



Accentuate the positive

*You've got to accentuate the positive,
Eliminate the negative,
Latch on to the affirmative,
Don't mess with Mister In-Between.*

Johnny Mercer

The first questions to ask yourself when considering creating your enterprise are: What am I good at? What do I love doing?

If you earn a living doing something you are good at and you love doing, it won't feel like work. How exciting does that sound? Do you look forward to Monday mornings? I am privileged to work with many people who do. People just like you who are embarking on their new business journey. The people who turn out to be successful pay equal attention to what they are not so good at and look at finding solutions to overcome their weaknesses.

Mentoring Moments

I am working with a relatively new drama company operating in both London and the Midlands called Lemon Jelly Arts. The two founders,

Hayley Carver and Kelle Baines, have an excellent pedigree in both dance and drama training and experience. Their workshops and academies are second to none, drawing on their own professionalism and their experience. They are building up a fabulous reputation for themselves. However, this wasn't always the story.

When I first met them they had just changed their name as their previous one was too similar to another company's. They had failed to check this out first; all their early efforts of building up a reputation had to stop as they were threatened with legal action. Hayley and Kelle also had an 'all singing all dancing' business plan that looked very professional, the only problem being that it was tucked away in a drawer and neither of them understood it fully or used it as a working document to help them grow and flourish. They also knew they had money in their business account, so cash flow was good, although they avoided looking at the full financial picture.

Fortunately, they recognized that their strengths were exactly what were needed to build their business and that their weaknesses could be overcome if they asked the right people for help. They arrived at Skills for Enterprise offices with a new business name that they had checked wasn't already being used and had registered with both Companies House and the HMRC – great, first problem solved. The next step was to create a viable business plan that they both agreed to take the business to where they wanted it to be.

Hayley and Kelle are two very creative people, so I took them through a visualization exercise in order for them to see, hear and feel what success meant to them. This was immediately put on to a huge piece of paper in the form of a mind map with pictures and words. We then turned it into an umbrella business plan (see Chapter 5). This seemed to be a real breakthrough, as they could get all the finer details down while remaining

focused on the bigger picture. At the end of this exercise there was a plan in place to help them to drive their business forward. They didn't need to borrow any money, so a formal business plan wasn't even necessary.

The next stage was to look at the finances. Hayley and Kelle were surprised at the healthy financial position Lemon Jelly Arts was in. They were making things hard for themselves by not using easier methods of payment and recording information. I encouraged them to make an appointment with their accountant to sort these issues out. The end result was that Hayley and Kelle can now get on with doing what they do best: teaching children to be fabulous thespians, improving their self-confidence and generally helping the next generation of adults to accentuate the positive!

How about doing this kind of exercise for yourself? A good tip is to be completely honest.

First, make a list of all your personal strengths, for example 'I am a great communicator', 'I am focused'. Ensure that the statements are in the present tense and repeat them to yourself often. I've included five spaces in the list below – make sure you complete at least three.

- Strength 1.....Exploit.....
- Strength 2.....Exploit.....
- Strength 3.....Exploit.....
- Strength 4.....Exploit.....
- Strength 5.....Exploit.....

Take your list of strengths and work out how you are going to exploit them to help your business.

Now it's time to look at your weaknesses. Complete the list below as you did with your strengths, ensuring that you use statements in the present tense and fill in at least three weaknesses.

Weakness 1.....Overcome.....

Weakness 2.....Overcome.....

Weakness 3.....Overcome.....

Weakness 4.....Overcome.....

Weakness 5.....Overcome.....

Take your list of weaknesses and decide how you are going to overcome them.

It is also a wise move to compare the strengths and weaknesses of your competitors. While it is bad practice to point out your competitors' weaknesses to potential customers, knowing them yourself means you can take advantage of them.

Fill in the chart below as fully as you can.

Once you have a full picture of what your competitors are doing it is easier to make your own business decisions.

For example, if you own a small grocer's shop you aren't going to be able to compete using the same strengths as the major supermarkets. Asda, Tesco and Sainsbury's are all able to:

- Compete on price.
- Afford expensive advertising campaigns.
- Have celebrities endorse their brand.

Competitors' strengths and weaknesses

Top three competitors

Name, address etc.

Strengths

Weaknesses

Competitor 1:

Competitor 2:

Competitor 3:

Focus on their weaknesses instead:

- Their stores are large so it takes time to park.
- They are busy so it takes longer to shop.
- They are possibly not close by.

Therefore, the strengths of your small grocer's could be:

- Convenience.
- Personal service.
- Ordering in speciality goods for customers.
- A community feel.

It's now time to exploit your business strengths in your marketing.
Good luck!

Entrepreneur's Experience

I personally have always loathed doing the day-to-day record keeping side of business. I procrastinate, always putting it off. It's not that I can't do it; it is because I would rather be doing far more exciting things, like winning the next client. I chose to ignore this major weakness and as a result I never knew where I was financially from month to month. I kept the information in my head, this was there in the background all of the time and it became very stressful.

When it was time to fill in my tax return I knew I had to apply myself and just do it. I laid out a year's worth of receipts on my conservatory floor in month order, ready to collate. The phone rang – as I got up to answer it the conservatory door opened slightly and the receipts blew everywhere. I had to start over again. It was at that point I vowed to sort the weakness out.

I contacted several accountants and found one who was reasonably priced and would do everything for me. All I had to do was put my receipts and invoices in an envelope at the end of each month, send them to him and by return I received a set of monthly management accounts.

I now feel confident in the knowledge that everything is in order. My financial situation takes minutes to review. I can spend my time winning more business and as a result I'm earning more money.

As a working mum, this experience made me look at other jobs I did that I could 'outsource'. Cleaning my house and ironing my family's clothes were again jobs that I endured. Using the word 'outsourcing' and looking at it in a business way made me drop the guilt I had previously attached to my thinking. I could earn far more per hour than I was paying my domestic help, and I was also helping another local business do what they did best: clean! I was beginning to accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative. How refreshing!

Making It – Meeting Steph Cutler, Open Eyed

I had been asked to give a presentation and workshop as part of Enterprise Week with the subject ‘The Big Idea’. This was to help potential entrepreneurs to think creatively and come up with their own big idea that was to make them lots of dosh. Well, not one who is shy at such a request, I said yes and set about making some notes.

It wasn’t until the programme of events was emailed through to me that I realized it was an event aimed at people with varied disabilities. ‘What’s the problem with that?’ I hear you thinking. No problem – except it completely threw me out of my comfort zone. I have experience in dealing with people with various disabilities on a one-to-one basis. Talking to an audience of 70 with hearing, sight, physical and mental disabilities scared me silly. I was so afraid of offending anyone that I knew I was in danger of offending everyone! My usual patter while ‘warming up’ my audience and putting them at ease includes such statements as ‘Can you hear me at the back?’ ‘Can everyone see the flipchart and screen?’ Clearly, I couldn’t use these phrases and I knew I had to be careful of the language I did use.

Before the presentations began I was called to a meeting with the signers who were there to assist the audience. On the paperwork I had been sent there was a typing error and it read ‘singers’ – I had felt sure that it wasn’t *The X Factor*!

Meeting over, the presentations began. Centre stage was Steph Cutler from Open Eyed, a disability and training awareness company that she had formed after experiencing her own sight loss. How I wished there was time for me to have a conversation with her before I began my workshop with the 70-strong audience for some tips in addressing them. What I heard next was one of the most inspirational stories about

how a business came to be. I could feel the hairs stand up on the back of my neck as her story unfolded. I knew immediately that her message had to get to a wider audience and with her permission Allison and I interviewed Steph about her incredible start in business ownership, her definition of success and her tips for business. Steph has given us permission to use the very speech she made at that event, entitled 'Making Lemonade'. I feel that no one can tell this better than she can herself.

For those of you interested, my workshop went down well. I had a couple of 'Bridget Jones' moments but nothing too bad, and for those people we are continuing to help to set up their businesses I shall look to Open Eyed for advice!

Making Lemonade – Steph Cutler's Story

'Less than three years ago I was a successful fashion designer working hard and playing hard in London. I was designing for the likes of Ted Baker and Marks & Spencer.

'It was while on holiday that I made a discovery. I was in New Zealand and on the way back from a sightseeing trip we stopped off at an amusement park called Puzzling World. One room was made up of optical illusions. I followed the instructions and I stared at a wall with black vertical lines with my left eye closed and then repeated the exercise with my right eye closed. The lines were supposed to change thickness or something. But with my right eye closed I couldn't see the lines at all. That's pretty clever, I thought. A bit blonde!

'However, when I got back into the car I tried again and I still couldn't see well through my left eye. I was not overly worried, I was having fun on holiday and thought I should go to the opticians on my return.

‘Eventually I found the time and went along to an optician in my lunch hour. She covered my left eye and I read the whole lettered chart right down to the bottom line without any problem. She covered my other eye and I couldn’t see the chart at all. She advised me to go to the eye hospital right away, which I did. At the hospital no one could tell me what was wrong with my eye and it was decided I would need to see a consultant.

‘That evening I was casually recounting my day to my parents. For me there were no real alarm bells ringing, but unbeknown to me the alarm bells on my parent’s end of the phone line were deafening.

‘The next day I was getting ready to go to work when I opened my door to my parents. Considering they live in Coventry and I lived in London, I was not expecting to see them. They came in and broke down and told me I was going to go blind! I think I must be the only person ever to take this news with relief. Seeing my parents in such a state I assumed something terrible had happened to my sister, who was at the time on honeymoon in Australia. I found myself comforting them and I was very English and made them a cup of tea.

‘We spent the morning at the hospital, I had lots of tests and while it wasn’t officially diagnosed, my symptoms and family history meant it was clear I had a condition called Lebers Optic Neuropathy. I decided that until it was confirmed I wasn’t going to worry about it and I went back to work.

‘The following week it was confirmed to me that I had three months with full vision and then my second eye would deteriorate and then I would have no central vision. My consultant broke the news in a nonchalant kind of way. I was grateful to him for this, as it played a big part in how I took the news. I did not know what central vision loss would mean to me practically or emotionally, but I made a very conscious decision

there and then in the hospital that this would not mean the end in any way for me and I made a vow to myself that I would keep to this.

‘Despite loving my job, I did not fancy spending the last few months with full sight looking at the four walls of work and so I took myself off to see some of the world while I could. It is an odd feeling to be taking photos that you don’t know you are going to be able to see on your return.

‘The three months were coming up and I would wake up every morning and would tentatively open my eyes to see if I could still see, but my good eye remained good. I started to actually will it to happen. Think about it: how long do you give something like that? I’d left my job and there was never any talk of it not happening. My view was that as soon as it happens, the sooner I can deal with it. No one could explain why it hadn’t happened and suggested that it might not happen at all.

‘I put together a great portfolio and got myself a fab new job, designing for Next. It was a promotion, pay rise, lots of travelling and working on a good range. I moved back to London and started on the Monday and realized that I couldn’t see my computer screen or the artwork. It was fair to say the timing was cruel and I left on the Friday.

‘Central vision loss did of course affect me practically. As I retained my peripheral vision, my mobility isn’t affected. I can make out most things so I don’t bump into objects. I can’t read, see my computer screen, see colour well, see fine detail or make people out easily – and for any of you men out there thinking of telling me you look like Brad Pitt, don’t bother!

‘Emotionally I stayed strong. From day one I eliminated the word ‘can’t’ from my vocabulary and set goals. Over the last couple of years I have

personally experienced the incredible effect this has. If you tell yourself you can't do something then you probably can't. That is because you are feeding your brain a message that it is not possible.

'If you send your brain a message that you can do something then you no doubt can. Convince yourself that it is possible and your whole mindset will be positive and your goal will be achievable. Providing you work hard and effectively towards it, and never lose sight of the fact you can do it, it will be achieved.

'My goal was to get my life back to what it was. I believe anything is possible, but I also believe that sometimes you can't do everything by yourself. The desire has to come from you, but I believe you should never let your pride be an obstacle.

'I am eternally indebted to my family and friends. With the best will in the world, when you are thrown from a familiar sighted world to an unfamiliar visually impaired world there is a lot to learn. Trouble is, all usual avenues of learning are not available. Printed material and the internet are not immediately accessible. Therefore being too proud to ask for help will get you nowhere fast.

'I decided from day one that sitting at home learning to live with my limited vision would not help me learn to live with my limited vision. I forced myself to go out and about. I put myself on the train and came back down to London to visit my friends. It was practically difficult and emotionally hard to see my friends who were living my old lifestyle, doing my old job and earning the money I used to earn. I believe if something scares you, you should give it a go and this was definitely the right approach for me. The more I pushed myself the easier it became.

'I was put in touch with a college in Birmingham that specialized in helping visually impaired people. It was with great trepidation that I turned up on my first day. I had no idea how they could help, I just knew they had to as I had no plan B. I told this to everyone I met and at the end of the assessment it was decided they could help.

'The problem was, the course was six weeks long and there were only four weeks left before the college closed for the summer. The more intuitive among you will have realized that I am not particularly patient. There was no way I could wait until September to start to get back to normal. I think they really were too scared to turn me away, as by the end of the day it was agreed they would keep the college open for a further two weeks in order for me to complete the course.

'I have never worked so hard. I was learning how to use a computer again but with a screen reader. I couldn't use a mouse as I couldn't see where to click and I had to learn how to do everything differently and without seeing the screen.

'By the end of the summer – the time I would have only just been starting had I not scared the college – I had reached my first goal. I was employable again.

'Along the way, as my sight had gone through the deterioration phase, I had to concede that I couldn't return to my career in fashion design. It is a very visual job and a very impatient industry. Tomorrow is always too late and even with sight it was difficult at times. It was a hard blow to take, but there were plenty of other things I knew I could do well. I had a great track record, transferable skills, a good CV and was enthusiastic – but none of this, it seemed, counted for anything if I didn't have full sight.

'Up until this point I had remained positive despite leaving behind my career, friends, lifestyle and living with limited vision. Having worked

so hard and endlessly filled out application forms I couldn't see with no response at all. I started to become despondent. This was my next goal and there was nothing more I could do than I was doing. I am not superhuman and my resolve started to fade.

'There is one major factor which meant I did not fall into a depressive state and that was that I knew I could do it. It was all the employers that assumed I couldn't and I knew they were wrong. About 18 months ago I decided to stick a big two fingers up to all those employers and I employed myself.

'While living with my acquired disability, I experienced the fact that many of the barriers disabled people face are created by non-disabled people's lack of awareness. On one of the occasions when I had forced myself to come down to London, I had asked a London Underground worker for some assistance. He helped me very appropriately and on chatting to him I discovered he was able to support sensitively because he had had visual awareness training. At the time I wondered if there was anything in this, but I was still in my rehabilitation period.

'I set up my own Disability Equality Consultancy and I use my personal experience and knowledge to help organizations make their services accessible to everyone. I have had the benefit of a disabled and non-disabled person's perspective and as a business owner I believe passionately in the business case for inclusion and accessibility.

'I have not looked back since setting up my consultancy. I still have outstanding goals, but I am well on my way. As you can imagine I have learned a lot in the last few years and one saying has stayed with me throughout and that is: "If in life you are dealt lemons, then make lemonade."

Strengths and weaknesses

Steph identifies her own strengths and weaknesses something like this:

Personal strengths

- Ambitious
- Clear
- Structured goal setting

After losing her sight, as it enhanced a few things, she became

- More organized
- Adaptable
- Determined

Personal weaknesses

- Impatient
- Likes other people to be passionate and committed

Business strengths

- Sector specific
- Approachable
- Put customers at ease
- Human face
- Enthusiastic
- Makes it happen

Business weaknesses

- Numbers! Steph overcomes this by outsourcing her accounts
- Steph also has an assistant for 15 hours per week that is paid for by a government scheme called Access to Work. This is crucial to Steph and gives her someone to drive and read for her.

During the course of our interview it became apparent that Steph's lemonade bottle is firmly half full. When she is having a bad day she allows a maximum of 24 hours to wallow, then it's business as usual. She also looks at who is having a better day than her instead of who is worse off. On one of her 'bad' days she saw a girl being proposed to on a bridge and shifted her thoughts to how the girl must be feeling.

Steph's business achievements have made the national finals in three business awards:

- *Enterprising Young Brit 2006*. Steph was short listed for the Social & Environmental category of the *Daily Mail* Enterprising Young Brits competition 2006 with her joint business, Image Intelligence. This image consultancy designed specifically to be accessible to visually impaired people appealed to the judges, who included representatives from HM Treasury, the *Daily Mail*, Lloyds TSB and celebrity judges Kanya King, founder of the MOBO awards and Margherita Taylor, Capital Radio DJ and television presenter. In attendance at the awards luncheon was the Rt Hon Gordon Brown, then Chancellor of the Exchequer.
- *Barclays Trading Places Awards 2006*. Open Eyed beat hundreds of applicants to be one of ten finalists to attend a glittering gala awards dinner at London's Café Royal. The Trading Places award is a unique tribute to people who have turned their lives around by starting a successful business. The awards are sponsored by Barclays, backed by government and endorsed by a host of celebrity entrepreneurs, including the late Dame Anita Roddick, Sir Terence Conran, Simon Woodroffe, Bill Wyman and Lord Sainsbury.
- *Handbag.com and Barclays Business Plan Awards 2005*. After impressing judges with her comprehensive business plan to set up

Steph's top tips

- Don't let your pride prevent you from becoming successful. Accept support and ask for it if it will move your business forward.
- Talk to everyone passionately like they want what you do. Don't make assumptions about who your customers are: you don't know who they know or what their plans are.
- Don't work to your business plan like it is set in stone. Keep an open mind and be prepared to adapt to new opportunities.
- Set realistic, short-term goals and monitor your progress. From time to time look back at how far you have come and acknowledge your achievements.
- Work hard to maintain your business relationships. People's circumstances and requirements change.
- Continue marketing even when your diary is full.
- Give yourself a break. Taking time out for a facial, round of golf or shopping trip is time well spent. You will return to your business with a clear head.
- Ask your customers why they use you. It's the best way to find out how to retain them and how to sell to potential customers.
- Read about and listen to other successful people, be inspired by them and learn from their experiences.
- Understand that you can't be good at everything. Excel at what you are great at and create strategies to deal with your weaknesses, outsourcing them if possible.

Open Eyed, Steph reached the finals in the 2005 handbag.com and Barclays Business Plan Awards. Open Eyed was acknowledged at the final held at an awards ceremony at renowned Conran restaurant Sartoria, attended by the cream of Britain's successful businesswomen including Sahar Hashemi, co-founder of Coffee Republic, and Nicola Gerwitz, founder of Lola Rose.

Steph is very willing to share her secrets of success with you in the form of her 'top tips' and her experiences of networking (go to www.openeyed.co.uk or www.making-lemonade.co.uk).

Networking, networking, networking

'Networking, Networking, Networking! is the business equivalent of the political mantra Education, Education, Education. It is the key to business start-up, business sustainability and business development.

'While sitting in front of a grant-awarding panel recently, one of the panellists commented on the size of the entertainment expenditure on my cash-flow projections. "What can I say?", I said. "I am a very sociable person!" I love to meet people. It is by listening to others that I learn everything from how best to promote a service to how not to behave. These things may make me approachable, likeable and good company, but they do not necessarily make me a good networker.

'Networking events organized to provide networking opportunities may suit some people, but I think there is an art to networking at these events. To be a good networker you need to plan your time and work the room with military precision. You need to approach strangers boldly, strike up a conversation, quickly ascertain whether there is potential for business, and be able to retreat to the next stranger if there is not.

‘So, despite being a confident communicator and being able to talk credibly and with enthusiasm about my business, I struggle at these events. I find myself gravitating towards the buffet and comfort eating to ease the pain. This, I know, is more likely to increase my dress size than my client base!

‘I struggle for another reason: I am visually impaired. What this means practically is that I can’t see the delegates list; I can’t see your name badge; and I can’t see very well what’s on the buffet I can be found propping up. I do not *look* visually impaired. In fact, I can walk up to you, make conversation and you would be none the wiser; which, in itself, is part of what makes attending a struggle. I don’t know who I am talking to. I therefore can’t identify attendees I would particularly like to speak with, and not only that, but I sometimes struggle to identify who I have just spoken to.

‘In for a penny, in for a pound. I rock on up to fellow attendees and introduce myself and ask their name, at which point they will more often than not point to their name badge, but I am none the wiser. I then have to decide whether to continue while being unsure of who they are and what they do, which is tempting but not ideal, or explain that I can’t see the badge. The latter approach can have a number of different responses, which mostly end in the same result. “Have you forgotten your glasses?” tends to mean merely that getting to the awkward silence takes a little longer and can be a bit more awkward, when I have no choice but to explain gently that I am actually registered blind. Telling them of my acquired sight loss does at least have the advantage of introducing my disability awareness consultancy into the conversation.

‘At my first networking event, I came horribly close to passing my empty plate to a fellow delegate, mistaking him for a waiter! Suppressing the urge to burst into laughter at my near “Bridget Jones” moment was made no easier as I then found myself seated next to the waiter look-alike for the rest of the evening!

‘The last networking event I attended was a breakfast meeting with an unsociably early start. On arrival, I pinned on my name badge. The company name read “Open Eyed”, but the wearer was anything but. Had I known the company of some middle-class, middle-aged men in suits beckoned, I would have stayed under my duvet!

‘I replied to one of the aforementioned, telling him that I own a disability awareness consultancy. On hearing this he proceeded to tell me how ridiculous it was that disabled people should want to be able to access services. Even more “ridiculous” was the fact that he had been forced to install a disabled toilet in his building. With increasing incredulity, he went on to say that nobody disabled would ever use it because the entrance to his building was not wide enough to fit a wheelchair through. I agreed that was “ridiculous”, but we were poles apart with our reasons. I considered saying I hoped he wouldn’t have an accident on his way home as, if he found himself required to use a wheelchair, he would not be able to get into his office to use his expensive toilet, but I refrained. The name badge routine hadn’t occurred and so he was unaware of my sight loss and I was therefore blissfully unaware of his name.

‘I then met Mr Small Town CV Consultant. He asked me what I did and he responded with “That’s nice”, then laughing he continued, “but come on, would you really put that you were disabled on your CV?” To this, I smiled and said, “I am and I do”, but this went right over his balding head. Mr Disabled Toilet and Mr Small Town CV Consultant shared the love of the sound of their own voices, while making nonsensical and insensitive points. I asked the latter to consider that the person who, at the time, arguably held one of the most powerful jobs in the country was totally blind. I left him to ponder David Blunkett’s CV dilemma and made a beeline for the buffet!’

Making It Happen for You – Accentuate the Positive

What did Steph do?

- Created a positive here and now.
- Sought out the positive aspects in negative situations.
- Fully expected a positive future.

How can you model Steph and accentuate the positive?

- Always assess your current situation in a positive way.
- Learn how to turn negatives into positives.
- Set positive expectations for your future.

How much do you accentuate the positive?

Think about what you really want to achieve in your business. With that in mind, score yourself from 1 to 10 on the statements below. A score of 0 means you really disagree and a score of 10 means you really agree.

- When I wake up, I think about all the good things that will happen in the day ahead.
- If things go wrong I can usually see the funny side.
- If I'm in a group of people who are moaning I will tend to turn the conversation to something more positive.
- I believe that things usually turn out all right.
- I have a voice in my head that encourages me and tends to be positive.
- I usually see the best in people.
- I expect things to go well.
- People see me as a positive person.

- Faced with a problem I think more about solutions than who is to blame.
- There's no such thing as failure.

CHECK YOUR ATTITUDE

Add up your total score out of 100.

- *If you scored 85–100 points* – You have a very positive disposition. Use the exercises below to be positively sure you're not missing any other opportunities to be even more positive.
- *If you scored 50–84 points* – You can be a little negative at times. Take some positive action to increase your score.
- *If you scored 0–49 points* – You probably have a lot of negativity. Work on building your positivity muscle.

Three Steps to Accentuating the Positive

A positive, optimistic attitude is one of the true attributes of winning entrepreneurs. Steph most certainly has one and it's been shown time and time again that in business, people who see the glass as half full rather than half empty usually do better.

The half-empty, half-full debate always reminds me of a story I once heard Robert Dilts tell about conjoined twins. Despite the fact that they were born at the same time, in the same place and, by virtue of the fact that they were joined at the hip, raised in exactly the same way, they viewed life quite differently. For the first few years of their life things didn't go too well for them, they had many operations and it was often touch and go if they would survive, but they did pull through. In their early childhood things improved for a while as

their health stabilized. At age 8, life deteriorated again. Their parents divorced, partly due to the strain of bringing up the twins. After a rough patch of adjustment to this, life became good again as they settled into a lovely new neighbourhood, with just their mother to bring them up.

One day twin one said to twin two, 'Isn't it great how things always work out fine in the end?'

Twin two looked surprised and replied, 'How can you say that when you know that things always get worse just after they get better?'

The question is, which of the twins is right? They both are, but they've chosen to experience and interpret what's going on in their individual worlds in a different way. One twin processes information positively, the other negatively. Those of us who tend to be more positive and optimistic perceive the world like the first twin, in a positive way. We look for and accentuate the positive. Those of us who are negative tend to do the opposite. Like the second twin, we have a tendency to find the negatives in situations. It's a bit like wearing a pair of tinted sunglasses in the summer. The lenses filter out the light that you don't want in your eyes and the tint makes everything look slightly different to how it really is. The sky might look duller, the grass more yellow. In truth, the grass and the sky are exactly the same colour they've always been – you just see them differently when you put on your glasses.

This different view of the world is not a reflection of reality. It's a reflection of what is being filtered in and out. If you want to accentuate the positive you've got to filter for it and consciously let it in. Follow the three steps below to accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative.

STEP 1: ALWAYS SEE YOUR CURRENT SITUATION IN A POSITIVE WAY

Use the positivity toolkit to filter for the good things in your life.

Positivity toolkit: Get new glasses and filter for the positive

I once saw a hypnosis show, in which the hypnotist told his willing volunteer that she was wearing a pair of magic spectacles. He told her that everybody she looked at through these specs would appear to her to be completely naked. Despite the fact that everybody in the audience was fully clothed, it became obvious very quickly that to this person everybody did look naked. Isn't it amazing how we can create a reality for ourselves? Even though no one else could see naked people, this woman absolutely believed that she could.

You too can use this technique to your advantage. Each day when you get up, imagine that you are putting on a pair of imaginary glasses. Don't get too excited, you won't be filtering for nakedness! Through these glasses you can only see positive things, you can only interpret things in a positive way. The glasses will help you to filter your world so that you actively look to accentuate the positive in events. When you take off your imaginary glasses at night, mentally tick off in your mind five great things that happened to you that day.

Train your brain to accentuate the positive. The more you exercise your positivity muscle, the bigger it will get. The less you dwell on negatives, the more your negativity muscle will shrink. The more you do this, the more you'll enjoy it. The world does look good when you choose to perceive it positively.

In her story Steph constantly accentuates the positive. Although she is losing her sight and working as a top fashion designer is no longer

viable, she is still able to put a positive spin on her situation. It's as if she sees everything through a pair of rose-tinted positivity specs. She says things like 'I absolutely knew I could do it', 'From day one I eliminated the word "can't" from my vocabulary'.

Positivity toolkit: Stop negative thoughts in their tracks

This is a very effective way of distracting yourself from any negative thoughts. If a negative voice should somehow manage to get through your filter and into your head, try this technique to distract the voice and make it more positively focused.

Choose a method to distract yourself: pinch yourself, clap your hands, say 'no' to yourself, wear an elastic band on your wrist and flick it. The choices are endless, but be aware of what you choose if it's something you are likely to have to do in a public place! (Slapping yourself hard across the face might not be exactly the right thing to do as a negative thought enters your mind.) When the negative thought manifests itself, activate your method of distraction, for example pinching yourself or clapping your hands, and at the same time say to yourself: 'I am no longer like that, I accentuate the positive.'

Positivity toolkit: Get positive about your life

Make a point of dwelling on all the great things that have ever happened to you in your life. Create something that celebrates the positive aspects of your life and all your achievements to date. Be creative: it could be a collage of photos, a list, or a laminated card. I once met a woman who had put all her great achievements onto a t-shirt. When she was feeling negative she put it on to change her mood. Whatever

your choice is, consult it often and keep it alive. Let it grow it by adding new positive events to it, events that will accentuate the positive nature of your life right now.

STEP 2: LEARN HOW TO TURN NEGATIVES INTO POSITIVES

Steph is very good at taking what many people would see as negatives and viewing them as positives. A technique to help you do this is reframing, or how to find a silver lining in any hideous situation! Here's how you do it.

Take an unfavourable situation and reframe it by looking for the opportunities in it. Steph encapsulates the idea of reframing beautifully when she says:

'In life if you are dealt lemons, then make lemonade.' In other words, take the negatives but focus on how you can turn them into positives. She's certainly taken a spoonful of her own medicine in seeing her disability in a positive light, as it's given her another perspective on the world that has helped her to create her own thriving business.

Being able to reframe disadvantages or setbacks as possible opportunities is a useful business skill. Without doubt there will be setbacks. Your ability to accentuate the positive and bounce back from these will affect your business survival. When you're able to take a situation, reframe it and look at it another way, it's possible to turn the glass from half empty to half full.

Accentuating the positive in any situation and reframing it helps put things into perspective. If something happens that you can't change, at

least you can extract something positive from it. Reframing events often creates new opportunities as well. For example, how do you think you would feel if you were the Real Madrid goalkeeper and then suddenly one day you were involved in a car crash and left unable to walk, let alone play football? This happened to Julio Iglesias. Instead of focusing on the hideousness of the situation, he looked for the opportunity and focused on singing, a career that has brought him much success. Reframing allows you to approach situations in an empowering way, as Steph does throughout her story.

Exercise: Reframing

Think of three situations in your life that you tend to dwell on negatively, then think of a positive way to reframe them:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

STEP 3: EXPECT A POSITIVE FUTURE

Steph's story is upbeat and full of positive expectations. You may want to read it again and notice the language she uses. There is a high level of expectation that everything will be fine, things will always work out. Here are a few of the positive expectations she has:

- 'I knew I could do it and it was all the employers that assumed I couldn't and I knew they were wrong.'
- 'If you send your brain a message that you can do something then you no doubt can ... it will be achieved.'
- 'I believe anything is possible.'

There's a lot of evidence to support the idea that you get what you focus on, so focusing on what you want to achieve and expecting that it will happen is a great strategy. As Steph says, when you tell your brain what you want, suddenly it's more achievable. The reverse is also true. If you focus on what you don't want you'll get more of that. So if you have negative expectations about your future, try putting a more positive spin on them and start filtering for that positive future that you desire. Steph along with many other successful entrepreneurs is living proof that it works.

Exercise: Positive expectations

Write down five negative expectations that you have, then write down the opposite. For example:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Negative future expectation	Positive future expectation
Nothing good ever happens to me	Good things happen to me
I'm too busy to do that	I will find time to do it
No one will want me, I'm not good enough	I am good enough and I will get work

As you finish this chapter, just think for a moment: what are you choosing to filter for the rest of the day? You tend to get what you focus on and you do have a choice over what you filter for. Remember the twins? It's up to you. Are you accentuating the positive, eliminating the negative, or are you messing with Mister In-Between? At the end of the day, it's all about choice – and the choice is yours!

'Most people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.'

Abraham Lincoln