

## Are You Living A Have-To or Want-To Life?

Hi Ry. I, like others, enjoyed your last newsletter, particularly your story about the spin bike. I think those personal stories are the best. Your story stirred a few thoughts in my head. So, what follows are some off the cuff notes. Perhaps you can mold them into a blog . . . or not.

None of these ideas are mine, nor are they particularly new. Age doesn't make ideas unhelpful or not true. In fact, it is probably the inverse: if an idea has been around for a while, there is probably some truth to it. As I started to write this I contacted Jon Nipple to help me remember some things. Many years ago Jon and I attended a course in Utah taught by the Vital Smarts guys about Personal Vitality. Part of the course dealt with how people choose to think about a situation, and that changing how they think can change their results. The Vital Smarts people may have borrowed their ideas from a book by Martin Seligman written a number of years ago titled Learned Optimism. In it Seligman describes two ways to think about and describe a situation – either as an optimist or a pessimist.

Seligmann said that when something happens to a person with a pessimistic explanation style they tend to describe it in Permanent, Pervasive and Personal ways. To use your spin bike example, people might say something like, *“My exercise routine always gets messed up.”* (Permanent – never ending.) Or, *“Shoot, this exercise debacle has messed up my entire vacation.”* (Pervasive – affects all aspects of their life.) Or, *“I don't know why these kinds of things always happen to me.”* (Personal – the individual is singled out.)

If people with a more optimistic explanation style see a similar event, their comments will be more Short-lived, Specific, and Situational. Again, to use the spin bike example, *“Oh well, it is only an hour class.”* (Short-lived.) Or, *“This class got cancelled but I still have the rest of my day to enjoy.”* (Specific – does not affect other parts of their life.) Or, *“Finding an instructor for this class has to be difficult. They probably cancel other activities occasionally too.”* (Situational – not something targeted at the individual.)

The first approach leads to helplessness. The second approach leads to optimism and alternatives. For example, your alternative of giving yourself a class. In your case, the situation Became a positive experience because you got to move the bike outside to better weather.

These two different styles of explaining are closely coupled to the idea that there are two ways to view your life: (1) 'want to' or (2) 'have to.' If a person “has to” go to a spin class, they are much more apt to find an explanation style that gets them out of it. On the other hand, it was obvious that you “wanted to” ride the spin bike so you saw it differently and found a way to make that happen. In our workshops I used to ask participants what percent of their life was 'want to' and what percent was 'have to.' When a person wants to get something done that initially looks distasteful or difficult to them, if they can link that task to something in their life that is important to them, (change the task from a 'have to' to a 'want to' they will find it easier to accomplish.

I will end this rambling with a quote from Think and Grow Rich author, Napoleon Hill -

“Every adversity, every failure, every heartache carries with it the seed of an equal or greater benefit.”