



How to Understand Your Attitude

Objectives

Understand why attitudes are so important in life.

Explain where attitudes come from and how they are formed.

Define the components of an attitude.

Describe and recognize three types of attitudes: Positive, Negative, and Neutral.

Utilize a formula to calculate your attitude and anticipated results.

You're Lifetime Companions

They've been with you since you were born, and they promise to be with you wherever you go—at work, at home, at school, and even on the streets. Some days, you're glad to have them around, but on other days, you may wish that they had stayed in bed! We all have them. Some are good and some are not so good. In fact, you've been around them so much, you can probably even detect them in others. We're talking about your lifetime companions—your attitudes.

A Good Attitude Leads to Success

A recent study by Telemetries International surveyed 16,000 people. This study linked common characteristics and actions to successful people. One of the most significant differences between high and low achievers was their attitude.

Those defined as high achievers tended to:

Care about people, as well as the bottom line.

Respect the value of other people's abilities.

Seek advice from others.

Be good listeners.

Have a positive attitude about life in general.



You Control Your Attitude

There are so many things in life you have little or no control over, such as the weather, the job market, and the economy. But there's one aspect of your life that you do have the power to control, and that's your attitude. Each and every moment of every day, you decide what your attitude will be—about yourself, your job, your customers, your family and friends, change, responsibility, and so on.

Certainly there are other factors that influence your attitude, such as your past experiences and the experiences of those around you. But no one can make you feel anything without your permission. You hold the remote control to the channels of energy that create both your attitude and your results in life.

So, to gain control of your life, you must learn to gain control over your attitude. Having a positive attitude can bring about positive results at home and at work—results that will bring you happiness and success.

What is an Attitude?

An attitude is the energy that fuels your thoughts, feelings, and actions based on the difference between your expectations and your perceptions (our definition of reality) of that situation. To better understand your attitudes, let's break apart the major components that make up an attitude.

Expectations

In any given situation, you have consciously or unconsciously formulated a set of expectations, or desired results, for yourself, for other people, and for situations. Sometimes referred to as your standards, these expectations determine your level of satisfaction. The higher your expectations, the more challenging it will be to feel satisfied with any given situation.



Perception

Your five senses and past experiences create your perception or interpretation, of a current situation. Based on what you see, hear, smell, touch, and taste, you develop your definition of what happened. Your perception may or may not be an accurate account of what actually happened; however, perception is what you use to formulate your thoughts and feelings about the situation.

Thoughts

Your thoughts define your state of mind. Happy people are most likely thinking happy thoughts. Conversely, sad or angry people are probably having negative thoughts. Thoughts spark the formation of an attitude. Once the mind is stimulated, you consciously or unconsciously think about the situation. While they're in progress, thoughts sound like, "I think ...". Thoughts—like feelings and attitudes—may be expressed out loud or silently to yourself.

Feelings

Your feelings keep your thoughts alive. It's virtually impossible to have an attitude without thoughts or feelings. Feelings encourage more thoughts and keep the mind active. While they're in progress, feelings sound like, "I feel."

Energy

The amount of energy you exert in a relationship or a situation depends upon how important the issue is to you. The greater the importance, the more energy you'll use to display your attitude through words, tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, and behavior. Like attitudes themselves, this energy can be positive, negative, or neutral in nature.

Action

An action is your physical response to a situation. Once again, you have the choice of taking a positive, negative, or neutral approach to each situation. Your



action will be a reflection of your attitude. A positive action in progress sounds like, "I can ..." or "I will ..." On the other hand, a negative action in progress sounds like, "I can't..." or "I won't..." A neutral action in progress sounds like, "I don't want to ..." or "I don't care ..."

Attitude Application

The following situation uses the major components to further define how an attitude is created and demonstrated.

Mr. and Mrs. Davis are celebrating their 15th wedding anniversary at their favorite restaurant. After taking the first bite of his meal, Mr. Davis is very disappointed. He calls the waiter to their table, pushes his plate of food aside, and states in a firm and deliberate tone, "This food is cold and looks like it's been sitting out all day. I refuse to touch it!"

Based on past experiences from eating at their favorite restaurant, Mr. Davis had high expectations that the food would look appealing and taste good. However, after tasting this particular meal, his perception of the food was just the opposite. He thought that the food tasted cold and looked stale. He felt that the quality of the meal was important to the celebration of the occasion, so he exerted energy by requesting that the waiter come to their table (action)^ and he communicated his attitude by:

Pushing aside his plate of food.

Talking in a firm and deliberate tone of voice.

Complaining about the food



Check Your Attitude

Describe a recent situation at work, at home, at school, or in public that led you or someone else to demonstrate an attitude. Complete the following statements to determine what kind of attitude was communicated.

Describe the situation by identifying who was involved and when and where it happened.

▪ **Who:** _____

▪ **When:** _____

▪ **Where:** _____

▪ **Define** your expectations of what should have happened.

▪ **Describe** your perception of what you believe happened.

○ Identify your thoughts about the situation by completing the sentence, "I think..." _____

○ Identify your feelings about the situation by completing the sentence, "I feel..." _____

○ Describe your actions (both words and behavior): _____

Circle the attitude that best describes your overall reaction to the situation.

Positive

Negative

Neutral



Where Do Attitudes Come From?

Child-behavior specialists generally agree that we develop our attitudes in our formative years—from birth to age seven. The good news is that we all start out with a good attitude; the bad news is that we later learn how to sour our attitudes. Consider a baby—full of happiness, curiosity, and acceptance. Babies very seldom reject people based on age, race, sex, color, or ethnic background. They're like sponges—hungry to learn, grow, and experience the many facets of life. Unconsciously, babies recognize that they need other people in order to survive.

So, what happens? We become influenced by our environment. Significant people around us—our parents, guardians, family members, teachers, and friends—pass on their attitudes through their words and actions. Studies show that by the time we are two years old, we observe more than 8,000 hours of life—the good, the bad, and the ugly—plus whatever is on TV.

The Past Is History

Even though the attitudes we learned at an early age are the most difficult ones to change, they aren't etched in stone. We can unlearn them and relearn new ones. Since we live in a world of constant change, we must learn to embrace change and recognize that what worked yesterday may not work tomorrow. And that goes for our attitudes too! Remember, you can control your attitude and your life



Three Types of People, Three Types of Attitudes

There are as many types of attitudes as there are people in the world. However, for our purposes, we'll simplify things a bit and focus on three broad categories of people and their attitudes.

Spectators

Some people go through life watching it happen around them. They're called the *spectators* of life. Their life experiences are limited because they "play it safe" and avoid risk. They would much rather observe or support others than risk failure or make a mistake. Spectators usually have a *neutral attitude* about life.

Critics

Another group of people stays on the sidelines of life. We call them the *critics*. They perceive themselves as experts in the game of life and pride themselves on finding fault in others. They want their complaints to be heard and understood. They often associate with fellow "critics" because they feel comfortable in numbers. Critics usually have a *negative attitude* about life.

Players

The third type of people is *the players* in the game of life. They eagerly await opportunities to learn something new and to grow, both personally and professionally. They take risks and are not afraid to make mistakes. Players usually have a *positive attitude* about life.

People and their attitudes can be temperamental. Just as one is completely positive or negative all the time, our attitudes can be situation-specific, lasting only temporarily. For instance, a positive person is capable of demonstrating negative attitude towards a person or situation. Likewise, a negative person can demonstrate a positive attitude from time to time.



A Typical Situation

You're likely to find all three types of people on every "team," whether it's on the job, at home, or in the community. Let's say you've just been put on a project team at work to plan this year's company picnic. The "spectators" on the team will attend every meeting but won't take an active part in the discussion or volunteer to accept any responsibility. They may even attend the meetings to get out of work.

"Critics" will spend most of their time complaining about last year's picnic and criticizing the parameters of this year's event. In addition, they'll probably be the first to shoot down other people's ideas for improving the picnic. And finally, the "players" will engage themselves in the planning and execution of the project. They'll follow through to make sure good ideas get implemented and tasks get completed. In other words, the players will "take the ball and run with it!"

Check Your Attitude

How would you describe your actions lately at home with your family? At work with co-workers and customers? In your personal life? What kind of person have you been? How might the people around you describe your attitude? Place a check mark under the personality type that best describes your attitude in the following environments.

	Spectator	Critic	Player
At Home			
At Work			
In Life			

Are you pleased with the results you've been getting at home, at work, and in your personal life? You may need to make some adjustments to become a better "player" at home, at work, or in life.



The Dynamics of an Attitude

To gain a better understanding of these three types of people let's take a closer look at how their attitudes are formed and communicated. Let's begin by exploring the thoughts and feelings people experience with each type of attitude.

The "Players" with Positive Attitudes

The following list describes some of the *thoughts* of a "player with a positive attitude:

- There is something good in every situation.
- A problem is an opportunity to do something different.
- Change is a sign of growth.
- A mistake is a valuable step toward success.
- I have control over my life.

The following list describes some of *the feelings* of a "player" with a positive attitude:

- Happy
- Confident
- Satisfied
- Optimistic
- Loving

The "Critics" with Negative Attitudes

The following list describes some of the *thoughts* of a "critic" with a negative attitude:

- There is always something wrong.
- Other people cause problems
- Change is a thorn in my side.
- A mistake is a failure.
- I have little or no control over my life.



The following list describes some of the *feelings* of a "critic" with a negative attitude:

- Anger
- Doubt
- Frustration
- Pessimism
- Hate

The "Spectators" with Neutral Attitudes

The following list describes some of the *thoughts* of a "spectator" with a neutral attitude:

- The situation or the other person is unimportant. 4 Someone else will solve the problem.
- Change is unnecessary.
- The future will come and go with or without me.
- I won't even try to control my life.

The following list describes some of the *feelings* of a "spectator" with a neutral attitude:

- Unemotional
- Tired
- Content
- Indifferent
- Detached



How Are Attitudes Communicated?

The energy from your thoughts and feelings compels you to communicate your attitude through your words and/or actions. You communicate your attitude in three different ways:

- The words you use (what you say or what you don't say).
- The tone of voice you use (how you say what you say).
- Body language and facial expressions (what you do).

Research tells us that we communicate our true meanings more with our tone of voice and body language than with the words we use. It's been found that only 8 percent of what we communicate comes from our words, and the remaining 92 percent comes from our tone of voice and body language. Let's explore what attitudes sound and look like.

What Do Attitudes Sound Like?

A positive attitude is verbally communicated with action words in an upbeat, enthusiastic tone of voice. Conversely, a negative attitude is verbally communicated with words of resistance in a whining or abrasive tone of voice. A neutral attitude is often communicated through silence; however, it may be expressed with apathy by using passive language.

Listed below are some of the most common words conveyed by each attitude. Read the list to yourself or aloud using a tone of voice appropriate for that attitude.

Positive Language <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ I can.▪ I will.▪ I expect it.▪ I will make time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Positively.▪ I'm sure.▪ I choose to.▪ Go
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<p>Negative Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I can't. ▪ I won't. ▪ No way. ▪ I don't have time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Not. ▪ I'm afraid. ▪ You made me. ▪ Stop.
<p>Neutral Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I don't want to. ▪ I might. ▪ I doubt it. ▪ I'll see if I have time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maybe. ▪ I don't know. ▪ I didn't. ▪ Coast

Notice how many "n't" words are associated with negative and neutral attitudes. Learn to eliminate those words from your vocabulary. Learn to think and speak positively. Talk about what you *can* do for yourself and others, not about what you *can't* do.

What Do Attitudes Look Like?

Your facial expressions and body language often communicate your attitude more clearly than your words and tone of voice. For example, a smile communicates happiness and a positive attitude. Conversely, a frown communicates anger or frustration and a negative attitude. Hands, arms, and gestures also communicate your thoughts and feelings. For instance, waving your arms frantically in the air communicates excitement, while shaking a clenched fist communicates hostility.



Take a Moment

You've heard and seen them all before—positive attitudes, negative attitudes, and neutral attitudes. Take a moment to describe what attitudes look and sound like coming from the three types of people we defined earlier. What does each type do? What do they say? How do they say it? Describe their tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language.

"Players" with a positive attitude are more likely to take the following action:
(Example) Smile, laugh, and act enthusiastic.

"Critics" with a negative attitude are more likely to take the following action:
(Example) Frown and look disgusted.

"Spectators" with a neutral attitude are more likely to take the following action or inaction: (Example) Daydream and look expressionless.



What Can You Expect from Your Attitude?

As previously described, your thoughts and feelings create your attitude. And your attitude determines your actions, which leads to the results you get in life. Here are several examples of what the three types of attitudes may lead to in your life.

Benefits of a Positive Attitude

Although it's not a guarantee, a positive attitude can help you:

- Get a better job or a promotion.
- Successfully complete a project.
- Achieve a personal or professional goal.
- Satisfy and retain a customer.
- Maintain the relationship of a friend, employee, or spouse.

Consequences of a Negative Attitude

It would be interesting to know how many times a negative attitude caused someone to:

- Be passed over for a promotion.
- Lose his or her job.
- Fail to achieve a personal or professional goal.
- Lose a customer.
- Ruin a relationship.

Consequences of a Neutral Attitude

The apathy expressed by someone with a neutral attitude may cause the person to:

- Miss out on an opportunity.
- Fail to learn new skills or gain needed knowledge.
- Become stagnant in a job or career.
- Fail to develop new relationships.
- Be excluded from an activity.