



Loving *Life* Fully

A FEW THOUGHTS FROM DR. HERB SENNETT

BUILD A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

A FEW SECRETS TO HELP LIVE YOUR LIFE

My dad died at a time in my life right after I had begun to build a family. So, at the age of 33, I buried one of the most influential people in my life. That was probably the most traumatic event that I had ever experienced. And I include the year I spent in combat in Vietnam. I never realized that thinking negative thoughts often leads to a person being thought of as depressed.

I spent the next 10 years trying to figure out why I was having problems with being so negative. I asked myself these questions: "Why am I having these struggles?" "Why do I seem to be negative all the time?"

Finally, my wife insisted that I talk to my doctor about it. That conversation resulted in a prescription. But, the negative thinking continued. That's when I decided to get some help from a counselor. What I learned during the following year helped me to turn my life around. The counselor guided me through the negative thoughts into a positive outlook. Now that I'm turning seventy years of age, I have started a whole new career.

I'd like to share with you some of the insights I gained. I think that if you will incorporate these two simple suggestions, you may not solve your negative thinking, but you'll definitely be a positive influence on yourself and the people around you.

FIRST, DON'T HOLD YOUR PROBLEMS INSIDE.

Perhaps a story will help illustrate what I mean by that statement. It seems that when trash compactors were first developed, the instructions said that you have to be careful and follow the directions. The compactors must be emptied at least once a week because if you let them sit for several weeks, even a month, what happens is that the trash keeps getting pushed down to the bottom. Eventually that garbage turns into gaseous materials that could explode under the pressures.

I think this illustrates what happens to us emotionally. Have you ever said something to somebody that you knew well and they got so angry at you that they started blurting all kinds of negative things? And you think, "Whoa, wait a minute. What did I say?"

It probably wasn't anything that you said. It seems that you just simply lit a small match to something that had already been festering down inside the other person. The outburst was the result of years of holding in a great deal of negativity that eventually had to come out. You happened to be the poor sap that was standing by when it happened.

In order to avoid this happening to you, take time to talk to a friend, a mental health professional, or a counselor. As I mentioned earlier, I spent about a year with a counselor. He helped me to realize that I was spending too much time trying to deal with the pain that I felt from losing my dad. Understand that this was my problem, and I needed to get over it and move on. He helped me to recognize that I was spending the last ten years of my life trying to please my father who was already dead.

You can talk to a friend, of course. But, I would suggest that you spend time with people you trust. You know they're not going to go blabbing it out to everybody around. Just talk it out. Don't hold things in. Let it go before it festers.

SECOND, TAKE TIME TO EXPRESS GRATITUDE TO OTHER PEOPLE.

What do I mean by this? Just thank people. Tell people how much you appreciate them. Several years ago, Richard Davidson at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, did a major study on the architecture of emotions. In this multi-year study, he discovered that "... our brains have a built-in negative bias." In other words, the brain constantly seeks for negative things to defend ourselves. It's constantly looking for the bad things that we need to notice and deal with. The problem, he noticed, was that too many people end up focusing more on the negative than the positive.

In the report of the study he said, "We need to work a little extra hard to overcome this problem because most people have a negative tendency in their thinking." So I say, start by speaking gratitude to other people. Express your appreciation. Look for the good in people around you. As you continue telling other people how nice they are, or how kind they are, or how polite they are ... Well, perhaps your brain will start applying those same thoughts to yourself.

You might start seeing the good things in yourself and start believing that you're not as bad as you thought you were. Speaking gratitude, speaking good, speaking positive -- eventually your brain will catch up with those words and actually start thinking, "Wait a minute, maybe I'm pretty good myself."

These are two small suggestions. I'm not here to offer you a big, broad understanding, but to share two little things that you can do. So I challenge you: make a commitment today to be just a little bit more positive in everything that you do and say. Listen to how you're talking to other people and, of course, how you are talking to yourself.

Remember, your thoughts are what control your emotions. Change your thoughts, you'll change the way you feel.

Remember: you are either a person in control of yourself or you're that person everybody talks about as being "out of control."

Don't be "that person." Make a commitment to start building a positive attitude within yourself today. Your future self will thank you ten years from now.