



CONCERN:EAP

# Healthy & Resilient You

## THE CLEAR-EYED OPTIMIST

BEING REALISTIC *AND* OPTIMISTIC ON  
THE ROAD TO RESILIENCE

*“Optimism is invaluable for the meaningful life. With a firm belief in a positive future, you can throw yourself into the service of that which is larger than you are.” – Dr. Martin Seligman*

For many years, positive psychology experts have promoted the value of optimism, with much research and data supporting that optimists tend to be:



More successful  
at work, school,  
and athletics



Healthier, with  
longer life  
expectancies



More satisfied  
in relationships  
and life

With all this going for it, it may surprise you that some people question the value of optimism. For them, the word *optimist* conjures the picture of a head-in-the-clouds, overly perky person (OPP) who cautions the world to “stop being negative” anytime someone voices sadness or a valid concern.



*Imagining obstacles on the way to your goals can lead to greater success.*

## All Optimism Isn't the Same

With that OPP stereotype out there, it's no wonder that people can be suspicious about the value of optimism. That's why it's important to note that optimism can be either *realistic or idealistic*.

*Realistic optimists tend to believe that they will succeed, but only with effort, planning, and persistence. Rather than imagining an easy path to success, they think seriously about probable obstacles, and how to overcome them. This kind of visualization helps them to feel better prepared and more confident.*

*Idealistic optimists (like our friend the OPP) might instead believe that success will come to them if they just picture it hard enough. They imagine that obstacles will evaporate without effort, that is, if they picture obstacles in their path at all. This kind of visualization can be good for an immediate mood boost, but studies show that it's not the best strategy for success.*

In one weight-loss study, for example, researchers asked participants how optimistic they were about reaching their goals. Not surprisingly, those who felt more confident in their eventual success lost an average of 26 pounds more than those who were doubtful.

What is surprising? Those who anticipated a harder struggle also lost more weight than subjects who visualized an easier path. That's right. Dieters who recognized that they were going to have a hard time saying no to those breakroom donuts lost around 24 pounds more than those who thought passing up the weekly birthday cake in the conference room was going to be a breeze.

Other studies have uncovered similar results in a variety of situations from job-seeking to looking for love to improving sports performance. In every instance, realistic optimists put in more focused effort, which led not only to higher success rates but also to a more resilient mood and higher life satisfaction.

## Applying Realistic Optimism: WOOP Your Way to Your Next Goal

In her book *Rethinking Positive Thinking*, New York University motivational expert, psychologist, and author Gabriel Oettingen details a stepwise technique that applies the principles of realistic optimism to setting and achieving goals. It's called WOOP, short for **Wish, Outcome, Obstacles and Plan**.

Here's how WOOP works, and how you might use it for optimistic and realistic goal setting:

**Wish** Identify a goal you want to accomplish. It should be an attainable goal. For example:

- a. *I want to finish my writing assignment by tonight.*
- b. *I want to lose that last 10 pounds.*

**Outcome** This is the fun part. Visualize a positive outcome for your wish. Ask yourself what the best outcome would be and how it will make you feel. For example:

- a. *It feels great to finish my work before deadline, and now I can watch my favorite show.*
- b. *I feel great about myself, and I have more energy and can fit into my skinny jeans again.*

**Obstacles** Ask yourself what kind of obstacles, internal or external, could keep you from accomplishing your wish? For example:

- a. *I get easily distracted by social media. / My significant other keeps coming in my office and asking, "Whatcha doin'?"*
- b. *I have an entire sheet cake in my refrigerator. / I'm going to dinner with friends, and I often make bad choices at restaurants.*

**Plan** Now, make a plan for overcoming these obstacles. What will help you deal constructively if that challenge shows up? For example:

- a. *I'll shut off my browser and all my notifications until I'm finished writing. / I'll ask my honey for a few hours of quiet time to finish my work so that we can watch our favorite show together once I'm done.*
- b. *I'm going to throw out that sheet cake or give it to the office before I eat the whole thing. / I'll look up the restaurant menu and make a healthy choice ahead of time.*

For even more techniques for building optimism and resilience, visit the Resilience Hub™ at [www.ConcernResilienceHub.com](http://www.ConcernResilienceHub.com) regularly. (First-time users may be asked to enter their company ID.)

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