



Turn Challenges Into Positive Possibilities: The Three-P Method



By Kerry Elam

If we encountered every day filled with peace, love and harmony, what a beautiful world we would live in. The reality is that no matter how smoothly life is going, we will face challenges during our journey. The opportunity for growth is in how we navigate the twists in the road. As Maya Angelou said, “If you don’t like something, change it. If you can’t change it, change your attitude.” This article “challenges” us to view difficult events and people as a life puzzle with

useful lessons at each turn. We will explore how to pause to pivot to positive possibilities.

Step 1: Pause to conquer negativity

How many times a day do you catch yourself immediately thinking a negative thought? How many times do you say to others: “Don’t be so defensive?” As humans, our natural tendency is a bias toward negativity caused by parts of our brains that are quickly triggered to “avoid harm,” while slower to react to “pursuing rewards.” The Genetic

Science Learning Center in Utah explains how cells communicate during fight or flight.

“When our senses perceive an environmental stress such as danger or a threat, cells in the nervous and endocrine systems work closely together to prepare the body for action. Often referred to as the fight or flight or stress response, this remarkable example of cell communication elicits instantaneous and simultaneous responses throughout the body.”

The point of this data is to remind us that negativity is part of our composi-

tion. The challenge we face, then, is how to shift our focus. We will explore an example of how my team traversed our negative emotions to take the higher, more positive road.

One of my internal team’s key responsibilities is to recruit and hire talent. Being in a niche market, we take pride in our abilities to equip our client-facing team with the best resources. Therefore, when we heard the following statement from that team, our fight response came to the surface.

● “I have no confidence that your

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team can provide us with the resources we need.”

What if the following would have been said instead?

- “I want to help your team devise a solution to ensure we have the resources we need.”

Which one feels better? Notice how you immediately feel different simply with a change in verbal messaging. Have you ever realized you respond rapidly to problems more so than possibilities (remember fight or flight)? When we are stuck on the negative, we fail to notice the positives, and a tornado of feelings may spiral out of control. In our team example, the first statement was made and immediately put us on the defense, since we strive for team satisfaction and didn't realize we apparently hadn't delivered. Both sides dove right into a nasty battle of blame, which did not feel good and was not best for our team. We reacted when we should have paused.

Allowing the negative feelings without reacting is certainly not easy. It takes time to remember that negative tendencies are natural, and practice to realize that bottling up those feelings is not healthy. When the blood is boiling, make an effort not to react. Instead, PAUSE to settle your feelings and allow the tension to pass.

Step 2: Pivot

When we are consumed with our feelings, many times moving to the positive is the mountain to climb. In order to pivot out of the negative spiral, it is essential to take time to explore what happened. What is your side? What would an outsider's perspective be? Can you identify why there was a challenge? Let's take a moment to go back to my team and the initial negative comment: “I have no confidence that your team can provide us with the resources we need.”

- **Our side:** We were not clear on the exact resources the client-facing team needed, nor the timing or the urgency as we were getting direction from multiple sources.
- **Outsider's perspective:** The current client-facing team was working overtime and submitted a job requirement; they thought they had done what was needed.
- **Why a challenge:** Both sides thought they were doing the right thing, but without fully

communicating to each other. When there was finally a discussion, both sides were already frustrated and hence all the negative emotions.

In this scenario, do you think either side really wanted to fight or fail the other? That possibility might sound ridiculous, but since that negative tendency is part of our composition, it is extremely important to acknowledge it and practice pausing before we react. Once my team got over the initial fight response, and remembered we are all on the same larger team, we were all able to have the difficult—and clarifying—conversation of walking through the above exercise. Both sides left feeling relief at being heard and a repaired compassion toward each other.

Step 3: Positive possibilities

As we wrapped up our call, we identified the opportunities to move forward in finding the appropriate people to fill our resource needs. Since then, we have been having more regular calls to ensure both sides are briefed on the daily changes in project needs. Henry David Thoreau said, “We are always paid for our suspicion by finding what we suspect.” This is the basic message great leaders portray: we see what we expect to see. If we expect to see the negative, we will see it; if we instead look for the positive, then that's what we will see.

By changing our focus, we can discover the silver lining in any scenario. In our situation, the positives now shine bright as we are expanding into exciting new areas of growth together. We want to live by our byline of “our expertise and commitment driving your success.” The recipe to success is held together with teamwork and accountability. Playing the blame game is never productive.

In summary, the next time you are faced with a challenge, use The Three-P Method: Pause to identify how you can navigate the terrain with solid and steady actions pivoting to a positive viewpoint. And remember to feel the negative emotion, as allowing and diffusing those natural tendencies enables us to clearly see the positive possibilities.

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