



# DANA LIGHTMAN, Ph.D.

Absolutely. Positively. Uplifting.

“Create the outcomes you want. Regardless of the circumstances.”

## The Power of Interpretation

Thirty pairs of eyes were looking at me. Some expressions were open and welcoming, drinking in the information with a thirst that could finally be quenched. Others were more quietly receptive. A few were skeptical. One of the skeptics raised her hand to ask what others were probably wondering, “It can’t really be that simple, can it?” “Yes,” I replied, “it is that simple.”

I was giving a presentation at a women’s conference on POWER Optimism, a program I designed that helps people create conditions for success and well-being in their lives. I had already explained that POWER Optimism is a two-step process, teaching strategies to first pull the weeds of negative patterns and then to plant the seeds of positive practices. Positive practices can’t take root if negative patterns overwhelm them, so identifying and releasing negative patterns is an essential first step.

I explained to the women that interpretation plays a powerful role in helping to release negative patterns. Here’s the principle: *Your interpretation of an event is more important than the event itself.* In other words, you create the thoughts, feelings and behaviors in your life by the way you interpret what has happened to you. If you choose an interpretation that allows you to feel positive, you will thrive. If you choose an interpretation that

leads to negative feelings and emotions, you will eventually get stuck and stagnate.

Let me give you an example from my own life. At the age of 35, I was planning to marry Nick, an Englishman I had met and dated for three years in the States. I had left my job, sold my car, given up my apartment, and divested myself of almost all my worldly belongings to move to England. I arrived in England to find Nick withdrawn and sullen. After a number of tension-filled months, he finally blurted out, “I will never marry you because you don’t have the perfect body.” Ouch. For a woman who has always struggled with weight and body esteem, I was devastated beyond belief. For several years, his words kept adding fuel to my lifelong negative pattern of feeling too fat to be attractive to a man.

Finally, I got the courage to revisit this past event. I began to recognize that what was really fueling my hurt and anger was my own negative belief that I was sexually undesirable, a limiting belief I had well before I ever flew to England. This limiting belief acted like Velcro, causing Nick’s comment to stick to me long after our breakup. In order to loosen the grip of the Velcro, I decided to reinterpret Nick’s comment based on a new perspective of the event. The reality was that Nick was just not ready to make a commitment to me. Because he lacked the courage to admit this openly, he had to

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say something extremely hurtful in order to get me to make the break. With this new interpretation, I was able to let go of my anger and hurt. And, more importantly, I began to look at myself as attractive and desirable—to the right man.

The POWER Optimism program teaches you how to reinterpret those past events that you are dragging around like a ball and chain, preventing you from moving freely and joyfully through your life. You cannot change the past, but you can change your perception of the past.

Similarly, POWER Optimism helps you make correct interpretations of the situations and events that are currently shaping your life. Tony Bruzan, the author of *Mind Mapping* and an expert on how the brain works, explains that the brain is continuously gathering bits of data and making connections between these pieces of information. If the connections are correct, we experience a feeling of openness, creativity, joy and flow. This is the energy of what I call an *upward spiral*. In contrast, incorrect connections cause us to feel deflated, stuck, lethargic and depressed—putting us on a downward spiral.

To understand how this works, think about what happens when you make a mistake at work. Do you

say to yourself, “This just proves I am incompetent. I hope I don’t get fired.” This kind of thinking leads to helplessness, inaction, fear and avoidance. On the other hand, you can begin to create a motivating interpretation of this mistake by asking yourself these questions: What can I do to rectify this error? What are innovative responses to this situation? What do I need to know to prevent this same mistake from happening next time? What can I learn about myself as an employee from this mistake? How can I adopt a positive perspective in this situation? By utilizing the strategies of POWER Optimism, you will interpret this mistake in a way that enables you to move on with greater confidence and self-worth. You will put yourself on the upward spiral of success and well-being.

So, in response to the skeptic in the audience, I say, “Yes, it is that simple.” Create positive interpretations of the past and present situations in your life, and you are laying the foundation for a positive future. The principle is simple, but putting it into practice takes self-discovery, ongoing awareness and a commitment to stay conscious and intentional. You can’t successfully be in the driver’s seat if you are unaware of where you are going and how you are getting there. POWER Optimism teaches you how to stop reacting negatively...so that you can enjoy the ride of a lifetime.