



Wellbeing Insight

Toxic Positivity or Positive Reframing?

I heard the term *toxic positivity* used recently and found myself curious – and I'll admit, a little defensive – about the difference between this and a term I choose to use, *positive reframing*. Clearly the former has negative connotations and the latter – dare I say it – has positive connotations!

I take toxic positivity to mean that frame of mind or expression which sees the positive in everything, to the extent of being toxic! Again, I take toxic to mean, poisonous to those who experience this toxicity in action, and probably too, to those who inhabit the body and mind of the one expressing the toxicity.

Let's begin with the effect on those *hearing/witnessing* the toxic positivity. I am accepting that hearing what is considered to be 'false' positive words in a context in which the words are deemed inappropriate and maybe even insensitive, is affronting. It would be especially so if the intentions of the speaker were to dismiss the importance of the occurrence remarked upon, or at best offered glib recognition.

Conversely, let's continue to consider the effect on the *speaker* of these poisonous words: if they mask emotions which therefore become bottled up or brooded upon, then it is possible to see that if this becomes a habit of the speaker when dealing with uncomfortable emotions, they will likely in time experience a troubled mind or even an excessively charged eruption of emotion at an inappropriate time in the future.

The speaker will also miss an opportunity to examine the 'uncomfortable situation' at hand closely. Questions like: *And what can I learn from this situation?* and *How can I use this as an opportunity for growth?* might be overlooked in the rush to utter those positive words.

But for a moment now, I would like to consider the alternative expression I have used for *toxic positivity*, which is *positive reframing*. What I have in mind here, is the practice – not in every situation but intentionally in some situations – of *making the most of the situation*. In effect, this might look like this: an unexpected occurrence happens; instead of jumping into what might be my default reaction – catastrophising – I take a moment to assess the situation. In assessing it, I decide that the issue is of the level of inconvenience, rather than life-altering. I am then able to reframe the occurrence to a more positive way of viewing it. In doing this, I lessen its impact, I have a moment to choose my action – rather than reaction – and I feel empowered in that I am managing my emotions.

Not for one moment am I suggesting that we should always take a 'Pollyanna' approach to life's events; however, I know in many instances, taking the positive reframing approach when I am able to, and consider it appropriate, helps me to avoid the extremes of emotional highs and lows and allows me to walk the middle path. To me, a person whose youth was full of emotional highs and lows, this choice is truly self-compassionate.