

The Optimist Creed: A Guide to Self Confidence

I often tell my executive coaching clients that all self confident people have three things in common.

- Self confident people are optimistic.
- Self confident people face their fears and deal with them.
- Self confident people surround themselves with positive people.

In this e book, I'd like to share with you 10 secrets of becoming more optimistic person.

When I was a young guy, I participated in the Optimist International oratory contest. The topic that year was, "Optimism, Youth's Greatest Asset;" which is hard enough for a ninth grader to say, (Think Joe Pesci in *My Cousin Vinny*.) let alone to write and deliver a 10 minute talk. It was a great experience for me; one that gave me some of the confidence I needed to become a professional speaker.

Optimist International is a great service organization. Their mission is to bring out the best in kids; and to help them develop to their full potential by providing hope and positive vision.

The Optimist Creed is their touchstone. It some of the best common sense advice I've ever seen. I have a copy of it posted in my office. See for yourself.

The Optimist Creed

Promise Yourself:

- To be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind.
- To talk health, happiness and prosperity to every person you meet.
- To make all your friends feel that there is something in them.
- To look at the sunny side of everything and make your optimism come true.
- To think only of the best, to work only for the best, and to expect only the best.
- To be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own.
- To forget the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater achievements of the future.
- To wear a cheerful countenance at all times and give every living creature you meet a smile.
- To give so much time to the improvement of yourself that you have no time to criticize others.
- To be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear, and too happy to permit the presence of trouble.

I believe that if you follow this common sense advice, you will not only become a more self confident and optimistic person, you will become a success in your career and life. In this little eBook you'll find my thoughts on each point of The Optimist Creed.

The Optimist Creed Point 1:

Promise yourself to be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind.

The first point of The Optimist Creed is a tall order – but one that I find is attainable with the right attitude. As we go through life bad things, as well as good things, happen to us. I’ve found that I might have been able to prevent some of the bad things by being a little more diligent or forward thinking. On the other hand, sometimes bad things just happen.

That’s when it’s really important “to be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind.” Several months ago, I told the story of one of my terrible days on my www.SuccessCommonSense.com blog. I was in New Jersey for some business, and I decided to stay two more days to make some sales calls.

The first call was at a pharmaceutical manufacturing facility in Pennsylvania, just outside of Philadelphia. I had a two hour drive to get there. When I arrived, my prospect’s assistant greeted me and told me that the FDA had just arrived on a surprise visit. My prospect was the head of Quality for the facility. The FDA’s arrival meant that he would be extremely busy for the next few days working with them. In other words – he couldn’t meet with me. She gave me his apologies, telling me that the FDA had arrived only minutes before I was scheduled, so they hadn’t had the time to call me to cancel our appointment.

I was disappointed, but I understood. I got back in my car and began driving back to my hotel, just outside of Newark. I stopped on the Jersey Turnpike to use the facilities and get something to drink. While I was there, I checked my voice mail. The person I was supposed to meet later that day, asked me to call him. When I called, he told me that he had resigned from his company, and so we didn’t need to meet.

One day, a lot of driving, two cancelled sales calls. My peace of mind was getting a bit disturbed. Through no fault of my own, my well planned sales day had completely fallen apart. As I sat there and drank my bottled water I decided that I would let myself feel sorry for myself for as long as it took to drink the water.

Once I finished the water, I got back in my car, drove to my hotel and spent the next couple of hours on the telephone following up with other prospects and current clients. I used the rest of this “found time” to work on a book that I had just begun writing. (That book turned out to be *Straight Talk for Success*. It’s available now on Amazon.com and in bookstores.) In this way, I turned lost time and frustration into something productive.

I was able to do this because I remembered the first point of The Optimist Creed: “Promise yourself to be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind.” I was strong. I gave myself 20 minutes to feel sorry for myself, and then set about doing positive things that helped me reach some of my goals.

This is one example of how The Optimist Creed has helped me become a career and life success.

The Optimist Creed Part 2:

Promise yourself to talk health, happiness and prosperity to every person you meet.”

This is a really important concept and one that has to do with the idea behind affirmations. An affirmation is a positive statement of the future you desire. I often use this affirmation. “I am a successful author, whose books and eBooks inspire and help people become successful in their lives and careers.”

I like the idea of affirmations. I believe they work. I have even gone to what some people would say are extremes in creating one. In all my work, I aspire to be a star; someone in high demand. I often repeat the affirmation, “Bud Bilanich is a star.”

But there is more to this story. In 2006, I went to the Name a Star website and named a star after myself. Now I can say “Bud Bilanich is a star” and really believe it, because Bud Bilanich really is a star.

Bud Bilanich the star, is Catalog Number TYC 868-1011-1 in the constellation Leo. Bud Bilanich has a Visual Magnitude indicator of 11.2. Right Ascension is 11h 58m 21s. Declination is 11degrees, 43,'18.”

I don't have a clue what all of these things mean, except the constellation Leo, which I chose because my birthday is August 14. But I do know one thing. Bud Bilanich is a star!

How's that for an affirmation? Affirmations work. And you don't have to go to the lengths I did to make them work. Just decide what you want, visualize yourself as having it, and tell yourself you have it. Then do whatever it takes to make that affirmation come true.

That's what the second point in the Optimist Creed, “talk health, happiness and prosperity” is all about. If you do this, to yourself and others, and you will become healthy, happy and prosperous. You will also be a beacon to those around you. You'll be someone to whom they can turn when seeds of doubt enter their mind.

And, people will like you more. Who doesn't want to be around a positive person who talks, health, happiness and prosperity?

The common sense point here is simple. The second point of the Optimist Creed, like the other nine, is a valuable tool for helping you develop your self confidence and help the people around you develop theirs.

The Optimist Creed, Point 3

“Promise yourself to make all your friends feel that there is something in them.”

Everybody likes to feel special. Mary Kay Ash, the founder of Mary Kay Cosmetics said it really well. “Everyone has an invisible sign hanging from their neck saying, ‘Make me feel important.’ Never forget this message when working with people.” She’s right. That’s the main message in the third point of The Optimist Creed.

I’d like to take it one step further. I suggest that you promise yourself to make all the people you meet, not just your friends, feel that there is something special in them. When you do this, two things will happen. 1) You’ll make their day. 2) You’ll feel better about yourself. Feeling good about yourself is an important part of self confidence.

Let me tell you a story. I was in New York one December, facilitating a meeting at a client’s office. The meeting was scheduled to begin at 7:30. I always like to turn up early for meetings I am facilitating.

I arrived at the client’s office about 6:50. Since 9/11, they have a security card system. Because I do a lot of work for them, I have a contractor security card. When I swiped the card on Tuesday, I was denied access. The Security Guard on duty looked at my card and told me that I have limited access 7:00 am to 7:00 pm to the building and that I would have to wait 10 minutes.

I didn’t know this. I’m usually not there that early. It was cold. I was tired. I had arrived at my hotel at 12:30 am the previous night. I tried to convince the guard to let me in to the building. He was unyielding (as he should have been). I expressed my frustration at this “silly rule”, and went to the coffee shop next door to wait until 7:00.

When I came back at 7:02, I apologized to the Security Guard. He was genuinely surprised. He said that similar situations happen a couple of times a week, and a lot of people get really angry at being made to wait. He told me that I was actually quite pleasant for someone who was being denied access to the building.

And that’s the common sense point here. I apologized to the guard and told him that he was not only “just doing his job”, but that he was doing a good job. He was firm in upholding the company’s policy, but he did it in a professional, non confrontational manner. This was some positive feedback for someone who is in a role where positive feedback isn’t all that common.

I could tell that he appreciated my comments. He felt a little better about himself because he did the right thing – and that someone who was frustrated by him doing the right thing recognized and appreciated the value of what he did. He began his day with a smile.

On the other hand, I felt better about myself because I chose to apologize for the little bit of grief I gave him, and I did something small to make someone else’s day just a little bit brighter.

Self confident, optimistic people feel good enough about themselves to help others feel good about themselves. This is a powerful way to build relationships with others and to become a career and life success. Try it. Look for ways to help everybody you meet to feel as if there is something special in them.

After I finished writing this piece, I went to my e mail where I found a daily motivation from the folks at Walk the Talk Company. The thought for the day came from Jackie Robinson, the man who broke the color barrier in major league baseball. "I'm not concerned with your liking or disliking me...all I ask is that you respect me as a human being." I can't think of a better way to finish this chapter.

The Optimist Creed Point 4

Promise yourself to look at the sunny side of everything and make your optimism come true.

In other words, think of the glass as half full. Last December, Cathy and I went to the Denver Center for the Performing Arts. We saw a stage production of the Irving Berlin classic film musical, *White Christmas*.

There is a number in the show where one of the leading men is comforting a small girl who is having trouble sleeping. In a song, he tells her, “When you can’t sleep, count your blessings, not sheep.” On the way home, we were talking about that song. We know that we are blessed. However, sometimes we forget how much we are blessed. We both decided that we would begin counting our blessings when we felt down.

Counting your blessings and not sheep is a great first step to “look at the sunny side of everything and make your optimism come true.” Realizing that you are blessed and that there is a sunny side is a good first step. However, don’t forget the second part of the quote – “make your optimism come true.”

Optimism can put you on the path to success, but hard work is will keep you moving forward. In my forthcoming book, *Straight Talk for Success: Common Sense Ideas That Won’t Let You Down*, I talk about the importance of taking personal responsibility for your life and career.

“It’s simple, really. Success is all up to you, and me, and anyone else who wants it. We all have to take personal responsibility for our own success. I am the only one who can make me a success. You are the only one who can make you a success.

“Personal responsibility means recognizing that you are responsible for your life and the choices you make. It means that you realize that while other people and events have an impact on your life, these people and events don’t shape your life. When you accept personal responsibility for your life, you own up to the fact that how you react to people and events is what’s important. And you can choose how you react to every person you meet and everything that happens to you.”

The common sense point here is simple. Look on the sunny side, count your blessings, see the glass as half full. Then, take personal responsibility for doing the work to make your optimism come true.

The Optimist Creed, Part 5

“Promise yourself to think only of the best, to work only for the best, and to expect only the best.”

This is an important point. Too many people settle for mediocrity. They take an “it’s good enough” attitude. Good enough is certainly not the best. In my opinion, it is not even good enough.

In 2001, Jim Collins published a great book, *Good to Great*. The very first words in Chapter 1 are “Good is the enemy of great.” Later, on the first page, he says, “Few people attain great lives, in great part because it is just too easy to settle for a good life.”

And that’s what the fifth point of The Optimist Creed is all about. Don’t just be good, be great. Why not? All it takes is a little more effort.

Here’s a personal example. I have found that blogging is a great way to write a book. I blog everyday, so I have a lot of material. Last summer, I took many of the posts from this blog and tied them together into a book. I was all set to publish it, when one of the people I had asked to read it said, “This is good, but it could be great. It reads too much like a series of blog posts. Your voice doesn’t come through well enough.”

I didn’t want to hear that. I wanted to get the book published. My first thought was, “This is good enough, I don’t want to do a lot of rewriting.” My second thought was, “I can write a great book, why settle for a good one?” So I rewrote the book. The first one wasn’t a total loss. I published it as an e book called *Star Power: Common Sense Ideas for Career and Life Success*.

I rewrote *Star Power*, and changed the title to *Straight Talk for Success*. It’s out in both hard cover and paperback editions now. You can get it at your local bookstore or at Amazon.com. I think *Straight Talk for Success* is a great book. We’ll see. It is certainly better than *Star Power*. It’s better than *Star Power* because I took the time to rewrite, to make my voice come through. I thought only of the best, worked for the best, and expected only the best of myself.”

When *Straight Talk for Success* went to the printer, I was proud of what I had written. I think it is great. It is the best I could do. In my heart of hearts, I knew that *Star Power* was good, but that I could do better. Someone challenged me to go from good to great, and I have – in my opinion at least. It will be interesting to see what other people think.

However, for now, I am proud of what I have accomplished. I feel as if I have been true to myself by not settling for something that is merely good when I had the chance to be great by putting in a little more time and effort.

The Optimist Creed Point 6

“Promise yourself to be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own.”

All teachers know that the best way to really master a subject is to learn to teach it. I learned this when I was teaching in the Business School at Northeastern University when I was completing my dissertation at Harvard. To be an effective teacher, you have to have complete mastery of your subject. You need to be able to present it in a number of different ways so that people with different ways of thinking will be able to grasp the ideas you are presenting.

I have found that this is true for self confidence as well. The more you help others develop their self confidence, the more yours will grow. This is true for me. As I've worked with my coaching clients, I have seen them grow, develop and flourish. As they've grown and flourished, my self confidence has grown.

I got the confidence to write my new book, *Straight Talk for Success*, from watching my coaching clients succeed. As I watched them put to work my thoughts on what it takes to succeed in their careers and lives, I came to believe that I was really on to something and that I should share my thoughts with a broader audience.

In other words, by being “enthusiastic about the success of others”, I became more self confident and enthusiastic about my chances of success for my new book. It's karmic. I've put out some positive energy, people have benefited from this energy. As a result, I have benefited by being able to gather my thoughts and get them into book form.

The common sense point here is simple. The sixth point of The Optimist Creed is really important. No one of us can succeed on our own. We need the help and support of others. The best way to gain the help and support of others is to help and support others. Being enthusiastic – not envious – of others' success is a good way to start.

The Optimist Creed Part 7

Promise yourself to forget the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater achievements of the future.

Let's begin with a quote from Ann Landers:

“If I were asked to give what I consider to be the single-most useful bit of advice for all humanity, it would be this: expect trouble as an inevitable part of life and when it comes, hold your head high, look it squarely in the eye, and say ‘I will be bigger than you. You cannot defeat me’.”

I like what Ann Landers has to say here because it is a bit of reality check. She's right, trouble – and setbacks and failure – are an inevitable part of life. Self confident people look trouble squarely in the eye and move forward. They are not cowed by their failures, rather they embrace them and use them to move towards their goals.

If you read my www.SuccessCommonSense.com blog somewhat regularly, you probably know that I am a big tennis fan. The Australian Open, the first major tennis tournament of the year is played every year in January. In January 2008, I watched two great matches in one weekend.

James Blake, one of the two best American men tennis players, won a great five set match on Friday night. He lost the first two sets to Sebastien Grosjean. Then he won the next three to win the best of five set match. He was down four games to one in the fourth set, but won in a tie break. In general, he was gritty.

To put it in terms of The Optimist Creed, James Blake was able to “forget the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater achievements of the future.” In this case the past was the first two sets of the match.

Roger Federer, on the other hand, is the best player in the world. He had a terrible match against Janko Tipsarevic on Saturday afternoon. He made 64 unforced errors and lost 16 of 21 break points. If you follow tennis, you know that this is a recipe for losing.

However, Mr. Federer won the match in five sets. Afterwards he said, “He (Mr. Tipsarevic) was just going for his shots and kept making them. In the end, I just tried to block out all the chances I missed.”

The Optimist Creed shows up again. By blocking out “all the chances I missed”, Mr. Federer was able to win the match.

I believe that James Blake and Roger Federer won these matches because of their self confidence, their optimism, and as Ann Landers says, their ability to “look it (trouble) squarely in the eye, and say ‘I will be bigger than you. You cannot defeat me’.”

The common sense point here is simple. Successful, self confident people realize that mistakes are part of life. Then learn from their mistakes and they build on this knowledge to create their own success.

The Optimist Creed Point 8

Promise yourself to wear a cheerful countenance at all times, and give every living creature you meet a smile.

I'm a 60's rock and roller. Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young were, and still are, one of my favorite groups. Point 8 of The Optimist Creed point reminds me of a line from *Wooden Ships*, one of their songs. "If you smile at me I will understand, because that is something everyone, everywhere does in the same language."

It's true; a smile is universally understood as a gesture of goodwill. That's why I like the eighth point of the Optimist Creed so much. It's simple common sense. Smile at people, and they smile back. I actually put this to the test one Friday. I was on a flight from Newark to Denver. I got an upgrade and was seated in 1E, so I was in a good position to make eye contact with almost everyone who got on the flight. As people got on the plane, I would catch their eye, and smile. All but two smiled back.

How does this relate to optimism and self confidence? Simple. You feel better about yourself and more self confident and optimistic when other people smile at you. The best way to encourage others to smile at you is to smile at them first.

To do this, you have to take a risk – albeit a small one. Smiling at others, sometimes – but not often – will get you a scowl in return. No one I know likes to have others scowl at him or her.

If you've been reading these thoughts on The Optimist Creed, you know that optimism is only one component of self confidence. In addition to being optimistic, self confident people face their fears and take action, and they surround themselves with positive people.

Facing your fear of rejection and taking action comes into play here. When you smile at strangers, you are taking action. You're showing that you're not afraid to engage them. They may scowl back, but so what? You've taken action to demonstrate that you are a friendly and open person. Who cares if they don't reciprocate? It's their loss if they don't return a smile with a smile.

The common sense point here is simple. Smile and the world smiles with you – and that helps both your optimism and your self confidence.

The Optimist Creed Point 9

Promise yourself to give so much time to the improvement of yourself that you have no time to criticize others.

This is great common sense. I know that I have a lot to learn. There are many things about me on which I can improve. I'm just guessing here, but I bet that's true for you too.

I remember back in college when I first learned about Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of human needs. It was structured as a pyramid. The need at the base of the pyramid was basic survival, safety and security needs are next. Once survival and security needs are met, Dr. Maslow suggests that people's needs for affection and belonging come to the fore. These are followed by the need for self esteem. Once all of these needs have been met, Dr. Maslow suggests that "self actualization" needs come into play. Self actualization needs are at the top of the pyramid. Dr. Maslow defined self actualization as "being all that you can be" – something the Army stole for TV recruiting commercials several years ago.

According to Dr. Maslow, self actualization is an unattainable state, because no matter what you achieve, you soon realize that you can achieve even more. This holds for superstar athletes like Michael Jordan, as well as superstar business people like Warren Buffett.

You can take this one of two ways. You can see it as negative and frustrating in that you'll never reach a goal of being self actualized. Or, you can see it as positive and inspiring in that you'll always have another dream to chase, a goal to reach.

I choose the latter. I was telling someone the other day that the whole web 2.0 phenomenon has been great for me, because I have begun really learning lately. I've always kept up in my field, but I've felt for the past few years that most of my learning was incremental. I wasn't making any quantum leaps forward.

However, since I've begun blogging and am getting ready to podcast, I've learned a lot – really a lot. And, as the ninth point of the Optimist Creed points out, I haven't had the time, nor the inclination, to spend a lot of time thinking about what others are doing, much less criticizing them. I'm busy learning and growing – and that's cool and fun and exciting.

The common sense point here is simple. If you want to build your self confidence, work on achieving whatever you can. Don't worry about what others are doing, or comparing yourself to them. Be too busy with your own growth to worry about anyone else.

Also....

If you're an American Football fan, by now you know that the New York Giants beat the New England Patriots to win the latest Super Bowl. It was quite an exciting game. Very few of the "experts" thought that New York would win. The odds makers in Las Vegas had them as 11 point underdogs. The commentators on the pre game show all picked New England. Most people I know thought that the Patriots would win.

I think that self confidence played an important part in the Giants victory. They believed in themselves, and fought to the very end when they scored the winning touchdown. It was an impressive victory – one with which every optimist can delight.

The Optimist Creed, Point 10

Promise yourself to be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear and too happy to permit the presence of trouble.

This point captures the very essence of optimism – “too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear, and too happy to permit the presence of trouble.”

“Great,” you say. “But how do I do all that?” I admit it’s not easy. I worry sometimes. Sometimes I get angry. Sometimes I’m scared; and sometimes I let my troubles bog me down. However, as soon as I recognize the symptoms of worry, anger and fear, I choose to let them go and focus on the positive things I can do to deal with them.

Free will is one of the great things about being human. We can’t control what happens to us, but we can control how we will react to it. I choose to react in a positive way.

When I’m feeling fearful I embrace that fear. I admit it and accept it. Then I do whatever it takes to get past it. Recently, I spent a lot of time and effort – not to mention money – to get my new book, *Straight Talk for Success*, finished.

Every time I write a book I’m a little bit afraid that no one will read it. Or worse yet, people will read it and hate it. However, I can’t control whether or not people read or like my books. I can control, however, the amount of time and effort I put into the writing, editing and design of my books. Suzanne Carlile my editor, and Bobbi Benson my designer, will tell you how I obsess over every detail of my books. I do the best I can to make sure they are the very best I can do.

And you know what? Every book I’ve written is better than the previous one. That’s because I spend a lot of time listening to the feedback I get on my books. I use this feedback to do better the next time. I’m not afraid of negative feedback. I don’t get angry when people tell me they don’t like what I’ve written. I ask them why they don’t like it, and what I can do to make my next book better.

Because I know that by the time a book is published, it’s the very best I can do, I don’t worry about what people will think. I am happy because in my heart of hearts, I know I did the best I could do. I can control my effort. I can’t control how others will receive what I’ve written.

The common sense point here is simple to grasp, but can be difficult to put into practice. Instead of worrying what people think, do the absolute best you can on everything you do. Instead of getting angry when things don’t go your way, figure out what you can do next time to get the result you want. Instead of being paralyzed by fear, identify what scares you and embrace it. Then do something constructive to beat that fear. Finally, instead of letting trouble get you down, keep working and believing in yourself. Most important, keep moving forward. As the old saying goes “tough times never last, but tough people always do.”

The Diving Bell and the Butterfly is a movie that really highlighted the tenth point in The Optimist Creed. It’s the story of Jean-Dominique Bauby, Jean-Do to his friends. Mr. Bauby

was the editor of *Elle*, the Paris fashion magazine, when he had a paralyzing stroke. He was left completely paralyzed, able only to blink his left eye.

Think about this for a second. Mr. Bauby's mind was fine. He could still think. Only, he could do nothing physical for himself. People had to bathe him and clean up after him. He was trapped in his own body – what he referred to as being in a diving bell.

As you can imagine, at first Mr. Bauby was despondent and wanted to die. However he found immense strength and was able to write his memoir over a period of 14 months, one blink at a time. His speech therapist arranged the alphabet in a manner that began with the most commonly used letters. At first she, then later his ex wife, would sit with him and recite the letters. When he heard the letter he wanted, he would blink. When he came to end of a word, he would blink twice.

I sometimes find it difficult to write sitting at my computer and will full use of my hands and body. What Mr. Bauby accomplished in writing his memoir is nothing short of remarkable. His ability to write a memoir in such a painstaking manner proved that he truly was “too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear and too happy to permit the presence of trouble.”

Mr. Bauby passed away in 1997 shortly after his book was published. However, his book and movie, both called *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, are a testament to the spirit of man, not to mention the power of optimism. In his review of the film, Roger Ebert called Mr. Bauby's accomplishment “heroic”. I agree.

Mr. Bauby's accomplishment is a fitting end to my ruminations on The Optimist Creed. I hope you've enjoyed my thoughts on The Optimist Creed. I've enjoyed thinking about The Optimist Creed and writing this e book.

On the next page, you will find a copy of The Optimist Creed that you can frame and hang in your office, just like me. If you think about these ten points and how they apply to you and your life, they will inspire you every day.

The Optimist Creed

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