OPTIMISM ABOUT THE FUTURE

Positive emotions about the future include faith, trust, confidence, hope, and optimism. Optimism and hope are quite well-understood, they have been the objects of thousands of empirical studies, and best of all, they can be built. Optimism and hope cause better resistance to depression when bad events strike, better performance at work, particularly in challenging jobs, and better physical health. Begin by testing your own optimism. You can take this test on the web, and get feedback on where you stand compared to people of your gender, age, and line of work, or you can take it now in the book.

TEST YOUR OWN OPTIMISM

Take as much time as you need to answer each of the questions. On average, the test takes about ten minutes. There are no right or wrong answers. If you have read Learned Optimism, you will have taken a different version of this test and done some of the exercises below.

Read the description of each situation and vividly imagine it happening to you. You have probably not experienced some of them, but that doesn’t matter. Perhaps neither response will seem to fit; go ahead anyway and circle either A or B, choosing the cause that is more likely to apply to you. You may not like the way some of the responses sound, but don’t choose what you think you should say or what would sound right to other people; choose the response you’d be more likely to have.

Circle only one response for each question. Ignore the three-letter codes (PmB, PvG, and so on) for now.
1. You and your spouse (boyfriend/girlfriend) make up after a fight.
PmG
   A. I forgave him/her. 0
   B. I'm usually forgiving. 1

2. You forget your spouse's (boyfriend's/girlfriend's) birthday.
PmB
   A. I'm not good at remembering birthdays. 1
   B. I was preoccupied with other things. 0

3. You get a flower from a secret admirer.
PvG
   A. I am attractive to him/her. 0
   B. I am a popular person. 1

4. You run for a community office position and you win.
PvG
   A. I devoted a lot of time and energy to campaigning. 0
   B. I work very hard at everything I do. 1

5. You miss an important engagement.
PvB
   A. Sometimes my memory fails me. 1
   B. I sometimes forget to check my appointment book. 0

6. You host a successful dinner.
PmG
   A. I was particularly charming that night. 0
   B. I am a good host. 1

7. You owe the library ten dollars for an overdue book.
PmB
   A. When I am really involved in what I am reading, I often forget when it's due. 1
   B. I was so involved in writing the report that I forgot to return the book. 0

8. Your stocks make you a lot of money.
PmG
   A. My broker decided to take a chance on something new. 0
   B. My broker is a top-notch investor. 1

PmG
   A. I was feeling unbeatable. 0
   B. I train hard. 1

10. You fail an important examination.
PvB
    A. I wasn't as smart as the other people taking the exam. 1
    B. I didn't prepare for it well. 0

11. You prepared a special meal for a friend, and he/she barely touched the food.
PvB
    A. I'm not a good cook. 1
    B. I made the meal in a rush. 0

12. You lose a sporting event for which you have been training for a long time.
PvB
    A. I'm not very athletic. 1
    B. I'm not good at that sport. 0

PmB
    A. He/she is always nagging me. 1
    B. He/she was in a hostile mood. 0

14. You are penalized for not returning your income tax forms on time.
PmB
    A. I always put off doing my taxes. 1
    B. I was lazy about getting my taxes done this year. 0

15. You ask a person out on a date, and he/she says no.
PvB
    A. I was a wreck that day. 1
    B. I got tongue-tied when I asked him/her on the date. 0

16. You are frequently asked to dance at a party.
PmG
    A. I am outgoing at parties. 1
    B. I was in perfect form that night. 0
17. You do exceptionally well in a job interview.
PmG
   A. I felt extremely confident during the interview. 0
   B. I interview well. 1

18. Your boss gives you too little time in which to finish a project, but you get it finished anyway.
PvG
   A. I am good at my job. 0
   B. I am an efficient person. 1

19. You’ve been feeling run down lately.
PmB
   A. I never get a chance to relax. 1
   B. I was exceptionally busy this week. 0

20. You save a person from choking to death.
PvG
   A. I know a technique to stop someone from choking. 0
   B. I know what to do in crisis situations. 1

21. Your romantic partner wants to cool things off for a while.
PvB
   A. I’m too self-centered. 1
   B. I don’t spend enough time with him/her. 0

22. A friend says something that hurts your feelings.
PmB
   A. He/she always blurs things out without thinking of others. 1
   B. My friend was in a bad mood and took it out on me. 0

23. Your employer comes to you for advice.
PvG
   A. I am an expert in the area about which I was asked. 0
   B. I am good at giving useful advice. 1

24. A friend thanks you for helping him/her get through a bad time.
PvG
   A. I enjoy helping him/her through tough times. 0
   B. I care about people. 1

25. Your doctor tells you that you are in good physical shape.
PvG
   A. I make sure I exercise frequently. 0
   B. I am very health conscious. 1

26. Your spouse (boyfriend/girlfriend) takes you away for a romantic weekend.
PmG
   A. He/she needed to get away for a few days. 0
   B. He/she likes to explore new areas. 1

27. You are asked to head an important project.
PmG
   A. I just successfully completed a similar project. 0
   B. I am a good supervisor. 1

28. You fall down a great deal while skiing.
PmB
   A. Skiing is difficult. 1
   B. The trails were icy. 0

29. You win a prestigious award.
PvG
   A. I solved an important problem. 0
   B. I was the best employee. 1

30. Your stocks are at an all-time low.
PvB
   A. I didn’t know much about the business climate at the time. 1
   B. I made a poor choice of stocks. 0

31. You gain weight over the holidays, and you can’t lose it.
PmB
   A. Diets don’t work in the long run. 1
   B. The diet I tried didn’t work. 0

32. They won’t honor your credit card at a store.
PvB
   A. I sometimes overestimate how much money I have. 1
   B. I sometimes forget to pay my credit card bill. 0
Scoring your test yourself as laid out in the following two sections will explain the two basic dimensions of optimism.

**Scoring Key**
- PmB ___ PmG ___
- PvB ___ PvG ___
- HoB ___ HoG ___
- HoG minus HoB = ___

There are two crucial dimensions to your explanatory style: permanence and pervasiveness.

**Permanence**
People who give up easily believe the causes of the bad events that happen to them are permanent—the bad events will persist, are always going to be there to affect their lives. People who resist helplessness believe the causes of bad events are temporary.

**PERMANENT (PESSIMISTIC)**
- “I’m all washed up.”
- “Diets never work.”
- “You always nag.”
- The boss is a bastard.”
- “You never talk to me.”

**TEMPORARY (OPTIMISTIC)**
- “I’m exhausted.”
- “Diets don’t work when you eat out.”
- “You nag when I don’t clean my room.”
- “The boss is in a bad mood.”
- “You haven’t talked to me lately.”

If you think about bad things in terms of “always” and “never” and abiding traits, you have a permanent, pessimistic style. If you think in terms of “sometimes” and “lately,” using qualifiers and blaming bad events on ephemera, you have an optimistic style.

Now turn back to your test. Look at the eight items marked PmB (which stands for Permanent Bad), the questions numbered: 2, 7, 13, 14, 19, 22, 28, and 31. These tested how permanent you tend to think the causes of bad events are. Each one marked with a 0 after it is optimistic; each one followed by a 1 is pessimistic. So, for example, if you chose “I’m not good at remembering birthdays” (question 2) rather than “I was preoccupied with other things” to explain why you forgot your spouse’s birthday, you chose a more permanent and therefore pessimistic cause.

Total the numbers in the right-hand margin. Write your total on the line in the scoring box marked PmB Total. If you totaled 0 or 1, you are very optimistic on this dimension; 2 or 3, moderately optimistic; 4, average; 5 or 6, quite pessimistic; and if you got a 7 or 8 you are very pessimistic.

When we fail, we all become at least momentarily helpless. It’s like a punch in the stomach. It hurts, but the hurt goes away, for some people almost instantly. These are the people whose score totals 0 or 1. For others, the hurt lasts; it congeals into a grudge. These people score 7 or 8. They remain helpless for days or perhaps months, even after only small setbacks. After major defeats, they may never come back.

The optimistic style for good events is just the opposite of the pessimistic style for bad events. People who believe good events have permanent causes are more optimistic than those who believe they have temporary causes.

**TEMPORARY (PESSIMISM)**
- “My lucky day.”
- “I try hard.”
- “My rival got tired.”

**PERMANENT (OPTIMISM)**
- “I’m always lucky.”
- “I’m talented.”
- “My rival is no good.”

Optimistic people explain good events to themselves in terms of permanent causes such as traits and abilities. Pessimists name transient causes, such as moods and effort.

You probably noticed some of the questions on the test—exactly half of them, in fact—were about good events (for example, “Your stocks make a lot of money”). Score those marked PmG (Permanent Good); they are the ones numbered 1, 6, 8, 9, 16, 17, 26, and 27. The ones with a 1 following them are the permanent, optimistic answers. Total the numbers on the right-hand side, and write the total on the line in the scoring key marked PmG. If your total is 7 or 8, you are very optimistic about the likelihood of good events continuing; 6, moderately optimistic; 4 or 5, average; 3, moderately pessimistic; and 0, 1, or 2, very pessimistic.
As for people who believe good events have permanent causes, when they succeed they try even harder the next time. People who see temporary reasons for good events may give up even when they succeed, believing it was a fluke. People who best take advantage of success, and get on a roll once things start to go well, are the optimists.

**Pervasiveness: Specific versus Universal**

Permanence is about time. Pervasiveness is about space.

Consider this example: In a large retailing firm, half the accounting department was fired. Two of the accountants, Nora and Kevin, both became depressed. Neither could bear to look for another job for several months, and both avoided doing their income taxes or anything else that reminded them of accounting. Nora, however, remained a loving and active wife. Her social life went on normally, her health stayed robust, and she continued to work out three times a week. Kevin, in contrast, fell apart. He ignored his wife and baby son, spending all his evenings in sullen brooding. He refused to go to parties, saying he couldn’t bear to see people. He never laughed at jokes. He got a cold that lasted all winter, and he gave up jogging.

Some people can put their troubles neatly into a box and go about their lives even when one important aspect of it—their job, for example, or their love life—is crumbling. Others let one problem bleed all over everything. They catastrophize. When one thread of their lives breaks, the whole fabric unravels.

It comes down to this: People who make universal explanations for their failures give up on everything when a failure strikes in one area. People who make specific explanations may become helpless in that one part of their lives, yet march stalwartly on in the others. Here are some universal and specific explanations of bad events:

**Universal (Pessimism)**
- “All teachers are unfair.”
- “I’m repulsive.”
- “Books are useless.”

**Specific (Optimism)**
- “Professor Seligman is unfair.”
- “I’m repulsive to him.”
- “This book is useless.”

When they were fired, they both remained depressed for a long time. But they had opposite scores on the pervasiveness dimension. When the bad events struck, Kevin believed they would undermine everything he tried. When he was fired, he thought he was no good at anything. Nora believed bad events have very specific causes; when she was fired, she thought she was no good at accounting.

The permanence dimension determines how long a person gives up for—with permanent explanations for bad events producing long-lasting helplessness, and temporary explanations producing resilience. The pervasiveness dimension determines whether helplessness cuts across many situations or is limited to the original arena. Kevin was a victim of the pervasiveness dimension. Once fired, he believed the cause was universal, and he capitulated across all aspects of his life.

Do you catastrophize in this fashion? The questions marked PvB (Pervasiveness Bad) are numbered 5, 10, 11, 12, 15, 21, 30, and 32. For those questions, total the numbers at the right-hand margin and write the total on the line marked PvB. Scores of 0 and 1 are very optimistic; 2 and 3, moderately so; 4, average; 5 or 6, moderately pessimistic; and 7 or 8, very pessimistic.

Now for the converse. The optimistic explanatory style for good events is opposite that for bad events. The optimist believes good events will enhance everything he does, while the pessimist believes good events are caused by specific factors. When Nora was offered temporary work back at the company, she thought, “They finally realized they can’t get along without me.” When Kevin got the same offer, he thought, “They must really be shorthanded.” Here are some more examples:

**Specific (Pessimism)**
- “I’m smart at math.”
- “My broker knows oil stocks.”
- “I was charming to her.”

**Universal (Optimism)**
- “I’m smart.”
- “My broker knows Wall Street.”
- “I was charming.”

Score your optimism for the pervasiveness of good events. The items marked PovG are numbered 3, 4, 18, 20, 23, 24, 25, and 29. Each item followed by a 0 is pessimistic (specific). When asked in question 24 about your reaction to a friend’s thanking you for helping him, did you answer, “I liked helping him through tough times” (specific and pessimistic), or “I
care about people" (universal and optimistic)? Using the numbers at the right, total your score for these questions and write it on the line labeled PmG. A score of 7 or 8 is very optimistic; 6, moderately optimistic; 4 or 5, average; 3, moderately pessimistic; and 0, 1, or 2, very pessimistic.

**The Stuff of Hope**

Hope has largely been the province of television preachers, politicians, and hustlers. The concept of learned optimism brings hope into the laboratory, where scientists can dissect it in order to understand how it works. Whether or not we have hope depends on two dimensions taken together: finding permanent and universal causes of good events along with temporary and specific causes for misfortune is the art of hope; finding permanent and universal causes for misfortune and temporary and specific causes of good events is the practice of despair.

Bad events can be described in either a hopeless or hopeful manner, as in these examples:

**HOPELESS**

“I’m stupid.”

“Men are tyrants.”

“It’s five in ten this lump is cancer.”

**HOPEFUL**

“I’m hung over.”

“My husband was in a bad mood.”

“It’s five in ten this lump is nothing.”

The same goes for good events:

**HOPELESS**

“I’m lucky.”

“My wife charms my clients.”

“The U.S. will root out the terrorists.”

**HOPEFUL**

“I’m talented.”

“My wife charms everyone.”

“The U.S. will root out all its enemies.”

Perhaps the most important scores from your test are your Hope (HoB and HoG) scores. For HoB, take your total for PmB and add it to your total for PmG. For HoG, take your PmG score and add it to your PmG score. Now subtract your HoB score from your HoG score. If it totals from 10 to 16, you are extraordinarily hopeful; from 6 to 9, moderately hopeful; from 1 to 5, average; from minus 5 to 0, moderately hopeless; and below minus 5, severely hopeless.

People who make permanent and universal explanations for good events, as well as temporary and specific explanations for bad events, bounce back from troubles briskly and get on a roll easily when they succeed once. People who make temporary and specific explanations for success, and permanent and universal explanations for setbacks, tend to collapse under pressure—both for a long time and across situations—and rarely get on a roll.

**Increasing Optimism and Hope**

There is a well-documented method for building optimism that consists of recognizing and then disputing pessimistic thoughts. Everyone already has the skills of disputing, and we use them when an external person—a rival for our job, or our lover—accuses us falsely of some dereliction. “You don’t deserve to be a vice-president for personnel. You’re inconsiderate, selfish, and the people who work for you cannot stand you,” your rival accuses. In reply, you trot out all the reasons she is wrong: the high ratings the staff gave you last year, and the skill you showed in turning around the three most difficult employees in the marketing department. When, however, we say the same accusing things to ourselves, we usually fail to dispute them—even though they are often false. The key to disputing your own pessimistic thoughts is to first recognize them and then to treat them as if they were uttered by an external person, a rival whose mission in life was to make you miserable.

Here is a short course in how to do this. Once you recognize that you have a pessimistic thought that seems unwarranted, argue against it using the ABCDE model. A stands for adversity, B for the beliefs you automatically have when it occurs, C for the usual consequences of the belief, D for your disputation of your routine belief, and E for the energization that occurs when you dispute it successfully. By effectively disputing the beliefs that follow an adversity, you can change your reaction from dejection and giving up to activity and good cheer.

**Adversity:** My husband and I went out for our first dinner alone since the baby was born, and we spent the evening bickering over every-
thing from whether the waiter’s accent was real to whether the shape of our son’s head is more like that of relations on my side of the family or my husband’s.

**Belief.** What is wrong with us? Here we are supposed to be enjoying a romantic dinner, and instead we’re wasting our one night out fighting over the most stupid things. An article I read said that lots of marriages end after the birth of the first child. Looks like we’re heading in that direction. How am I going to raise Noah by myself?

**Consequences.** I felt a deep sadness and disappointment. And I also had a panicky feeling. I could barely eat my dinner; I just pushed it around my plate. My husband was clearly trying to shift the mood, but I could hardly look at him.

**Disputation.** Maybe I’m being a bit unrealistic. It’s hard to feel romantic when you haven’t had three consecutive hours of sleep in the last seven weeks, and you’re worried that your breasts are going to leak. Yeah, that’s romantic! And come on, one bad dinner does not mean divorce. We’ve been through much tougher times than this, and we came out feeling even better about our relationship. I think I’ve just got to stop reading those stupid magazines. I can’t believe I’m sitting here planning out the visitation schedule just because Paul thinks Noah’s head looks more like his great-uncle Larry than my aunt Flo. I think I just need to relax a bit and view this as a good first try at romance. The next dinner will go better.

**Energization.** I started to feel better and more focused on Paul. I ever told him my concern about my breasts, and we had a good laugh thinking about how the waiter would respond. We decided to view this as a practice dinner and that we’d go out again next week and try again. Once we talked about it, we both seemed to have more fun and feel more connected.

It is essential to realize your beliefs are just that—beliefs. They may or may not be facts. If a jealous rival shrieked at you in a rage, “You are a terrible mother. You are selfish, inconsiderate, and stupid,” how would you react? You probably would discount the accusations, and if they got under your skin, you would dispute them (either to her face or internally). “My kids love me,” you might say to yourself. “I spend ungodly amounts of time with them. I teach them algebra, football, and how to get by in a tough world. Anyway she’s just jealous because her kids have turned out so badly.”

We can, then, more or less easily distance ourselves from the unfounded accusations of others. But we are much worse at distancing ourselves from the accusations that we launch daily at ourselves. After all, if we think them about ourselves, they must be true, right?

Wrong!

What we say to ourselves when we face a setback can be just as baseless as the ravings of a jealous rival. Our reflexive explanations are usually distortions. They are mere bad habits of thought produced by unpleasant experiences in the past—childhood conflicts, strict parents, an overly critical Little League coach, or a big sister’s jealousy. But because they now seem to issue from ourselves, we treat them as gospel.

They are merely beliefs, however. And just because a person fears that he is unemployable, unlovable, or inadequate doesn’t mean it’s true. It is essential to stand back and distance yourself from your pessimistic explanations, at least long enough to verify their accuracy. Checking out the accuracy of our reflexive beliefs is what disputing is all about. The first step is just knowing your beliefs warrant dispute; the next step is putting disputation into practice.

**Learning to Argue with Yourself**

There are four important ways to make your disputations convincing. Each of these is discussed in a separate section below.

**Evidence**

The most convincing way of disputing a negative belief is to show that it is factually incorrect. Much of the time you will have facts on your side, since pessimistic reactions to adversity are so very often overreactions. You adopt the role of a detective and ask, “What is the evidence for this belief?”

If you got a bad grade and believed it the “worst in the class,” you should check the evidence. Did the person sitting next to you get a lower grade? If you think you “blew” your diet, count up the calories in
the nachos, the chicken wings, and the light beers. You might find out
that they came to little more than the dinner you skipped to go out with
your friends.

It is important to see the difference between this approach and the
so-called power of positive thinking. Positive thinking often involves try-
ing to believe upbeat statements such as “Every day, in every way, I’m
getting better and better” in the absence of evidence, or even in the face
of contrary evidence. If you can manage the feat of actually believing
these sorts of statements, more power to you. Many educated people,
trained in skeptical thinking, cannot manage this kind of boosterism.
Learned optimism, in contrast, is about accuracy. One of your most
effective techniques in disputing will be to search for evidence point-
ing to the distortions in your catastrophic explanations. Most of the
time, you will have reality on your side.

Alternatives
Almost nothing that happens to you has just one cause; most events
have many causes. If you did poorly on a test, all of the following might
have contributed: how hard the test was, how much you studied, how
smart you are, how fair the professor is, how the other students did, and
how tired you were. Pessimists have a way of latching onto the worst of
all these causes—the most permanent and pervasive one. Here again,
disputation usually has reality on its side. There are multiple causes, so
why latch onto the most insidious one? Ask yourself, is there any less
destructive way to look at this?

To dispute your own beliefs, scan for all possible contributing
causes. Focus on those that are changeable (not enough time spent
studying), specific (this particular exam was uncharacteristically hard),
and nonpersonal (the professor graded unfairly). You may have to
push hard at generating alternative beliefs, latching onto possibilities
that you are not fully convinced are true. Remember that much of pes-
simistic thinking consists of just the reverse, latching onto the most
dire possible belief—not because of evidence, but precisely because it
is so dire. It is your job to undo this destructive habit by becoming
facile at generating alternatives.

Implications
But the way things go in this world, the facts won’t always be on your
side. Reality may be against you, and the negative belief you hold about
yourself may be true. In this situation, the technique to use is decata-
Prophobizing.

Even if the belief is true, you say to yourself, what are its implications?
It was true that the dinner was not romantic. But what does that imply?
One bad dinner does not mean divorce.

How likely, you should ask yourself, is the worst-case scenario? Do
three B’s on a report card mean no one will ever hire you? Do a couple
of chicken wings and a plate of nachos really mean that you are doomed
to obesity forever? At this point, go back to the first technique and
repeat the search for evidence. In our earlier example, the wife remem-
bered that she and her husband had been through much tougher times
than this.

Usefulness
Sometimes the consequences of holding a belief matter more than its
truth. Is the belief destructive? When you break your diet, the response
“I’m a total glutton” is a recipe for letting go of your diet completely.
Some people get very upset when the world shows itself not to be fair.
We can sympathize with that sentiment, but the belief itself may cause
more grief than it is worth. What good will it do me to dwell on the
belief that the world should be fair? Another tactic is to detail all the
ways you can change the situation in the future. Even if the belief is true
now, is the situation changeable? How can you go about changing it?
The wife cited earlier decided to stop reading those catastrophic maga-
azine articles about divorce.

Your Disputation Record
Now I want you to practice disputing. During the next five adverse
events you face in your daily life, listen closely for your beliefs, observe
the consequences, and dispute your beliefs vigorously. Then observe
the energy that occurs as you succeed in dealing with the negative
beliefs. Record all of this below. These five adverse events can be minor:
the mail is late, your call isn’t returned, or the kid pumping your gas doesn’t wash the windshield. In each of these, use the four techniques of effective self-disputation.

Before you start, study the two examples below. The first one is about a bad event, while the second is about a good event.

**Adversity.** I received the course evaluations for the seminar I taught on the psychological recovery from trauma. One evaluation said, “I was extremely disappointed in this course. The only thing that impressed me was how thoroughly and consistently boring the professor was. Most corpses are more lively than Professor Richmond. Whatever you do, don’t take this class!”

**Beliefs.** The audacity of that little punk. Students today expect their classes to be in Dolby sound, and if you don’t have glitzy multimedia, then you’re a bore. They can’t handle it if you actually present thoughtful material and expect them to think and work a little. I’m just so sick of the entitled attitude of these kids. It’s a good thing I don’t know who wrote that review.

**Consequences.** I was furious. I called my wife and read her the evaluation, ranting for about ten minutes. Even later in the day, I was still upset about it. I kept ruminating about how arrogant and spoiled the students are.

**Disputation.** That really was rude. I can understand it if someone doesn’t like the course, but there is no reason to be that nasty. I ought to remember, of course, that it was only one evaluation. Most of the students seemed to think the course was okay. I didn’t get as high ratings as I usually do, however. And more than a few students made comments that it would be easier for them to grasp the material if I used some slides. They aren’t asking for a laser show, just a little technology to make the material more exciting and accessible. Maybe I have gotten a bit lazy. I used to work harder at finding ways to engage the students. I don’t enjoy teaching the course as much as I used to, and I guess I’m letting that show. Maybe I should view that evaluation as a wake-up call and spend a little time sprucing up the material.

**Energization.** I felt much less angry. I still was annoyed by the way the one student expressed himself or herself, but I was able to keep it in perspective. I didn’t like admitting that I had gotten a lit-

tle lazy, but I was able to focus that energy on updating my course. I even feel reconnected to the material, and I look forward to revamping the course.

As noted earlier, the pessimistic style for interpreting good events is just the opposite of the same style for bad events. If it’s good, pessimists say, it’s temporary, specific, and I had nothing to do with it. Pessimistic explanations for good events stop you from getting on a roll and taking full advantage of victory. This example shows how to dispute temporary, specific, and external explanations for success and change them into permanent, pervasive, and personal explanations—the explanations you need to keep successes coming.

**Adversity.** My boss told me that he was pleased with some new ideas I presented. He asked me to join him at a big meeting and pitch the ideas to our executive team.

**Beliefs.** Oh, no, I can’t believe he wants me to go to that meeting. I’m going to make a fool of myself. I just got lucky in my meeting with him. Those really weren’t my ideas, anyway; it’s stuff a lot of us had been talking about. I talked a good game, but I don’t have the depth of understanding I’ll need to answer questions from the big guns. I’m going to be humiliated.

**Consequences.** I felt intense dread. I couldn’t concentrate. I should have spent my time planning the pitch, but I kept losing my train of thought and ended up doing busy work.

**Disputation.** Hang on a second. This is a good thing, not a bad thing. It’s true that I developed the pitch with others, but it’s not realistic to say they weren’t my ideas. In fact, in our last meeting, I was the one that really got us through the impasse and hit upon the new approach. Almost anyone would be nervous presenting in front of the top executives, but I can’t psyche myself out. I’m not out of my depth. I’ve been thinking about this stuff for a long time. I even wrote up my ideas and circulated it around the department. The reason Hank picked me is because he knows I’ll do a good job. He’s not going to risk his reputation by putting just anybody in front of his bosses. He has confidence in me, and so should I.

**Energization.** I became a lot more focused and calm. I decided to recruit a couple of my colleagues and practice my presentation on
them. I actually started to look forward to the challenge, and the
more I worked, the more confident I became. I even hit upon a
few new ways of saying things that made the whole talk a lot more
coherent.

Now you do it in your daily life over the next week. Don’t search out
adversity, but as it comes along, tune in carefully to your internal dia-
logue. When you hear the negative beliefs, dispute them. Beat them
into the ground, then record the ABCDE.

1.
   Adversity:
   Belief:
   Consequences:
   Disputation:
   Energization:

2.
   Adversity:
   Belief:
   Consequences:
   Disputation:
   Energization:

3.
   Adversity:
   Belief:
   Consequences:
   Disputation:
   Energization:

4.
   Adversity:
   Belief:
   Consequences:
   Disputation:
   Energization:

5.
   Adversity:
   Belief:
   Consequences:
   Disputation:
   Energization:

In Chapter 5, I discussed what happiness about the past is, and how to
obtain more satisfaction from your past. In this chapter I discussed what
constitutes happiness about the future, and detailed techniques for
improving your happiness in this domain. I now turn to happiness in
the present.