

COACH *Notes*



Volume II, No. 10

Newsletter

The Magic Ratio of Positive and Negative Moments

According to the Nobel Prize-winning scientist Daniel Kahneman, each day we experience approximately 20,000 moments. A moment is defined as a few seconds in which our brain records an experience. The quality of our days is determined by how our brains recognize and categorize our moments – either as positive, negative or just neutral. Rarely do we remember neutral moments.

There is no question that the memories of our lives are recorded in terms of positive and negative experiences. Now scientists propose that each day our brains – i.e. our thoughts and our emotions – keep track of our positive and negative moments and the resulting score contributes to our overall mood.

Our emotional tone or mood is defined by the number of positive vs negative moments experienced during the course of a day. This is not news to those people who study emotional intelligence and how the brain works. But it has major implications for how we can improve the quality of our lives and our relationships.

Let's look at an example:

Let's say you are getting ready to go to work. You go out to breakfast to find the children have spilled milk. Your spouse complains there's no more cereal and who ate the last banana, so you score 3 negatives.

You find another banana, the spouse says thanks, you get everything cleaned up, the kids out the door and you get a hug. Score 3 positives. (Score is now $-3 + 3 =$ zero)

Traffic is heavy, you get off the freeway, take a shortcut and get to work in time: score another positive moment: +1.

The receptionist says the boss is gunning for you, and your hair looks great. Score a neutral (one negative and one positive).

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As a coach, I don't try to make my clients' dreams come true. That's their privilege...and responsibility.

My role – and my joy – is to stand by their side to encourage, guide, challenge, and cheer them on.

Are your dreams big enough? Let me help you unleash your potential and accomplish more than you ever dreamed possible.

...David Herdlinger

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Learn more about HerdlingerAssociates at our website:

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The boss catches you on the way to your desk and says your report is inadequate. Score another negative.

You pass by your desk and a co-worker is upset. You listen to her for a few minutes, say a few encouraging words to cheer her up. Score a positive.

When you finally get back to your boss' office, he makes a remark about taking too long. He criticizes your work and dismisses you without adequate discussion, score 3 negatives.

Your day continues with a succession of good moments and bad ones. By the time you leave work and arrive home, your score is 10 positive and 15 negative moments, for a total ratio of 2:3.

At the end of the workday, you are tired and full of left over emotions, usually a mix of positive and negative. But when you arrive home, you find that your children need your attention.

You have no time and no place to unwind and take care of your own emotional basket. And because emotions are contagious, usually trickling down from the leader (guess who's leader at home) – your kids end up mirroring the mood you are in. Your mood is more negative than positive because of the ratio of your day's experiences.

The Magic Ratio

Over the past decade, scientists have explored the impact of positive-to-negative interaction ratios in our work and personal life. And they've found that this ratio can be used to predict – with remarkable accuracy – everything from workplace performance to divorce.

This work began with noted psychologist John Gottman's exploration of positive-to-negative ratios in marriages.

Using a 5:1 ratio, which Gottman dubbed "the magic ratio," he and his colleagues predicted whether 700 newlywed couples would stay together or divorce by scoring their positive and negative interactions in one 15-minute conversation between each husband and wife.

Ten years later, the follow-up revealed that they had predicted divorce with 94% accuracy.

Apparently there is a similar magic ratio for measuring worker satisfaction. The Gallup Organization has surveyed some 4 million workers on the topics of recognition and praise, and they delivered startling results. Along with the 65% of people who reported receiving no recognition on the job last year, an estimated 22 million workers are presently "actively disengaged," or extremely negative in their workplace.

The number one reason that Americans leave their jobs is that they don't feel appreciated. There are not enough positive moments to offset the negative ones.

A recent study found that workgroups with positive-to-negative interaction ratios greater than 3:1 are significantly more productive than teams that do not reach this ratio.

The Bucket and the Dipper

In a recent book *How Full is Your Bucket*, psychologists Donald O. Clifton and Tom Rath propose a metaphor of looking at positive and negative interactions during the day. Imagine we all have a bucket within us that needs to be filled with positive experiences, such as recognition or praise. When we're negative toward others, we use a dipper to remove from their buckets and diminish their positive outlook. When we treat others in a positive manner, we fill not only their buckets but ours as well.

Here are 5 strategies from these authors for increasing your magic ratio of positive to negative moments in any given day:

- **Prevent "Bucket Dipping."** Increase your own awareness of how often your comments are negative. Work toward a ratio of five positive comments to every one negative comment.
 - **Shine a light on what's right.** Try focusing on what employees or peers do right rather than where they need improvement.
 - **Make best friends.** People with best friends at work have better safety records, receive higher customer satisfaction scores, and increase workplace productivity.
 - **Give unexpectedly.** The vast majority of people prefer gifts that are unexpected.
 - **Reverse the Golden Rule.** Instead of "*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,*" you should "*Do unto others as they would have you do unto them.*"
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