



By [Linda Wagener, Ph.D.](#)

Image: Blinkers from our Seattle studio sharing a positive experience on a rare sunny day outside.

Most athletes with any competitive experience rely on positive visualization or mental preparation. Typically, the athletes imagine successfully completing the complex tasks they must perform well to succeed in their sport. The quarterback recites the play calls and commands the huddle, in his mind. A downhill skier walks the course, imagining successful lines and fast times. A tennis player mentally practices the perfect serve.

A positive mindset enhances performance

Beneath all of these visualizations is a core truth about positivity: a positive mindset enhances performance.

In fact, research by psychologists Barbara L. Fredrickson and Marcial F. Losada suggests that human beings flourish consistently when they experience a minimum of three positive emotions for every negative emotion. This principle defines the positivity ratio. The positivity ratio is a calculation of an overall emotional state based on the emotions you are currently feeling.

Do you feel silly, amused, or fun-loving? That's a positive emotion.

Do you feel guilty, repentant, or blameworthy? That's a negative emotion. Throughout the course of a day, our emotions will include both.

Negative emotions narrow our perspective to focus on threats

Both positive and negative emotions change the way that our brain operates. Negative emotions narrow our perspective to focus on threats.

Our brains have been wired through evolution to respond to threats against survival. Because of the high risk involved, we give exaggerated attention to that threat and diminished attention to the positive. For most of us, when we experience positive and negative emotions at an equal level, the scale tips toward the negative and life feels less rewarding.

Negative emotions [trigger fight-or-flight behavior](#). While this might help us focus and increase our reaction time, it also challenges our health, especially working at a desk job. [Suzanne C. Segerstrom and Gregory E. Miller's work](#) suggests that consistent stress can negatively influence our health rapidly. It can increase cholesterol production and decrease its rate of removal. It can position us to encounter a higher chance of blood clotting and take a toll on immune systems. It can even influence memory.

Much of this negativity is a result of our own doing. As a society, we change jobs quickly and are expected to take on heavy workloads. There's consistent pressure to keep up. Generally, we're too busy and our expectations of perfection lead to negative self-talk.

Positive emotions broaden our field of vision

On the opposite end of the scale, positive emotions broaden our field of vision. Psychologist Barbara Fredrickson coined the term ["broaden and build"](#) to describe the impact of positive emotions.

In addition to the good feeling it provides, positivity can widen our scope of attention, broaden our behavioral repertoire, increase intuition, enhance creativity, speed up recovery from injury or disease, prevent stress-related disorders, provide resilience in adversity, and increase our life span.

Everyone experiences good and bad emotions on a daily basis and our moods reflect that variety of positive and negative emotions. But an adequate positivity ratio is extremely rare. In fact, according to Fredrickson and Losada, only 20% of Americans have the ideal positive-to-negative ratio that results in these benefits.

Fredrickson has developed a very quick daily measure of positivity. If you want to improve your positivity ratio, take the test, and take it often. It will draw your attention to opportunities throughout your day to experience positive emotions.

You can find the test at [PositivityRatio.com](#).

Find some balance

Additionally, find some balance with the skills and hobbies that relax and refresh you. This suggestion is especially important for people stuck in mid-level and entry-level work roles where they don't feel like they have much autonomy to change the system. Maybe it's reading a book. Perhaps it's joining a rec-league basketball team. Maybe it's serving at an animal shelter.

If you're in a leadership position, take steps towards creating a positive environment around you. Provide support, encouragement, and appreciation. Be an advocate for your team, but don't avoid conflict. An appropriate approach to conflict can be affirming, as long as the end goal is in alignment with your team members. When you shift the ratio toward positivity — at least 3:1 — your mental health, team, and business all benefit.



Image: "Collecting Positivity" illustration by Blink researcher Holly Prouty.

What this means at Blink

Here are four ways we help our team improve their positivity ratio day-to-day.

1. We encourage people to give positive feedback to their colleagues regularly and celebrate our day-to-day successes. We have a Slack channel for digital high-fives and give everyone on our team the opportunity to publicly recognize anyone else for doing great things.
2. We train our managers and leaders on the importance of building teams that have more positive than negative interactions. We also coach them on how to make difficult conversations become a growth experience. Weekly project health reports include scores for team morale, which provides data we can use to help improve negative situations.
3. Among other metrics, we measure positivity in our annual culture survey. Our leadership makes adjustments to process and policy to create more positive experiences at work.
4. Everyone at Blink is encouraged to help make our work environment the best it can be. That includes a mindfulness practice group in Seattle and a running club in San Diego. We have perks that encourage positive experiences at work, such as in-studio massages and team happy hours. We also give back to the community by hosting events in our studios which multiplies opportunities for our team to have positive interactions.

[Hit us up on Twitter](#) to let us know how you plan on improving your team's positivity ratio.

Sources & further reading

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