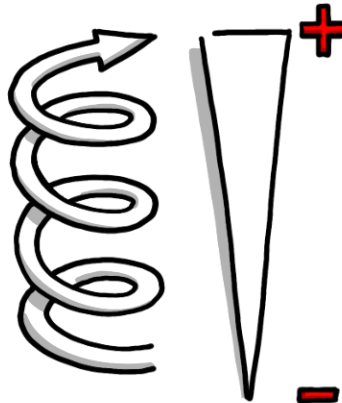


Creating a positive dynamic: simple actions with a big impact



25.4.2024, David Fiorucci

In a world beset with “fake news”, conflict and climate change, it is easy to become negative. Private, public and professional conversations often reflect this sense of demoralization. However, we have it in us not only to view things differently but also to have a positive influence on those around us. Complaining, criticizing and looking glum only exacerbate the downward spiral of pessimism. On the other hand, adopting a positive attitude, sharing words of encouragement and performing acts of kindness can completely transform our daily life and the lives of others.

So let's learn to channel, prioritize and focus our energies to create a positive dynamic.

The impact of small actions

Let's take the inspirational example of Tobias, aged 21, who shows his gratitude and respect for bus drivers by greeting and thanking them whenever he gets on or off the bus – a simple but effective way of showing appreciation. Such respect for others' often unnoticed labours makes for a warm, inclusive environment.

Take another very mundane situation: a young neighbour aged 12 or 13 spontaneously helped me by holding open the entrance door when I had my hands full. These spontaneous acts of kindness, which cost nothing but are nevertheless precious, strengthen community cohesion and show how courtesy can become part of daily life.

Courtesy in action

There is plenty of scope for personal acts of kindness on public transport. On one occasion an elderly person, sitting with his walking frame beside him, seemed worried about how he would get off the bus. Aware of the man's disquiet, I helped him with his walking frame and made sure the doors of the bus stayed open long enough for him to get off without having to hurry. By discreetly ensuring his safety, I was able to restore his confidence and at the same time encourage other passengers to help in similar ways.

Smile: the first step on the way of kindness

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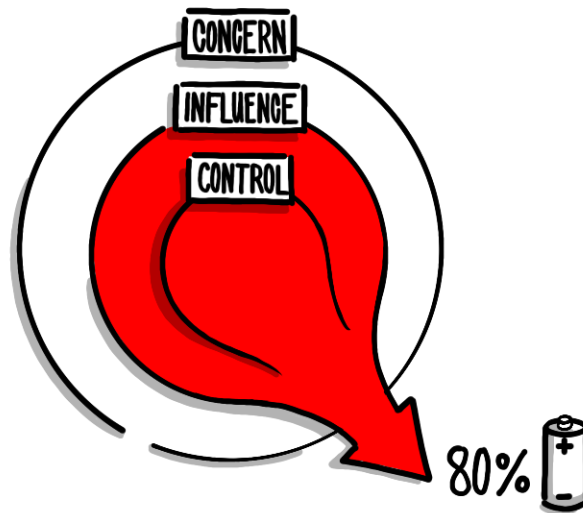
A smile is probably the simplest and most telling way of breaking the ice and dispelling anxiety. When we smile, we send a signal of openness and goodwill towards others, which will greatly enhance the quality of our daily interactions.

Practical actions anyone can perform

Here are a few ways in which all of us, young and old, can help to create a positive atmosphere:

1. **Greetings and thanks:** Never underestimate the power of a hearty “good morning” or a sincere “thank you”. Whether you are interacting with service staff, work colleagues or even a stranger in the street, these words can transform a dull day into a positive experience.
2. **Spontaneous assistance:** Whether you hold open a door, help someone carry their shopping or give up your seat on the bus, there is no lack of opportunities to be helpful. Such actions create a framework of solidarity and kindness.
3. **Active listening:** When holding a conversation, show that you are really listening. This means asking questions, reflecting back and responding thoughtfully. Careful listening can make all the difference to the other person’s emotional well-being.
4. **Paying compliments:** A sincerely meant compliment can light up someone’s day. Compliments must be sincere and specific if they are to have their full effect.
5. **Community participation:** Get involved in community activities or local initiatives. Whatever such volunteering entails, neighbourhood clean-ups or social events, it reinforces the social fabric and makes for a positive dynamic.

Introduction to the Covey Circles of Influence model



In his well-known book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey introduces the concept of three circles: the circle of control, the circle of influence and the circle of concern.

1. **The circle of control** takes into account the factors over which we have direct control: our actions, decisions, attitudes and reactions.
2. **The circle of influence** is concerned with the aspects of our life and environment on which we can have some impact, but only indirectly, mainly through our interactions with others.
3. **The circle of concern** includes issues and situations which affect us but in respect of which we are powerless, such as government policies or others' behaviour.

Prioritizing our energies: the 80/20 rule

Covey recommends applying a version of Pareto's (80/20) rule to these circles. He says we should devote roughly 80% of our energies to the circles of control and influence. His theory is that personal efficiency can be greatly enhanced if we concentrate on fields in which we really have power to act. By behaving in this way, we not only use our energy most effectively, we also extend our circle of influence, because taking the initiative and assuming responsibility for our actions often encourages others and stimulates their trust and cooperation.

The importance of self-reflection and emotional intelligence

Self-reflection plays a vital role in this model. It makes it possible to:

- Clearly identify where each aspect of our lives belongs in the different circles;
- Regularly reassess our priorities and so adjust the way we apply our energies;
- Cultivate self-awareness, which is essential in managing our reactions and attitudes to situations we cannot control.

Emotional intelligence is of equal importance, as it helps us to:

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- Conduct our social interactions more effectively, which will enlarge our circle of influence;
- Manage our emotions in stressful or unforeseen situations, by concentrating on what we can do something about, rather than being overwhelmed by things outside our control.

The societal impact of our actions

By focusing most of our energies on our circle of control, not only do we optimize our personal well-being, we also help to create a positive social dynamic. Every conscious action and every decision taken with intent will have a constructive influence on our environment. Therefore, by cultivating a proactive and thoughtful attitude, we become agents of change in society.

Every action counts and helps create a positive upwards spiral. By adopting charitable ways of behaving, not only do we improve our own state of mind, we also influence others in a positive direction. The stories of Tobias and others we know demonstrate that change often begins with small gestures. In these difficult times, let's remember that optimism is a force to be cultivated and shared. Let's begin acting as architects of a more cheerful, more humane future.