

# Why your cards are stacked against feeling good (and how to reshuffle the deck)



In my previous post, "[Is it natural to be negative](#)", I introduced you to the concept that the mind is primed toward a negative reality as a survival advantage to us. Basically, we can't slow down and smell the roses if we are dead. So the

ability of our minds to predict, identify and warn us of threats, *even those that aren't real*, is an evolutionary advantage despite coming at what is supposed to be a short-term cost. The cards are stacked against noticing the pleasant in favor of the threat.

The problem with this mechanism today is that we are much more likely to act based upon our fears, than on love. In particular, our perception of suffering or loss is more strongly motivating than our perception of joy or gain. Studies show that when it comes to losing money, we view the loss of a certain sum as 2.5 times greater than if we gained that exact sum. Other studies have shown that when it comes to relationships, counteracting a single negative interaction with a person requires an average of five positive interactions following it. No wonder it stings so much when we find we overspent for some product, or feel let down by a loved one. We might even rationalize that the situation isn't as bad as we think, yet we still feel the way we feel.

Said another way, comparable negative and positive experiences don't carry the same weight in our minds. This means we suffer far more than what it seems we logically should. Not only do

we *not* attribute the same degree of meaning to positive experiences as we do to negative ones, but we also are less likely to even notice the positive experiences happening in our every day lives. Even though we have evolved reward mechanisms to prompt us towards positive situations that also enhance survival (the flood of dopamine when we bite into a sweet apple, for example), our minds view the need to identify, and avoid, negative threats as more important. Basically, we notice negative experiences more frequently than positive ones, and negative experiences carry more weight than positive ones do. The end result is a stressed out, unhappy, unfulfilling life that leads to disease of the mind and body until the sweet release of death.

Okay, that is probably too dramatic, but it is certainly how some people feel. And it *is* how many live their lives, whether they realize it or not. But where do we go from here, knowing this information about how our minds work? How can we use it to our advantage?

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It takes practice, but it is possible to gradually shift your reality from a negative to a positive one. The first step is cultivating mindfulness. This means paying attention in a non-judgmental manner to what is happening around you. You know that you will automatically seek out the negative during your day, because this is what your mind is skilled at. By being mindful, you will also notice more positive, providing a balance. When you do encounter an experience in your day you

would call positive, focus on it! The second step is to express gratitude in that moment, whether it is for the first snow of the season, a tasty and healthy lunch, or catching up with an old friend. By experiencing the good mindfully, you experience the good *more*. This will help offset the natural negative tendencies of your mind. Need a reminder to feel grateful? Then try setting one! Leave yourself post-it notes, or set an alarm on your phone that will prompt you to take a few minutes out of your day to be appreciative.

A third step is to come up with a list of activities you enjoy, and rate them on a scale of 1-10 in terms of how fun they are. The number is the “fun quotient” for each activity. Since it’s easier to feel grateful when we are enjoying ourselves, pick at least three days this next week to do something that has a fun quotient of 7 or higher. (Be careful that you aren’t picking “numbing” behaviors, as explained [here](#).) Engaging in an activity you enjoy will help calm the threat sensors in your brain, allowing your viewpoint to shift, even if just for a few minutes or hours.

Knowing that negative experiences carry more weight in your mind, you have your work cut out for you. For every one thing that disappoints you, you might have to find four or five things that you feel grateful for. You *might even* have to have fun more often! But if you start, from today, with just noticing one more positive experience and really feeling it, you will be well on your way to changing your reality. Ultimately, your reality is a subjective experience, as is mine. So why not design it so that each day is filled with hope, love and blessings? I can assure you that you will never lose the survival mechanisms that have so successfully gotten us where we are today. But you will make the switch from *surviving* life, to truly *living* it.

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# Your dark side is where your beauty lives

I have [written before](#) about how powerful it can be to feel our so-called “negative” feelings. You know what I mean...there is a part of you that has probably felt rage, grief, loss or crippling self-doubt, also known as your dark side. These feelings are a part of the human experience – to be human means that we feel this way, some of the time. When we are struggling in life, trying to gain a foothold where it feels there is none, these feelings become more intense. The more intense they become, the harder they are to ignore, and the harder they are to ignore, the harder we try to ignore them by distracting ourselves with other things. Or we might break down, becoming overwhelmed by guilt that we aren't living the happy, positive life others may think we are. We might feel ashamed, that we act out in ways we know will only lead to more pain. Whatever it is that you feel during your dark times, know that it is this place that holds the rawest expression of your inner beauty.

What is beauty, after all? Is it shiny, perfect and flawless? If that were the case, then there would be far less of it in the world today, and certainly the natural world would not hold up to this standard. My definition of beauty is a transcendental quality of raw expression, that has the potential to connect us to something greater than ourselves. Isn't this what we all feel, when we are captivated by a compelling piece of art, or gaze upon the graceful form of a sculpted woman? Aren't we as equally moved by those things that stir deeper, more complex feelings, that reflect an artist's turmoil and pain? Any stimulus that so powerfully unleashes our emotional energy, whether negative or positive,

allows us to access our own inner world that we are often so unaware of. Likely, the more out of balance your dark side is, the more you actively try to ignore it. It wants to be acknowledged, to be seen, to be loved for the role it plays in connecting you in emotion and experience to every other human being. It speaks to you of the beauty of life, which is like a double sided coin. With life there is always death. With pleasure, there is often pain. The day is always followed by night. By accepting your own dark side, and recognizing that *it is that which makes you beautiful*, you surrender to the experience of being alive.

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The next time you find yourself plummeting down a hole of despair, or paralyzed with fear or indecision, open yourself to fully embracing this place and seeing it as you would a work of art that deeply moves you. Not only is accepting your dark side a grounding practice, but it will exponentially increase the beauty you appreciate in everything, and everyone, around you.

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