

BODACIOUS

The rise and fall of negativity

Merchant of doom, wet blanket or just plain cynic - we've all come across them - at work, in business, in our social lives. They seem to have an uncanny ability to throw ice-cold water on our most mundane of ambitions and cast a web of gloom that even the most positive amongst us find nigh on impossible to climb over.

Ah yes, the negative vibes of the disgruntled co-worker, the naysaying friend who poo-poohs your latest business brainwave or the family member who treads on your plans to do the 10k run with a snort of derision. If you've ever been faced with the negative attitude of others, you'll know:

- It can suck the lifeblood out of you in minutes
- That too much exposure can wholly discourage you from upping your game
- That other people's lack of ambition, if you let it, can pole-axe you in your quest for a better job, more customers or more fun.

And whether it's one person or more than one, the language, demeanour and lack of motivation of negative people is more than a reflection of how they are feeling, it's also highly contagious. So can we stop the spread of negativity and bolster our immunity to it?

Well the good news is that it doesn't have to be this way. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton said:

"The mind is its own place and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven."

In other words: negativity is a choice. Sadly you can't guarantee to make a dent in other people's negativity, but you can choose how much - or little - they drag you down with them. Try these tips for keeping others' negativity at arm's length:

1. Try not to judge. Negative people may be risk averse, blame external factors for their own misfortune or have controlling behaviours but it's likely these attributes are rooted in fear: fear of what others think, fear of failure, fear that bad things are going to happen. Despite negativity oozing from every pore, they won't necessarily know they're like this or that they are draining your mental energy by the bucketload.
2. Don't make their problems your problems. You can't fix it for them. Offering solutions to their gripes is most likely to result in a string of 'yes but's' rather than positive action.
3. Constant exposure to negativity is likely to divert you from your own work or business activity and affect your performance, so set limits on how much you'll listen to.
4. It's OK to disagree if you feel strongly but engage at your peril. It's not about you so try and keep objective.
5. Change the subject to something deliciously light and positive.
6. If all else fails: walk away. Don't let your brilliance be drowned by others' negativity.

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