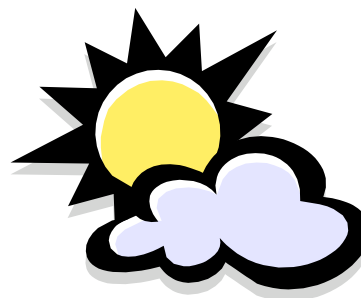


Optimism



Why is it that some people go to pieces when something rotten happens, while others seem able to pick themselves up from the most terrible misfortune? The key difference is the way they *interpret* events. People who are easily undermined by bad events tend to interpret them as **permanent**, **pervasive**, and **personal**. If, on the other hand, you can learn to interpret bad events as temporary, 'one-off' and not all 'your fault', you will be much better able to cope and move on.

Say you go for an interview for a job but don't get selected. If you tell yourself 'I'll never get a decent job I like' (a permanent condition) or 'I just can't impress people' (i.e. this one failure to impress pervades every aspect of my life), or 'I really messed up that interview' (a personal failing) you are preparing yourself for long-term unemployment, since these kinds of messages are self-fulfilling prophecies. If, on the other hand, you tell yourself 'I had an off day when I did that interview' (temporary) or 'They must have had some other really good candidates' (specific and non-'personal'), you are almost ready to go for another job.

Look at these different ways of interpreting the same event:

Permanent (pessimistic)	Temporary (optimistic)
<i>'I'm a wreck.'</i>	<i>'I'm exhausted.'</i>
<i>'Diets never work.'</i>	<i>'Diets don't work when you have to eat out a lot.'</i>
<i>'You're always getting at me.'</i>	<i>'You get at me when you've had a bad day.'</i>
<i>'The children show me no respect whatsoever.'</i>	<i>'The children are at a difficult age.'</i>
<i>'You never talk to me.'</i>	<i>'You haven't talked to me lately'</i>

Universal (pessimistic)	Specific (optimistic)
<i>'All men are bastards.'</i>	<i>'That man's a bastard.'</i>
<i>'I'm not attractive.'</i>	<i>'I'm not attractive to him/her'.</i>
<i>'Going to the cinema's boring.'</i>	<i>'That film last night was boring'.</i>

The same principles apply to the way we interpret *good events* – except that the 'style' is opposite to that for bad events. The optimistic interpretation of good events finds permanent, pervasive and personal meanings: *I'm brilliant at interviews*. The pessimistic interpretation of good events is that they are temporary and specific: *I was lucky with that interview panel*. Optimism will give you the confidence to go for plenty more interviews if you want even more exciting jobs, while pessimism leaves you believing that each success is just a fluke.