The Positive Attitude Development Workbook

Assimilating, Accommodating, Acclimating to Change

DEVELOPED BY Lyle Wildes
WITH Joe Kelly

WHOLE PERSON ASSOCIATES
DULUTH, MINNESOTA
The Positive Attitude Development Workbook
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Dedicated to John and Lyn Clark Pegg
How to use this workbook

This workbook helps you learn the basics of Positive Attitude Development (PAD). You can use it on your own or use it as a tool in a PAD group.

The introduction gives you an overall sense of our perspective on Positive Attitude Development. The chapters are designed to be read and used in order, since each chapter builds on concepts in the previous chapter(s).

At the end of each chapter are BrainWork activities—mental exercises related to the subject of the chapter. These exercises don't have right or wrong answers—they are designed to get you thinking in new ways.

When you come upon the BrainWork symbol in the text, go to the end of the chapter and complete that particular BrainWork exercise. When you've completed the exercise, go back to the text and keep reading.

Once you’ve completed a chapter, turn to the back of the book to read some reflections on the chapter’s BrainWork exercises. Don’t use the back of the book to figure out how many answers you got right. Instead, think about your responses in light of the end-of-the-book reflections, and see what insights you gain.

At first, some BrainWork questions may seem strange and difficult. That is intentional. Each question is meant to require you to think differently. As you work through each BrainWork, remember that Positive Attitude Development comes only through daily repetition of powerful mental exercises.

In fact, we encourage you to use the BrainWork exercises over and over as you practice and keep building your Positive Attitude Development.

We hope you enjoy your adventure.
After six months in the Milan, Michigan, federal prison, my daily pulse rate was 101 beats per minute and I couldn’t get it to slow down. One day, as my table started to shake, I was convinced there’d been a nearly impossible event: a Magnitude Six earthquake in Michigan.

I felt I was falling out of my chair and lunged across the aisle to stabilize myself. Before my hand reached the other side, an inmate grabbed my arm and said, “Hey dude, you better do something or you’re never going to make it out of prison alive.” At that moment, I realized I was in trouble and something had to give.

Back then, I was convinced that everything in my life would be okay if things outside me (like other people and events) changed. If other people did what I thought they should do, then my stress would dissipate, peace would descend—and so would my heart rate. I was furious because those external stressors weren’t changing (or staying the same) the way I wanted.

The situation seemed much worse because I was locked behind a prison fence with no way to influence the outside world—and I was convinced that the external world was causing all my pain. Everything just kept getting worse, and I was in serious trouble because it seemed like there was nothing I could do to change the situation. If none of the events and people on the outside were going to change (in spite of my expectations, desires and demands), there was no way to reduce my stress and possibly save my life!

I was at risk of dying for no medical reason. But what could I do? I was imprisoned by the government and by my own stress, anger and anxiety.

Of course, many other inmates were stressing out too. But I noticed some old timers who looked very calm. They seemed capable of dealing with losing everything they were attached to—including control of their daily activities and any ability to influence outside people and events.

I started asking the old timers, “What do you know that I don’t?” They simply said, “You just have to put your life on hold until you get out and then pick up whatever pieces are left.” That sounded right, but it still didn’t
relieve the pain of seeing everything I was attached to falling away. I was frozen in the moment of my arrest for drug dealing, while everyone else in my life was moving onward.

It was at this point of my incarceration that a fellow prisoner, Dan L. Bayes, asked me to co-facilitate a positive attitude class that aimed to teach other inmates how to deal with change. While wondering what I could offer anyone about accepting change, this opportunity drove me to study the connection between change and attitude. The experience eventually gave me a new lease on life, ultimately helping me to feel free—even as I spent 18 more years behind bars. I realized the process for accepting change begins with one's attitude. As I enriched my own attitude I began to see everything, including my relationships, differently. This was huge!

For more than 18 years, in cooperation with prison staff, I've taught this Positive Attitude Development course in federal prisons at three security levels, each course running 20 weeks or more. The programs have been well received by inmates, with some taking the course multiple times.

For those of us who adopted PAD, life was no longer a battle that we had to fight every day. Even while we were restricted by incarceration, our lives became a journey. Instead of waiting for release to pick up the pieces, we began building a new life on the inside. This was the most freeing experience of my life. I now had control over how I felt about everything. My happiness was not based on the way events happened (whether within the prison or “on the outside”), but rather on the way I interpreted those events.

I began to picture an attitude as the cloud from which our thoughts rain. Next, I imagined thoughts nourishing the soil from which our actions grow. And finally, I saw our actions blossoming into a positive, meaningful life.

The texture and quality of our attitude determines the type of life we build for ourselves. That's the foundation of Positive Attitude Development, which can offer the beginning of a new life for each of us—no matter what our circumstances.

I know that inmates are not the only people who feel trapped by circumstances. If you have ever felt “imprisoned” by people, places or situations in your life, then this book has answers that can work for you—because they’ve worked in the extreme environment of prisons.

Lyle, your Positive Attitude Development course helped change my life. It taught me how to recognize my core values, how to look for the good in people and things, and how to see that my happiness does not depend on how people treat me—but on how I treat other people. This course was one of the most eye-opening, uplifting times in my life! Thank you so very much.

Your friend forever,
John Gelnette, former federal prisoner
Example: Auto-Pilot Thinking

**BrainWork**

You call home and your significant other answers the phone differently than usual.

"Hi. What's the matter?"

“I'm just tired. You've been out of town for a week and I'm bored. I went out with Mary and Bob last night."

Do you stay on automatic pilot or let go and support her,

“Did they bring along a date for you?”


You hear the click of the phone being disconnected.

“Trust? I'm out earning a living for our family and you're gallivanting around, leaving the kids with a sitter, and partying.”

“I'm tired of your constant disapproval and lack of trust.”


You stomp away from the phone, bump into someone at the bar, and almost knock him over.

He gets angry. “You stupid idiot. Watch where you're going!”

He gives you a shove and you push back.

“Are you drunk, or what?”

You get pulled over for running a stop sign, and end up in the drunk tank, charged with DUI.

Several hours later you get into your rental and try to drive to your hotel.

You push by and go straight to the bar. “OK, if I'm going to be accused of being a drunk, I might as well be a drunk.”

Your boss finds out you have fallen off the wagon and missed an important presentation. You get fired.