more negativity someone surrounds themselves with, the more their thoughts will become negative.³ You are allowed to remind your coworkers to find the positive parts of the day. They may get annoyed at first, but the more you call someone out on their negativity, the more they may start thinking more positively as well. We are mostly introverts in veterinary medicine, so this may be a challenging ask, but the payoff is worth the try!

Always try to focus on the small, good things that happen during the day. Focus on the positive feelings you get from that and allow it to change you. If you are not open to allowing positive changes, then you will continue to dwell on the negative.²

Most important, be kind to yourself. Allow yourself to make mistakes and realize that you cannot be a more positive person without working on yourself. **TVN**

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Tami is the current intensive care unit, emergency room, and intermediate care supervisor at the Purdue University Veterinary Teaching Hospital. Tami attended veterinary technology school at Purdue and graduated in 2010 with her bachelor's degree in veterinary technology. Tami started as a veterinary technician in the ICU and has been the supervisor at Purdue since 2012. She received her VTS credential in emergency and critical care in 2016. She enjoys teaching new veterinary nurses and veterinary students and preparing them for their career ahead. In her spare time, she enjoys hanging out with her 26 chickens and ducks, German shorthaired pointers, mixed-lup mutt, cat, and 2-legged husband.