

# Workplace Shaman: Turning fear into optimism

Mary Pearson, Financial Post

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Keeping a positive perspective can be a challenge during an economic crisis. Yet maintaining a sense of optimism is important for your health, as much as it is for the welfare of society and the workplace. On this note, one reader asks:

**Q:** What can I do to be positive in today's environment of fear and negativity?

**The Problem:** People can become overwhelmed with negative emotions during uncertain times. Living with pessimism wears down your energy and makes the world seem smaller and darker. This in turn affects one's health, well-being, creativity, and mental functioning. It's important to find ways to combat negativity through conscious positive thinking and actions.

**The Remedy:** When things look bleak, many people draw on an inner strength, sometimes turning to spiritual sources, to make sense of their circumstances and deal with negative feelings. Martin Rutte, chair of the Board of The Centre for Spirituality and the Workplace at Saint Mary's University Sobey School of Business in Halifax; and Vince Brewerton, executive director of the Centre, provide the following practical suggestions:

Be a micro-leader in creating a positive environment at work. Leadership doesn't have to mean you're doing some huge, enormous thing. You can practice micro-leadership, small, daily steps eventually add up. Think of some area of your work or workplace that would benefit from positive attention. Determine how you and your colleagues can make even tiny, improvements every single day. Ask them to join you as micro-leaders!

Smile at colleagues and clients every day. Psychologists have found smiling can trigger increased activity in the left prefrontal cortex - known to be the seat of positive emotions.

Be grateful for what you have. At the end of each day, take a few minutes to reflect on the positive, good things that happened.

Listen to others who might help you be more positive. Go to YouTube and search for "inspiring speakers," "wisdom," or "comedy" and have a good laugh. Share the videos with friends and co-workers.

Your financial situation may be at a lower level but you still have a choice, as you always do, on where to place awareness. (It has nothing to do with the amount of money you have.) Place it on positive things and positive people. Start your day thinking about something inspirational or spiritual. To combat negativity, try not to listen to or read the news until the workday is over.

Find people and institutions who are at the cutting edge of where you want to go next in life and work. This is an excellent time to upgrade skills and join groups that can provide you with knowledge and insight.

Practicing what he preaches, Rutte, who is also president of Livelihood, a management consulting firm in Santa Fe, N.M., says: "I've chosen not to participate in the recession – I'm choosing to participate in 'The New Prosperity' " - a new paradigm of economic activity he envisions as life-sustaining, -affirming and -nurturing. His energy is being used to help businesses with a new economic model that: values ethical and moral behaviour; is responsive to the needs of humanity; ensures not only environmental sustainability but environmental rejuvenation; and ensures future generations have opportunities for economic self-reliance.

That, dear readers, is what the great spirit of optimism looks like - the dream every chief executive should have - and what workplace shamans strive for. A crisis can provide an opportunity for growth and inspire us to create something better than what we've had. The world looks good from here.

(For information on the Centre for Spirituality and the Workplace, at the Sobey School of Business, at Saint Mary's University in Halifax visit [www.spiritualityandtheworkplace.ca](http://www.spiritualityandtheworkplace.ca))

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