

# Staff Development Services

building strong businesses one employee at a time.

**Optimism -- The fourth in our series discussing the 13 tendencies in our reports.**

*“The optimist proclaims that we live in the best of all possible worlds; and the pessimist fears this is true.”* James Branch Cabell, *The Silver Stallion*, 1926

Most people have no difficulty understanding what it means when we refer to someone as being optimistic or pessimistic in our hiring reports. But, how does that optimism or pessimism impact the success of their job performance?

If you want to say we have a motto here at Staff Development Services, I guess it would be, “We match the right person to the right job.” Every role has differing requirements that a jobholder must be able to fulfill in order to be successful in that role. And, a person’s outlook on life is something that is actually very important when looking for the right person to hire for a particular position. Not only does a person’s level of optimism affect how successful they are going to be in a job but it is also an indicator of how they are going to fit into their work environment as well.

As in all of an individual’s character tendencies, a person can have too little, or too much, optimism. There are some people who have a balanced outlook on life—that is, they tend to have a realistic view of the world and can see both the negative and positive side of things. But, there are probably more of us who tend to see the positives easier than the negatives or vice-versa. While having a balanced outlook on life is certainly beneficial in all aspects of a person’s life, there are some roles that may actually require someone who tends to be more negative while others need people who are more positive.

Let’s consider the person with very low optimism. Think about your work environment—you can probably identify someone who has a very negative outlook. This person immediately finds something wrong with any changes made in the organization, is quick to point out others’ faults, worries that the ‘other shoe is going to drop’ at any time, etc. The root of this negativism usually extends back to their childhood and, unless they want to be different, it is very difficult for anyone to have much impact on this type of person.

Obviously there are certain jobs that require a good deal of wariness that comes naturally to the negative person, such as a police officer, auditor, or other roles that require a person to find and resolve problems. But, employers usually do not want overly negative people on staff in an office setting since they can create a very unpleasant work environment for everyone. And, if this highly pessimistic person also happens to be a very assertive person, they will undoubtedly complain about everything to everyone—this could be disastrous in some situations!

On the other end of that spectrum is the overly optimistic person who is carefree and oblivious to reality. They want to see a world that does not have any problems and to feel that things are always going to work out well for them—how unrealistic is that?! This type of person has problems but would rather not identify them and, if anyone else tries to point them out, they usually refuse to acknowledge them.

Employees with very high optimism are generally well liked by customers or clients and very pleasant to be around but can cause problems in the workplace due to their inability to identify issues or deal with them. And, consider an overly optimistic person who has a need to be liked by others (high sociability) being put into a manager’s role. This combination of character tendencies would prevent them from dealing with personnel issues and pretty much dooms their chance of success in the role.

A skillful interviewer can often detect ‘red flags’ during the interview stage of the hiring process. For example, the very pessimistic person might be consistently critical of others or previous employers. Or, they may talk about what they do not like and have problems identifying what they do like. However, as many of you who are involved in the hiring process know, people can often hide their less desirable traits long enough to get a job. But, once hired, those traits can quickly surface, often with disastrous results! That is the value of the Simmons Personal Survey—it identifies a person’s true character before they are hired.

On the lighter side:

A young monk joined an order that required total silence. At his discretion, the abbot could allow any monk to speak. It was nearly five years before the abbot approached the novice monk and said, "You may speak two words."

Choosing his words carefully, the monk said, "Hard bed." With genuine concern, the abbot said, "I'm sorry your bed isn't comfortable. We'll see if we can get you another one."

Around his tenth year in the monastery, the abbot came to the young monk and said, "You may say two more words."

"Cold food," the monk said. "We'll see what we can do," the abbot said.

On the monk's fifteenth anniversary, the abbot said again, "You may now speak two words."  
"I quit," the monk said. "It's probably for the best," replied the abbot. "You've done nothing but gripe since you got here."

### Health and Happiness

John

Staff Development Services  
john@staffdevelopment services.com  
910-253-6471