



FOCUSSING ON WHAT YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE RATHER THAN WHAT YOU DON'T WANT TO HAPPEN

Research suggests that when we focus on achieving a positive outcome, rather than on avoiding a negative result, we are more likely to get the outcome we want.

For example: When delivering a presentation to a group of senior managers, I can either focus on presenting the information in a useful and interesting manner *or* I can focus on avoiding giving a confused and boring presentation. This doesn't sound like a large difference in focus but it can significantly impact on my performance.

Research suggests that in the first case, as I give my presentation I will tend to notice positive responses from the audience and this will increase my confidence, in the second case I am likely to interpret neutral events (e.g. one of the managers yawning) negatively. This is likely to distract me and diminish my ability to give an effective and interesting presentation. After the presentation, if my focus has been on avoiding a bad outcome, I will tend to remember any negative events and this will lower my confidence for future presentations.

This shift in focus is relevant and important in many aspects of our lives

- When resolving conflict are you focussing on achieving a good outcome or on avoiding a negative one?
- When managing staff performance are you focussing on helping your team to achieve consistent accuracy or on stopping them from making mistakes?
- In an interview are you focussing on demonstrating your strengths and abilities or on hiding your weaknesses?

These different attitudes are likely to impact on the outcome – we tend to get what we pay attention to.

It is important to be aware that our brains have a natural tendency to create pictures of the negative outcomes we want to avoid – thousands of years ago, when we were living on the savannah, if we were to survive we needed to be very good at anticipating and avoiding danger. So it may be necessary to consciously counteract this natural tendency by repeatedly bringing our attention back to the positive outcome we want to achieve.

You can read more about this topic in a paper written by Shelly Gable “Approach and Avoidance Motivation In Close Relationships” which can be accessed at <http://www.sydney-symposium.unsw.edu.au/2007/Chapters/GableSSSP07.pdf>

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