

2.1 Optimism – focus on future

Slide 1

People who are optimistic tend to be resilient. Optimistic people look forward, are focused on goals and the future, and seek out possibilities. They put setbacks into proportion and believe that they can move on from them. Optimism is something that can be learned, practised and developed.

One way to practice optimism is to spend time thinking about where you are heading and what you want to have in your future. If you have clarity about that, it enables you to have a sense of perspective on the challenges that are draining your resilience and being able to look for alternative strategies.

In this presentation, you will be guided through a scenario to visualise. It will be most effective if you are in a quiet place where you can relax, be free from interruption for a few minutes and you can close your eyes. If that is not possible right now, perhaps come back to it another time.

Slide 2

Now, I'd like you to find a comfortable sitting position, close your eyes, take a few deep breaths in and out.

Allow any outside sounds and distractions to wash over your head for now.

OK... I'd like you to imagine that it is five years from now. You are feeling excited and inquisitive.

You're feeling excited because you are about to go and interview somebody inspiring. You know you will learn a lot from them. They have been really successful in achieving just what they wanted from their life and career. They feel very fulfilled.

You're arriving at the place where you're going to interview this inspiring person. You knock on the door. As it opens and you see your interviewee, you realise that you recognise them. The person that you are interviewing is your future self. This is yourself in 5 years time, having achieved just the kind of fulfilling life and career that they had hoped for.

Notice how your future self greets you. How do they make you feel? Get a sense of them. You go inside and settle yourself down, and now you're going to ask your future self some questions. Take some time to listen to their answers.

1. The first question you ask is: In this life, what is the most important thing to them? The thing they most value in their successful life in five years from now. Take a few seconds to hear their reply.

2. The next question you ask is: What is their proudest achievement from the last five years? Again take a few seconds to hear their reply.

3. Now, ask your successful future self: who is it that most supports them or enables them to be at their best in this successful life and career?

4. You have a couple more questions to ask. The next one is: to be more successful, what have they found they needed to change about what they do or how they behave over the last five years?

5. Now, ask them: what is the best piece of advice that they can give you about the challenges that you are facing now?

Finally, before you go, take the opportunity to ask your future self any question you like. Listen to their answer.

Now, thank your future self and say goodbye. Know that you can call on them for their advice at any time in the future.

When you're ready, take a deep breath, open your eyes, find a pen and paper, pause this presentation, and write down some notes about anything you want to remember about your encounter today with your future self.

Slide 3

Visualisations like the one we've just done in the previous slide don't work for everybody. Perhaps our imaginations simply don't work in this way. Sometimes we just need to practice.

Another activity you could try instead, or as well as the visualisation is free writing. Free writing is a creative practice, and it is simply the act of emptying what's in your head down onto paper. In free writing, we don't judge what we've written. We don't criticise it. We just notice what our mind or our subconscious is telling us in the moment and write it down.

When we're free writing, all we do is to think of a topic and just write continuously whatever is coming into our head about that topic. We write without stopping. If we stop, it is too tempting to re-read what we've written and become critical. Free write for a short period of time – maybe only a few minutes.

The topic might be really general: what's bothering me right now'. That's a really useful well-being boosting activity to do in general. If you're feeling skeptical, just give it a go and see what happens.

What we're suggesting here is that you do some free writing on the following topic: what does life look and feel like for you in five years time?

Both inside and outside of work.

Realistically but also positively and optimistically?

Set a timer for 5 minutes and just see where it takes you.

If you want to know more about free writing, you will find some extra resources on the website.