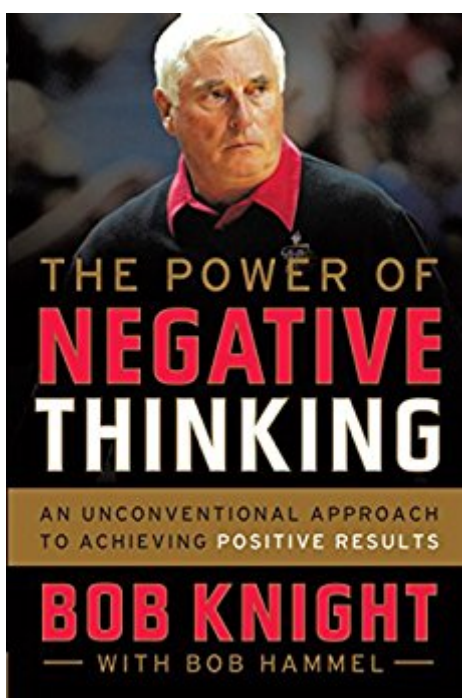


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# The Power Of Negative Thinking: An Unconventional Approach To Achieving Positive Results



## Synopsis

Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking*, a classic bestseller, has inspired an optimistic perspective for millions of Americans. Now, in an inspirational and entertaining rebuttal, the legendary basketball coach Bob Knight explains why "negative thinking" will actually produce more positive results, in sports and in daily life. Coach Knight, the second-winningest coach in NCAA history with 902 victories, explains that victory is often attained by the team that makes the fewest mistakes. His coaching philosophy was to instill discipline by "preparing to win" rather than hoping to win. That meant understanding the downside and drilling his teams to prevent the things that could go wrong. And when his teams did win, he made sure they didn't dwell on their success, but rather looked immediately to the challenges of the next game. He applies this lesson to business strategy as well. Coach Knight has long been inspired by his grandmother's words, "If wishes were horses, beggars would ride." As the first person to teach Knight about the power of negative thinking, this book is dedicated to her pragmatic spirit.

## Book Information

File Size: 2164 KB

Print Length: 240 pages

Page Numbers Source ISBN: 0544320824

Publisher: Publishing (March 5, 2013)

Publication Date: March 5, 2013

Sold by: Amazon Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B009RRHTM4

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #27,380 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #1

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Nonfiction > Sports > Coaching > Basketball #4

in Kindle Books > Sports & Outdoors > Basketball > Coaching #12 in Kindle Store > Kindle

## Customer Reviews

The main argument of this book seems to be that you can win more games by reducing mistakes (excellent defense) than by improving offense. I recall reading about this same idea in Mauboussin's excellent book *The Success Equation: Untangling Skill and Luck in Business, Sports, and Investing*, as follows: In amateur (low skilled) matches, games are won by making points (offense). In professional (highly skilled) matches, games are won by not losing points (defense). So I think the main theme of the book is a good one, and is backed up by the author's track record. The writing in this book is reasonable, with no big grammar or typo issues. Quite a few of the game stories were interesting and well described too. It's an easy, fast read. However, I felt the book was quite disjointed, with no overall story line that I could find. The book wandered away from the main idea (defense, not offense, wins professional games) in many places. Many of the wanders seemed to be efforts to emphasize the subplot idea of "negative thinking", or random pages of facts or stories that didn't seem to contribute to any point or story line, or (as other reviews have said) pokes at old sayings or "nuggets" that had nothing whatsoever to do with the theme of the book. The subplot of "the power of negative thinking" didn't seem to be well executed either. Thinking and focussing on what could go wrong, what areas need work, what offensive forces you have to neutralize, etc, all seem to be part of normal defensive preparation. So I can't really see them as good examples of negative thinking, or even as unconventional thinking (some teams focus on offense, some on defense, some on both, ... how can any of this be considered negative or unconventional?). The book also dragged in various examples of "negative thinking" from history, apparently to support the subplot of the power of negative thinking. But it seemed to me that the author was really reaching for meaning that wasn't there on most of them. Maybe the title *The Power of Negative Thinking* was just a play on words, and I'm making too much of it. I think a better title would be "How Defensive Thinking Won More Pro Basketball Games", or something similar. Sorry to say, but I wouldn't recommend this book to anyone except basketball enthusiasts who like to read about famous coaches, players, and games.

I always had a low opinion of Bob Knight's coaching antics, chair throwing, etcetera, but find myself a fan of his for his intelligent game commentary since he's retired from coaching. Then this book-- my philosophy has always been black irish, plan for the worst that can happen and I'm ready for anything. My husband, on the other hand, is the eternal optimist who never utters a discouraging

word. I've read that pessimists such as myself are more accurate in assessing the situation, but it's the optimists who end up more productive, so I hope the yin/yang approach here is in balance. Bob Knight's book bridges our differences, as we both really appreciate his thinking on the subject.

I have never been a basketball fan, so I went into reading *The Power of Negative Thinking* wondering if I would "get it." I knew who Bob Knight was (even as a non-basketball fan, how could you not?), but had no idea what to expect. I'm happy to report one need not be a basketball fan to thoroughly enjoy this lively, accessible, conversational-style look at the power of overcoming positivity with negative thinking. There has been a backlash over the cult of positive thinking over the last few years, and with good reasons. Barbara Ehrenreich's *Bright-Sided: How Positive Thinking Is Undermining America* is one of the first books I read on the subject. And over the years, a great deal of research has come out warning about the dangers of unfettered optimism. But usually, optimists dismiss discussion of negative thinking as being depressing, pessimistic, or just giving up. Knight starts his book with a very simple premise that overcomes this objection. Negative thinking is not about giving up or being a pessimist. Instead, it is about NEGATING everything that can get in the way of victory. Winning isn't about who wants it more. Winning is about who is most prepared. And being prepared is about honestly assessing strength, weaknesses, and developing a plan that negates mistakes and anything else that can get in the way. Or, as he sums it up: "Having the will to win is not enough. Everyone has that. What matters is having the will to prepare to win." Another point Knight makes is to not push people to do what they can't do, but push them to do what they can. It seems so logical, and yet we ignore this every day: "My list of hollow platitudes includes the idea that You Can Do Anything You Really Want to Do. The truth is you can't. Chalk it up to the Divine Being's grand plan for making the whole world work because of interdependence, but the fact is each of us has more things that we cannot do well than we can. That's why society has doctors and plumbers and electricians and mechanics and every other Craigslist specialist." The point is that whether you are pushing yourself, or running a team, you need to have a clear understanding not only of your strengths, but also an honest assessment of your weaknesses. The inability to do something is not a character flaw (as is not-so-subtly implied when you are told "If you really want to do it, you can"). The Negative Thinker recognizes the strengths and weaknesses in his team and, instead of pushing people to do what they can't do, pushes them to do what they can to best take advantage of their talents. There is a lot of great information in this book of particular value to anyone in a leadership position, whether that is a sports coach or a business owner. In particular, when he discusses setting maximum, but realistic, expectations for those who answer to

you. People will, in general, work to whatever level you will tolerate. Don't tolerate less than maximum results. But at the same time, make sure those expectations are based on the real abilities of the person and not an arbitrary, unreachable goal. He offers great examples from his own coaching experiences on how to work toward this. I have two minor gripes with the book. First, at times Knight gets a little too conversational. He'll be on a discussion point, and then switch over to an odd little anecdote that bears little resemblance to the point he was making. Second, there are a lot of unnecessary filler quotes thrown at the end of each chapter which are just random adages and clichés. In fact, half of Chapter 11 is nothing but clichés and adages. It felt like they were trying to fluff up the word count. (My copy appears to be double spaced, but this may be because it is an advanced review copy and the final version may have more normal spacing between the sentences). Overall, *The Power of Negative Thinking* is a fantastic look into the thought processes and work ethic of a man who knows that it takes more than Happy Fluffy Thoughts to win.

Positive thinking is really important in sports. Athletes do best when they are confident in their skills. That being said, confrontation is important. Working to improve weaknesses is important. Realizing how to maximize strengths and minimize/strengthen weak areas is a key to success. When Professional athletes that have been deluged with positive thinking reinforcement then become coaches, the fear of disrupting confidence and chemistry in the room is so imbedded that it can restrict the need to address and minimize athletes limitations. Bobby Knight's book addresses this.

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