



# Employee Assistance of the Pacific

Summer 2006

## Optimism: The Power of Positive Thinking

Spring is the season of new growth, and the signs of change are all around us. Hawaii's shower trees rain down their blossoms, the days are longer, brighter and warmer, and our emotions are lifted by the extra light and sunnier, blue-sky days.

Springtime is seen as a time of growth, renewal, of new life being born, and of the cycle of life beginning again. It is also seen more generally as the start of better times. At this time of year we begin to feel less sluggish, and become more open to inviting changes - both big and small - into our lives.

Studies in the field of positive psychology have shown how important emotions such as hope, pleasure, humor, excitement, joy, pride and involvement are to human happiness.

One of the key elements of positive psychology is optimism, which has a major effect on human behavior. Not only do optimists get sick less often and recover from

illness more quickly than others, but they also live longer.

Optimism can be developed. According to University of Pennsylvania psychologist Dr. Martin Seligman, this approach to life has three general characteristics:

1. It attributes an unpleasant experience to specific causes rather than global problems: "I feel fine except for this headache."
2. It blames problems on external rather than internal conditions: "I probably got the headache from reading too long without a break; next study session, I'll remember to stop and stretch every half hour."



Is the glass half-full or half-empty?

3. It assumes that the causes of pain or illness are temporary; for example, "I don't usually have headaches for very long, so I'm sure I'll feel better soon."

Using qualifiers for bad events such as "sometimes" and "lately", rather than "always" or "never" builds optimism. But the opposite applies to good events - an optimist will explain these by saying "I'm talented" or "I'm always lucky".

The positive psychology approach also recommends building optimism by habitually recognizing and challenging pessimistic thoughts. You can use your EAP benefit to learn how you can change your thinking and build your optimism. It's a great way to plant some new seeds this spring, and harvest some health and well being in the future.



### Optimism Quotes:

*"If they can make penicillin out of moldy bread, they can sure make something out of you."*

— **Muhammed Ali**

*"If you view all the things that happen to you, both good and bad, as opportunities, then you operate out of a higher level of consciousness."*

— **Les Brown**

*"We must accept finite disappointment, but we must never lose infinite hope."*

— **Martin Luther King, Jr**

*"Few cases of eye-strain have been developed by looking on the bright side of things."*

— **Unknown Author**

# The Power of Humor

Physicians like Patch Adams have long believed that people's mental attitudes can make a difference in the length of time they take to recover from an illness—or even whether they recover.

In a famous book, *The Anatomy of an Illness*, Norman Cousins described his refusal to succumb to the orthodox routine of hospital treatment for a grave form of rheumatoid arthritis. He objected to the regimen of painkilling and tranquilizing drugs and the bland hospital diet.

Instead, with the help of a sympathetic physician, Cousins checked himself out of the hospital and into happier surroundings: a hotel room, where he stopped taking his painkillers and tranquilizers.

In their place, he substituted large doses of vitamin C and a nearly continuous diet of old Candid Camera tapes, Marx Brothers films and other favorite comedies. Remarkably, he not only survived, but he reversed many of his symptoms.

Cousins credited his success to taking control over his environment

and his illness and to replacing toxic negative emotions with healthful laughter. He concluded that laughter helps renew the adrenal glands, which can become exhausted from fighting disease.

Adapted from *Psychology, Third Edition*, by Philip G. Zimbardo



## Scientists Prove That Laughter Really *Is* The Best Medicine

Scientific research studies have shown that laughter strengthens the immune system and lowers levels of the stress hormones cortisol and epinephrine. After a good round of laughter, blood pressure drops to a lower, healthier level than when the laughter began. Stanford University found that "twenty seconds of guffawing gives the heart the same workout as three minutes of hard rowing." An-

other year-long study of heart attack victims done at the Health Research Institute of California found that of those who spent half an hour a day watching comedy videos, 10 percent had a second heart

attack, whereas 30 percent of those who did not watch had a second attack.

Since laughing is something people can do sitting down, costs no money, and requires no special exercise equipment or skill, it's the perfect workout. Next time you need a wellness break - laugh a little.

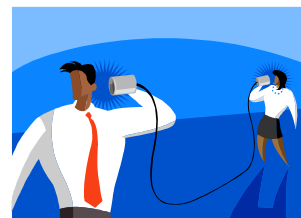
**"You don't stop laughing because you grow old. You grow old because you stop laughing"**

**Michael Pritchard**

## To Listen Is To Love

Listening is magnetic and transformative, a creative force. When we listen to another, we enhance that person's sense of self and well-being. When we are listened to it makes us unfold and expand. Those who listen to us are the ones we move toward, are those we want to deepen relationships with. Listening is the foundation of caring, respectful relationships.

Becoming an attentive and empathetic listener is possible for all of us. It can improve relationships with friends, family, and at work. We do not have to be wealthy, scholarly, or talented to give this gift



that all desire. If you're interested in developing your listening skills, EAP can help.

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