When to Use Optimism, Pessimism, & Realism

The abbreviated prescription for a happy, productive life is to think constructive thoughts as consistently as you can. Constructive thoughts are those that benefit you. They encourage you to feel healthy emotions, to go after important goals, and to cope effectively with adversity.

Constructive thinking is not synonymous with positive thinking. Constructive thinking can be either optimistic, pessimistic, or realistic. The key is to know when each type of thinking is profitable. Here are essential guidelines:

**Optimism serves you best when:**
- You are striving to be creative
- Your objective is to feel good emotionally
- You are motivating yourself
- You are leading or motivating others

Optimism generates inspiration. Like a jolt of adrenaline, it revs you up and produces energy. Use optimism whenever your objective is to brainstorm or to battle procrastination.

Also, use optimism when the effect you will have on others is of paramount importance. Optimism is infectious. What’s more, people attribute competence to someone who is optimistic. This makes perfect sense. If someone is behaving optimistically, it’s reasonable to assume they’ve been riding a wave of success.
Use pessimism when:
* Failure or mistakes could be perilous or costly

Pessimism plays devil’s advocate. It brings into focus the worst-case scenario; and, in so doing, raises awareness of those variables which merit careful consideration when the stakes are high.

Realism will not serve this purpose. Whereas realism sees what is and what is likely to be, pessimism sees beyond to the improbable events that could lead to grave consequences. Use pessimism when safety is paramount or when something very dear is about to be put on the block.

Use realism when:
* The brainstorming is over and the nuts-and-bolts details need to be worked out; when practicality is the issue, and when accuracy is the issue
* Constructive but not necessarily heightened emotion is the objective

Realism adheres to the facts. Realism is rational thinking. As such, it’s free of emotional reasoning or other logical errors. Realism will always lead you to a constructive emotion: sadness in the face of loss as opposed to intractable depression; annoyance in response to frustration as opposed to damning anger.

Three types of thinking. Each meets different needs. Learning to use optimism, pessimism, and realism intelligently is using the power of thoughts to your advantage.