

Our Negative Bias



“If we’re really honest with ourselves, there are probably times when we think, what possible use can I be in this world? What need is there for somebody like me to fill? That is one of the deeper mysteries. Then God’s grace comes to us in the form of another person who tells us we have been of help, and what a blessing that is.”

Mr. Rogers

Our brains process negative and positive experiences in quite different and uneven ways. Our brains are wired to pay much more attention to negative experiences than positive experiences. Scientists refer to this as *Our Negative Bias*.

Our caveman survival instincts taught us to focus much more on negative events since these events could often lead to harm or death. As a consequence, our brains react more strongly to negative events than to equally positive events. It causes us to naturally remember negative things and criticism much stronger and more frequently than positive ones and compliments.

Some researchers claim that it takes five positive experiences to counteract just one negative experience. I think it is probably closer to ninety-nine to one. We all have had the experience that a perfectly pleasant day is turned upside down with just one negative complaint or criticism. That is *Our Negative Bias* in action. If you look it up on the internet, it is shocking to see how much we are wired for negativity.

Suggestions for Dampening Our Negative Bias

Be aware of the tendency to hold onto and ruminate over negative events, and consciously work at bringing happier thoughts to the forefront of our minds.

Take a positive approach. Spend more time thinking about and holding onto positive experiences.

When ruminating over past hurts or mistakes, engage in an activity such as listening to upbeat music, going for a walk, or watching a funny cat video on YouTube.

Instead of fixating on past mistakes that cannot be changed, consider what you have learned from the experience and how you might apply that to the future.

*Thoughts shared by Fr. Dave Brzoska
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