

LEADERSHIP

Winston Churchill once said, “Optimists see opportunities in every difficulty.”
There is a definite connection between optimistic leaders and business success.

◆ CHRIS GRIFFITHS, AUTHOR, *THE CREATIVE THINKING HANDBOOK*



Innovate with optimism

Is the glass half full, or half empty? This age-old saying is a classic way of determining the natural outlook of a person. From a factual perspective, the glass is at 50 per cent liquid capacity, but people are still perfectly capable of perceiving this in different

ways. At its heart, this saying suggests that the potential and opportunity we see in the world is specific to us. Optimists sometimes get a bad reputation—their natural positivity and ‘can-do’ attitude are occasionally seen as naive or unrealistic. Often, cynics are even threatened by optimists—their drive and self-belief can

seem daunting, particularly when relating to change. The truth is, the energy afforded by an optimistic viewpoint perfectly lends itself to an innovative mindset. There is great power in optimism, and that is something anyone can harness. With the right adjustment in attitude, even a natural pessimist can use a positive outlook to their advantage in business.

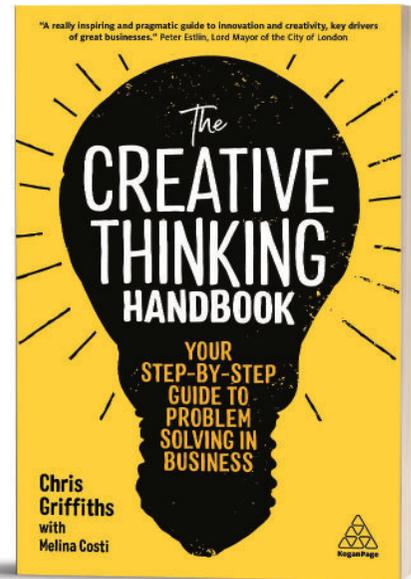
In leadership, positivity could not be more important. Countless studies have shown optimism to be a valued quality in leaders; perhaps unsurprisingly, people prefer working for someone who is positive.¹ Psychology suggests that leaders tend to have one of two perspectives—a growth mindset or a fixed mindset.² Those with a fixed mindset believe that people’s foundational qualities, like personality or intelligence, are set in stone. They do not believe that people can really change, whereas those with a growth mindset feel quite differently. Belief in a person’s ability to grow is essential to getting the most out of employees; if you see an employee’s qualities as unchangeable, then you inadvertently suggest that the experience of working for your business will leave them no more enriched or knowledgeable than when they first joined.

Those with a fixed mindset are generally more pessimistic and far more likely to be guilty of ‘status quo bias’³—this is the outlook associated with people who are reluctant to rock the boat. They accept things as they are, regardless of whether the way things are is actually helpful to their company. It makes sense that those who expect the worst are more wary of embracing change; they fear mistakes and use worst-case ‘what if’ questions to prevent any new, innovative ideas ever taking off. By very definition, innovation requires the risk-taking that coincides with trying something that has not been done before. Embracing optimism will energise you so that you can take the right risks to bring about progress. Being brave with good ideas does not have to mean being foolhardy;



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simply ensure decisions are made in the right way and then execute them accordingly.

Intel co-founder, Robert Noyce, rightly said, “Optimism is an essential ingredient of innovation. How else can the individual welcome change over security, adventure over staying in safe places?”⁴ Optimists are the pioneering adventurers of the workspace. Whilst the corporate dinosaurs cling desperately to the old ideas situated in their comfort zones, optimists are on the hunt for fresh ideas and new methods of improvement. When mistakes inevitably happen, they never wallow, but get back on the horse and try again. They see the potential that is there, rather than what is missing—and that is the true advantage of being a ‘glass half full’ business leader. **M**

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