CHAPTER ONE

Establishing Your Positive Mental Attitude
Since the days of Aristotle, humans have striven for healthy minds, ones that focus on positive qualities, like strength, hope, optimism, courage, and the capacity for meaningful insight. But many of us still struggle to maintain positivity on a daily basis. There are two main reasons for this: first, a misunderstanding of what positive thinking entails, and second, a lack of a systematic approach. Ideas are easier to sell when they’re simple, so as the positive thinking movement has become more mainstream, many have glossed over the deep, and at times difficult, inner work required to create and maintain a positive mindset. This includes acknowledging the important place that negative thoughts and experiences hold in creating a positive life. Positive thinking is a skill that can be mastered, like gardening or learning a new language. But it takes commitment and a plan. You need to show up every day and attend to the workings of your inner world, where you learn the basics and then graduate into increasingly complex skills and applications.

This chapter will prepare you for a much more substantive and sustainable journey to positivity than you’ve experienced before. You’ll gain a new understanding of what positive thinking entails and learn about the latest research showing how positivity enables transformation in your well-being, career, and relationships. You’ll also create personalized goals for how you will apply the positive thinking skills in this book to improve your own life, so that you have concrete ways to measure the success of the work you’re putting in.
HOW DID YOU GET HERE?

How many times have you tried to become “a more positive person” but found yourself back in the same rut, repeating the same negativity you promised to give up? Well, you’re not alone! Most people struggle to make lasting positive changes in their lives. Only 8 percent of people, for example, actually stick to their New Year’s resolution. That’s because making change involves ambiguity, and the brain tries to avoid ambiguity at all costs because it means it has to work harder to account for different possible outcomes. Instead, the brain loves experiences it’s familiar with, including the negative thoughts you’re used to thinking, and it shuns anything “new,” like positive perspectives you’re trying to adopt, because it takes more cognitive effort to incorporate them. But the brain doesn’t do this because it simply doesn’t like change. It does this because it’s trying to maximize its own efficiency, and it can be pretty inefficient to acquire new information. But with a little coaxing, and a little encouragement, your brain can adapt and help you make lasting changes in behavior.

For example, you might want to develop a positive body image, but unless you’re already accustomed to practicing acceptance with your body’s imperfections, your brain will not easily support this goal without some additional training. Its aversion to ambiguity means it will reject the vulnerable, unpracticed experience of positive self-talk in the mirror and try to get you to stop doing it by sending out all kinds of ready and well-worn negative thoughts and emotions, like “this won’t work,” or “start tomorrow, not today.” But there are many things that you can do to overcome your brain’s bias against ambiguity in order to sustain positive changes. The first step is to get clear on why you’re doing this work.
Why did you pick up this book? In general, I’ve seen four primary reasons, or some combination therein, people strive to think more positively. People want to (1) get motivated, (2) climb out from under bad feelings, (3) let go of stress, or (4) live a better life.

**Seeking Motivation**
There’s nothing worse than having big dreams but no energy or desire to pursue them on a day-to-day basis. Negative thinking is often responsible for this lack of drive: If you’re always thinking about how difficult your day will be, or worrying about how you’ll mess things up, then, let’s face it, staying in bed and watching Netflix is going to feel better than going after your dreams. In other words, accomplishing your goals can be difficult when you’re mired in negative thinking and don’t have the motivation to get started or pick up where you left off. But positive thinking breaks the cycle of negativity and can be the boost you need to get moving. It also reminds you that you’re courageous and competent enough to make small steps toward your goals every day. When your mind is expecting good things to come of your efforts, like a promotion, a delicious meal, or a fun date, it gets your blood pumping and your enthusiasm flowing and you feel naturally motivated to take action.

**Feeling Depressed**
If you’re feeling depressed, life can be inordinately dark and difficult, and it can be hard to do much of anything, let alone feel positively about yourself or your circumstances. Research from the *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology* shows that negative interpretations of experiences leads to negative views of yourself and the world, and that people who have more negative automatic thoughts are vulnerable to depression. This is why
positive thinking is such a powerful intervention for improving your mood and overcoming depression.

In fact, according to research cited in Clinical Practice & Epidemiology in Mental Health, positive thinking improves depression by increasing positive emotions and helping people compassionately cope with their negative emotions.

**Letting Go of Stress**

Another reason you might be drawn to positive thinking is because of its stress-busting effects. In the modern world, it’s impossible to avoid computer crashes, flat tires, canceled flights, difficult relationships, or life transitions. These experiences can trigger stressful psychological and physiological symptoms, such as emotional overwhelm and disconnection, or somatic issues, like sweaty palms, chest pain, and digestive issues, all of which add to the challenging circumstances.

Research shows, however, that it’s not these symptoms themselves but how we react to them that determines our level of stress. In their book *Stress, Appraisal, and Coping*, psychologists Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman compile two decades of research, demonstrating that how we perceive a stressful life event—as threatening, neutral-positive, or not relevant—is different from person to person and contributes to the huge individual differences we have in coping with these experiences.

When your flight gets canceled, positive thinking skills help you reframe your experience, keeping in mind what you’re grateful for, how you’ll cope, and how you’ve overcome similar circumstances in the past. Whether it’s your career, your commute, or your overactive kid that is causing you angst, cultivating positive emotions like joy and playfulness significantly reduces your stress.
Looking for Something Better

Last, maybe you’re looking to build a meaningful career, loving relationships, authentic friendships, a healthy lifestyle, or financial security. Whatever it is, chances are good you’re probably craving something more out of your life. A 2018 study by Cigna showed that 43 percent of Americans feel that their relationships are not meaningful and that they are isolated from others. Another study, by Ipsos, in the same year indicated that a whopping 80 percent are dissatisfied with their bodies. Furthermore, research association The Conference Board reports that only 51 percent of Americans are satisfied with their jobs.

Fortunately, vast numbers of studies show that positive thinking is correlated with greater success in many areas of our lives, including our relationships, careers, and self-image. However, it is that you want to level up, positive and self-affirming thoughts bolster your feelings of self-worth, make you more likely to expect positive outcomes, and, consequently, more likely to pursue your goals. When the going gets rough, positive thinking makes you more resilient by helping you focus on finding solutions.

**DO THIS NOW: WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?**

You may not know where this book is taking you (yet), or you may feel uncomfortable with some of the challenging exercises I provide in the coming chapters. Because of the brain’s tendency to avoid ambiguity, you’ll be tempted to toss this book aside and thwart your progress on the path to positivity. But if you’re clear on why positivity matters to you, you’ll be much more likely to stay the course and get the results you desire.

Take a moment to clarify your “why.” It’s important that you write down your answers, not just move through them as a mental exercise. This will slow down your thoughts, as well as
make you remember your reflection much better. I recommend that you use a special notebook or journal, dedicated exclusively to your path to positivity. This is the first of many exercises in which you’ll be invited to be more introspective, and it’s helpful to keep all your thoughts and insights in one place so you can refer back to them when you need them and document your progress over time.

Start by answering the following questions:

- What made you pick up this book? What were you thinking when you decided to purchase it?
- How do you think your life might change for the better when you regularly practice positive thinking?
- How might you benefit from using positive skills to get motivated, work through depression, and beat stress?
- Who do you know who is already a positive thinker, and what do you admire about them or value about being in their company?
- What skills, specifically, are you seeking to cultivate?
- How do you want to be, feel, or change by the end of this book?

Once you’ve answered all the questions, summarize your insights into one strong “why” statement.

“Why” statement: “I am committed to the path to positivity because . . .”

Remember, this “why” statement is critical to maintaining your progress. Whenever the path to positivity becomes challenging and you need to regain some perspective into your positive thinking practice, the first step is always to return here and revisit your “why.”
WHAT’S POSITIVE THINKING, ANYWAY?

Some people equate positive thinking with incessant optimism. Others believe it’s a type of avoidance, whereby unpleasant thoughts and situations are denied and suppressed until they go away. These definitions are not only inaccurate, but they also give positive thinking a bad reputation because they dismiss the negativity embedded in every human experience. We find a much better definition from researcher Barbara Fredrickson, who describes positivity as deep experiences of love, joy, amusement, gratitude, and hope that are accompanied by optimistic attitudes, meaning, and the “open mind, tender heart, relaxed limbs, and soft faces they usher in.” Fredrickson’s studies show that positive experiences help you build resources, such as resilience and meaningful relationships, that last much longer than a smile.

For practical purposes, this book will define positive thinking as a way of perceiving yourself and your situation that makes you feel confident and cared for. Let’s dig deeper into the core components of positive thinking and how they contribute to your well-being.

Changing Your Frame of Mind

Is being rejected from a job a sign that you’re incompetent or just a natural part of life? Is going to the gym an annoying chore or an act of self-care? It all depends on your frame of mind. Moreover, because the way you choose to think about these experiences impacts how you feel and how you behave going forward, positive thinking invites you to choose a perspective that will empower you to continue pursuing your goals. When you get rejected from a job, thinking you’re a loser or that life’s not fair makes you feel angry and lowers your confidence, which
decreases your motivation in the job search. Positive thinking changes that frame of mind so that you learn from the experience and continue your search with optimism.

**Positive Thinking Rule #1:**
Adopt a helpful and hopeful perspective.

**Challenging and Restructuring Your Thoughts**
As previously discussed, negative thoughts are an easy way for the brain to manage ambiguity because negativity, especially if you’re prone to negative thinking, uses less mental energy. But recognizing, challenging, and restructuring the negative thoughts, although more mentally tiring and vigorous, is the way to make important changes in your thinking.

When you recognize a negative thought, ask yourself if this thought is really true. For example, if you’re feeling socially anxious on your way to a friend’s party, it might be that you’re conjuring up negative thoughts about the anticipated experience, and you tell yourself, “I’m terrible at making conversation with strangers.” Positive thinking instructs you to challenge that negative thought by asking yourself, “Is this really true? Are there times when I’m good at making conversation? What’s one thing people enjoy talking about with me?” This is known as an “exception question”—what are the exceptions to your negative thoughts, the times when the negative thought wasn’t true?

When you challenge your negative thoughts, you develop a more realistic perspective about your situation. And simply saying the thought to yourself or, better, writing it down on paper will really help it sink in. Then you can restructure your thoughts to help yourself feel more confident, like: “I usually find one person that I connect with about music, so I’m hopeful that will happen today, too.”
Don’t Talk About Yourself Like That!
My client Kristie’s daughter got sick and was hospitalized for two weeks. Kristie was blaming and shaming herself, thinking: “What did I do wrong? Why did I become a mother? I’m clearly not up to this task. I’m screwing up this child.”

This is a great example of negative self-talk. I asked Kristie how she would talk to her best friend if she was in this situation, and she said, “I’d tell her that I’m sorry she’s going through this scary situation, that every mother makes a million mistakes, and that I know she’ll get through it.” Then I invited Kristie to talk to herself in this same compassionate tone—that’s positive self-talk. Often, you are your own harshest critic. Positive thinking uses self-talk to focus on your strengths and compassionately address your weaknesses.

It’s Okay to Be Unhappy
Simply put, it’s not only unrealistic to avoid unhappiness, it’s completely unhelpful. And oftentimes, the more you try to avoid something, the harder it becomes to ignore. Therefore, if you’re constantly arguing with your spouse, or if you’re feeling unappreciated by your critical boss, you need to give these negative emotional experiences extra care and attention. Don’t gloss over them or pretend everything is fine. Often, negative feelings emerge when one of your core needs are unmet, such as safety, love, or rest. Positive thinking stops you from judging yourself
or the other person and steers your mind to problem-solving, asking, “What do I need to navigate this situation more skillfully?” or “How can I support myself through this challenging experience?”

Positive Thinking Rule #4: Approach your negative emotions with curiosity, bravery, and kindness.

DO THIS NOW: ASSESS YOUR POSITIVITY

Positivity involves making a commitment to see the good in yourself and others, take responsibility for your well-being, and sit face-to-face with negativity, uncertainty, and discomfort. You’re going to learn how to use positive thinking to fulfill all these commitments throughout this book, but it’s great to take stock of where you are right now on the path to positivity.

Please score each item from 1 to 10, based on how true each statement is for you, with 1 being the lowest score and 10 being the highest. Then calculate your positivity score by adding your responses together.

1. I like myself, appreciate my strengths, and accept my imperfections.
2. My daily life and goals are very fulfilling because they are aligned with my core values.
3. I take responsibility for my relationship to my experiences by working with my thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.
4. I turn positive experiences into long-term resources. When good things happen, I proactively take time to appreciate, nourish, enrich, and share these experiences.
5. I surround myself with people who believe in kindness, gratitude, and positivity, and I cultivate deep, meaningful relationships with these people.

6. When I experience negative emotions, I pause before reacting and meet my thoughts and feelings with curiosity, compassion, and self-care.

7. I never avoid discomfort or uncertainty; I know I am resilient enough to overcome whatever circumstances I encounter.

8. When I feel lost or confused, I tap into the intuitive intelligence of my personal wisdom and honor its guidance.

9. When I fail, I always look for the growth and learning in my experience, and then continue to move forward toward my goals.

10. On a day-to-day basis, I expect good things, and I feel optimistic about my life.

**My positivity score:** ______ /100%

I know that this score looks like a grade you’d get after a test in high school, but positivity is not a pass-fail experience. Treat this assessment as a simple signpost, showing you where your positivity strengths are and where you’ll benefit the most from learning new skills—and your first opportunity to put positive thinking into practice.

In the areas in which you didn’t get a desirable score, can you talk to yourself like you would to your best friend, with an encouraging tone? Can you practice hopefulness about your ability to improve in these areas? Can you approach any negative emotions you’re feeling with curiosity and kindness, asking how you can support yourself to bear this disappointment and improve in the future? As you progress through this book, you’ll receive a lot more insight and tools about how to cultivate these positive perspectives, but for now just do the best you can.
WHAT POSITIVE THINKING IS NOT

Some people are skeptical about positive thinking because they see it as a Pollyannaish whitewashing of "real" life rather than an evidence-based tool to make the most of all the circumstances life serves up. Let’s dispel the major positive thinking misconceptions.

**Positive thinking is not “fake it till you make it.”** If you’re having a hard day, there’s no need to fake a smile. You just try not to get sucked into self-pity because that won’t help you feel better. Positive thinking keeps you focused on self-care and solutions.

**Positive thinking is not ignoring reality.** If your goal is to make $150,000 in 2020, and you’ve only made $25,000 by November, you don’t have to force yourself to believe you’ll hit $100,000. Positive thinking reminds you that you had a lot of wins along the way and helps you learn from your shortcomings so you can constructively move forward.

**Positive thinking is not a one-time exercise.** You can’t think, “I choose to love myself, inside out” one time and expect to never have another self-critical thought. Positive thinking is a practice.

**Positive thinking is not a substitute for positive action.** If your goal is to lose 20 pounds, positive thinking will help you feel motivated. But you still have to go to the gym.
WHY BOTHER?

For many of us, thinking negative thoughts is like breathing air—it’s easy, automatic, and makes us feel in control. Your brain hates ambiguity, you’ll recall, so it uses negative thoughts like worrying, judging yourself, and complaining about your life to create a temporary experience of comfort, making you feel prepared for the inevitable disappointments that await. And as much as your brain dislikes ambiguity, it loves familiarity. Maybe you’re hooked on complaining to whoever will listen about your day’s grievances: the dead-end job going nowhere, the coworker who won’t mind their own business, or the underfunded public transit. This negative thinking feels comforting because it’s so familiar.

Moreover, when you’ve been struggling for a long time to feel good about yourself or make progress toward your goals, positive thinking can feel like a ridiculous leap of faith. Going from “I’m not going to get any better at this” to “I’ll give it another try” requires tremendous courage because you may, in fact, fail again.

So, if negativity is easier and often more comforting than positivity, why go through all this effort to train your brain to think differently? Well, imagine if you heard about a new medicine that not only keeps your immune system strong but also makes you experience more joy, gives you more energy, and helps you enjoy the people and circumstances around you more. You’d be heading straight to your local pharmacy, right?

Positive thinking has been scientifically proven to have all of these benefits, and it’s the best supplement I know for living a fulfilling, successful life of physical and mental wellness. And this isn’t a pill, so no prescription is required.
**Better Overall Mental Health**

As we discussed earlier, positive thinking can help you de-stress, overcome depression, and increase your motivation. Furthermore, research demonstrates that people who have a positive mind-set, those who have confidence in themselves and perceive the world positively, are more resilient in challenging times and are more motivated to bounce back from failure. A 2011 study in the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* showed that college students who had more positive “cognitions” (thoughts) reported significantly higher levels of life satisfaction, lower levels of depression, and higher levels of resilience.

Positive thinking interventions in mental health consistently show positive results, too. One 2015 study, for example, published in *Clinical Psychological Science*, showed that when people who struggle with anxiety were taught to think about worry in more positive ways, their intrusive thoughts lessened and their anxiety improved.

**Better Physical Health Outcomes**

Positivity isn’t just medicine for your mind; it offers significant benefits for your physical health, too. A 2016 article in the *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine* shows that positive thinking strengthens your immune system, decreases your blood pressure, and increases your tolerance for pain. Individuals with a positive attitude are less likely than their negative counterparts to experience a heart attack or catch a cold. And positive thinkers, as a whole, gain an average of eight years in their life spans—more time to enjoy their lives and follow their dreams.

Even when you do get sick, positive thinking helps you heal. For example, a 2014 study from the University of California, San Francisco demonstrated that HIV patients who practice positive thinking not only carry a lower level of the virus but are also
more likely to take their medication correctly and less likely to need antidepressants to cope.

**Strive More, Achieve More**

When scientists studied academic achievement in college, what do you think was the most important factor for getting good grades? Intelligence, personality, previous academic achievement? Nope. Their findings, published in 2010 in the *Journal of Research in Personality*, indicate that the strongest indicator of academic achievement is hopeful, positive thinking. The students who expected positive outcomes as a result of their planning and efforts did, in fact, get the best outcomes.

Positivity empowers you to achieve more after graduation, too. From work performance to sales figures to income levels, numerous studies show that positive people strive and achieve more than their negative counterparts. Nice guys may finish last, but positive ones are thriving in our society.

**Improve and Sustain Relationships**

Positive thinking is also an elixir for relationships. Optimists, for example, feel more satisfied in their relationships. A 2006 study of dating couples published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* found that positive thinkers are more likely to interpret their partner’s behaviors and intentions in positive ways, and they’re more cognizant of how their relationship (even with its ups and downs) facilitates their personal goals and growth. The partners of optimists also report greater relationship satisfaction, indicating that the benefits of optimism are not just “in the head” of the optimists.

The same study also showed that positivity makes us better at managing conflict in our relationships, romantic and otherwise. Positive thinkers and their partners, for example, see each other as engaging more constructively during conflict, which in turn leads both people to feel that the conflict is better resolved.
Unsurprisingly, in a one-year follow-up, optimists were more likely to still be in their relationship.

**DO THIS NOW: SET YOUR GOALS**

As you can see, positive thinking helps you create positive change in your mental health, your physical wellness, your relationships, and your professional success. It’s a practical tool that enables well-being and flourishing in so many areas of your life. However, as you make your way through this book (for the first time, anyway), I’d like you to choose one specific area of your life that you will try to transform through positive thinking.

I started learning Hindi a year before I got married because I wanted to be able to communicate with the 600 guests in my Indian wedding. With limited time on our hands, my teacher and I developed a brilliant plan: We focused exclusively on practicing the kinds of conversations I would have with my in-laws and wedding guests (rather than how to order dinner in a restaurant or ask a stranger for directions). This approach was a smashing success because I was clear on why I was learning Hindi and how to focus my efforts. I was able to hold a coherent conversation with every attendee! This increased my confidence in my language skills, which encouraged me to continue learning Hindi for other contexts as well.

Similarly, when you choose one specific area of your life upon which to apply your positive thinking skills, it empowers you to stay focused and clearly measure the impact of what you’re learning in this book. Positivity will inevitably spill out into other areas of your life, but to best support your progress, start with one clear, focused goal for your positive thinking practice.

Start brainstorming what goal you would like to set by journaling the answers to the following questions:
1. Suppose tonight, while you sleep, a miracle occurs, and you wake up tomorrow to a life that you absolutely love. What’s changed? Include specific details about what your relationships look like and feel like, as well as your health, your career, your lifestyle, your self-image, etc.

2. Out of all the changes you described in question one, which one is most important to you right now? Which transformation would create the most positive change in your overall well-being? For the sake of this exercise, we’ll call this your “milestone.”

3. Turn your milestone into a realistic and motivating action item that you can feasibly accomplish in the next three to six months. This may involve breaking down a bigger life goal into smaller milestones. For example, rather than “make new friends,” you might write “meet three new people with shared interests.”

When thinking about creating goals for yourself, it can be useful to develop SMART goals. The SMART acronym breaks a goal down into five distinct categories that help define the goal and create a template for how to achieve it:

- **Specific**—Make sure the goal is specific and not overly broad (e.g., “I want to cook dinner at home more in order to save money.”).

- **Measurable**—You should be able to measure your progress (e.g., “I want to cook four dinners a week at home.”).

- **Achievable**—The goal should be within your reach. Don’t make it overly ambitious and thereby hard to accomplish (e.g., “I am home four or five evenings per week. Therefore, cooking at home four nights a week is possible.”).

- **Relevant**—The goal should be applicable to your life and make sense in your current situation (e.g., “I would like to cook dinner at home four nights a week because I want to
save money and lose weight. When I eat at home, it is often cheaper and healthier than eating out.

**Time-bound**—The goal should not be indefinite. Instead, it should be for a limited time so that it can be actually completed (e.g., “I want to cook dinner at home four nights a week for the next month.”).

Try formulating a goal of your choosing and then complete the following sentence in your journal, filling in the blanks. Notice that we are making this goal as tangible and measurable as possible so that it’s easy to evaluate your progress and stay focused on the path to positivity.

My goal is to use positive thinking skills to ________ (milestone)__________ by ________(date)_________. I will measure my progress every week by ___ (quantifiable indicator of progress)______.

Here are a couple examples:

My goal is to use positive thinking skills to increase my self-esteem by April 1, 2020. I will measure my progress every week using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

My goal is to use positive thinking skills to be more honest with my husband by November 15, 2020. I will measure my progress every week by the number of times I lie to him or withhold my true feelings.

**MAKING CHANGE**

To create sustainable transformation, you need two things: the will and the way.

You already started cultivating “the will” by defining why you’re here and what your goals are. As we commence on this
journey, you’ll be asked to practice positive thinking skills, like forgiving someone who wronged you or facing your most paralyzing fears. You will not always feel like doing these exercises because, despite how they help you grow in the long term, they create discomfort in the short term. However, if you keep returning to your goals and the reason you picked up this book, you’ll increase your will to weather these challenges.

The other aspect of sustainable progress is “the way”: knowing exactly what steps to take and how to take them in order to reach your goals. I’ll be divulging these details in the coming chapters, but before we dive in, I want to give you three attitudinal foundations to maximize your results.

**Keep It Current**
The most common method of sabotaging success in the future is getting stuck in the past. My client Dan had started—and quit—at least 15 different diets before we met. Dan asked me to be his “accountability coach,” checking in with him three times a day about his meals so that he’d feel pressure to stay on track. I wouldn’t oblige, though, because I knew that the moment we stopped working together, he’d go back to his old ways. In the long term, the only accountability coach you’ll ever listen to is the one in your head. Dan needed to forgive himself for his past and learn what kind of negative thoughts and emotions were influencing him to eat in ways that were out of sync with his goals. He also needed to understand how to be compassionate with himself so when he did slip up, he wouldn’t beat himself up and abandon his mission, but rather learn from his mistakes and refocus on his goal. These positive thinking skills empowered Dan to finally stay in control of his mind and maintain his new dietary protocols.

Similarly, no matter what your change-making track record looks like, approach the goals you set in this book as a clean
slate. According to a 2019 article by Harvard Health Publishing, the least effective strategies for long-lasting behavior change are those hinged on fear or regret, whereas the most successful changes are self-motivated and rooted in positive thinking. Your success, therefore, hinges on keeping your mind on your future goals and trusting the evidence-based tools I provide in this book to recalibrate your mind for success.

**Take on the Challenge**

So, you’ve chosen to let go of the past, but what if you slip up in the present? Let’s say you set the goal of applying positive thinking to improving your relationship with your mother. Then she calls you up, nags for 20 minutes, and *bam!* you’re consumed by negative thoughts about her and you hang up the phone.

How should you handle this perceived failure? First, acknowledge it with honesty and accept responsibility for your experience. Second, remember that nobody has ever created anything meaningful without substantial discomfort, failure, and revision. In fact, every single model of behavior change includes failure as part of the process, so messing up and realizing that you’re doing it is a sign that you’re in the process of making changes. Finally, choose to see this challenge as an opportunity to do better the next time. Ask yourself, “What feedback can I take from this failure? What needs more attention the next time I try this?”

**Don’t Lose Focus (But It’s Okay If You Do)**

Creating positivity is like baking bread. You mix together all the ingredients, place them in an oven, and let the dough rise. The tools I’m giving you in this book are your ingredients, but they will only consolidate into powerful habits if you bake them in the heat of your intense focus and commitment. This path is all
about practice. I will give you the skills and the directions, but you have to apply them every day in order to create meaningful results. So, decide right now that this is your priority for the next three months and commit to practicing the skills you’re learning here at least once a day. Journal about your insights and progress daily and download an app to remind you to practice what you’re learning. Remember that you will fail at some point and that there will be days you’ll feel distracted or disheartened. That is always a part of growth, so as soon as you recognize it, simply return to your commitment and reset your sights forward toward your goals.

YOUR PATH TO POSITIVITY

We’re about to embark on the most empowering, inspiring, and transformative journey of your life. Like any journey, it’s always nice to know your itinerary ahead of time, so here’s a preview of the miraculous vistas and delectable dishes you’ll experience on this adventure.

Your Brain on Positivity

In chapter 2, you’ll learn about the connection between your thoughts, your feelings, and your actions, and you’ll understand how to take responsibility for your experiences by consciously crafting these three elements. You’ll get insight on cutting-edge research on neuroplasticity (aka the science of changing your brain) and understand why habits are the key to successful transformation. Then you’ll acquire techniques to overcome your negative thoughts, practicing various tools for letting go of the past and dealing with disappointment, guilt, and shame. This is challenging work, but the rewards are so sweet. You’ll feel lighter and more capable of handling adversity, and most important, you’ll have newfound space in your mind for emerging positive thoughts to settle in.
Finally, you’ll learn how to cultivate and savor these positive thoughts and emotions. The daily experiences of joy, hopefulness, curiosity, and appreciation will not only help you feel better, but they will also nurture the health, wisdom, and community that will help you fulfill your long-term goals.

**Living Your Values**

In chapter 3, we move beyond your momentary thoughts and emotions to look at your life as a whole. In any circumstance, you can proactively cultivate positivity by working with your thoughts, your feelings, and your actions, but you can also go the other way around by designing a life that is so fulfilling and so enjoyable that it serves as a wellspring for frequent positive experiences.

You’ll get clear on your personal values and use these insights to design what I call “goals with soul,” or changes in your relationships, career, and lifestyle that will make you feel a sense of purpose and connection each day. Then, anchored in the security and importance of your values, you’ll learn how to push past discomfort, overcome the comparison trap, and forgive yourself for your mistakes.

**Taking Action**

Of course, even when you are living in alignment with your values, you’ll still face challenges on the way to your goals. You’ll slip up, forget your daily practice, or get a promotion you don’t feel qualified to take. You’ll put a bid on your dream house, only to have it get rejected, or you’ll date one person for months without knowing if they’re “the one.” This is where most people lose their motivation, pack their bags, and go home to status quo and negative ways of thinking. But not you, my courageous reader.
In chapter 4, you’ll learn the positive thinking skills that will keep you motivated and moving forward. You’ll learn how to deal with imperfection, confront your fears, open yourself up to uncertainty, and overcome procrastination. You’ll also activate your Wise Mind, which is the intuitive wisdom that can help you navigate difficult decisions and overwhelming circumstances. I’ll even share some information about the most up-to-date research on effective goal setting and progress tracking.

**Nurturing Positivity**
By the time you reach chapter 5, you’ll understand how to activate positivity by working with your thoughts, feelings, and actions as well as how to cultivate meaning and fulfillment through a values-led life. This final section will provide you with the strategies for maintaining and enhancing these positivity achievements so that you can stay on the path even after you close this book for the final time.

You’ll learn how to say no and set boundaries with the people and situations that drain your energy and discourage your positivity. Even more important, you’ll cultivate positive relationships built on the foundation of kindness and gratitude. These relationships will nourish your positivity practice and provide the support you require when times get tough. Finally, you’ll create rituals of mindfulness, self-care, and compassion to recharge your positivity when your energy is running low, and you will raise your self-esteem to meet the challenges along your life’s journey. You’ll walk away with confidence and capabilities to live your best life.
POSITIVITY IN PRACTICE

You’ve now set the foundation for your positive transformation. You know what positive thinking entails, how it will benefit your life, and how, specifically, you’ll apply the tools you’re learning in this book to improve your life and well-being.

Feeling excited? Maybe a little nervous? Unsure? Don’t worry! I’m here with you the whole time. Now, let’s try to put into practice one of the critical aspects of positive thinking that we discussed in this chapter: positive expectations.

1. Write down what you’re expecting will happen to you as you begin practicing positive thinking skills in the context of your goals. Make a list of the first three things that come into your mind. Don’t force yourself to have positive expectations. Just write down whatever comes to mind.

2. Now review the three expectations you wrote down. Are your expectations positive, negative, or skeptical?

3. Get curious about your negative and skeptical expectations. No judgment here: Just be inquisitive about how your mind works.

   How do these negative expectations make you feel?
   Are they helpful to you?

   Are these negative expectations a result of your past experiences? Are you willing to let them go in order to move forward?

   Are these negative expectations based on negative perceptions of yourself and your capacity to change? Would your best friend also think this about you, or would they have a more uplifting expectation you could borrow?
What experience can you remember and draw from to challenge your negative expectations? What evidence is there that you can be more hopeful here?

Even if your negative expectations do unfold, can you remember a few times you've been able to recover and grow from those situations?

4. Now that you've had a chance to try some positive thinking on your expectations, rewrite your new expectations. (Remember, you don't have to be Pollyanna, just make sure you challenged the validity of your negative thoughts.)
“You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, ‘I lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.’”

—ELEANOR ROOSEVELT