

# Optimism and The Student-Athlete

“If you think you can, or you think  
you can’t—you’re right.”

~ Henry Ford



# In our last session we talked about a “Growth Mindset”

## Fixed Mindset

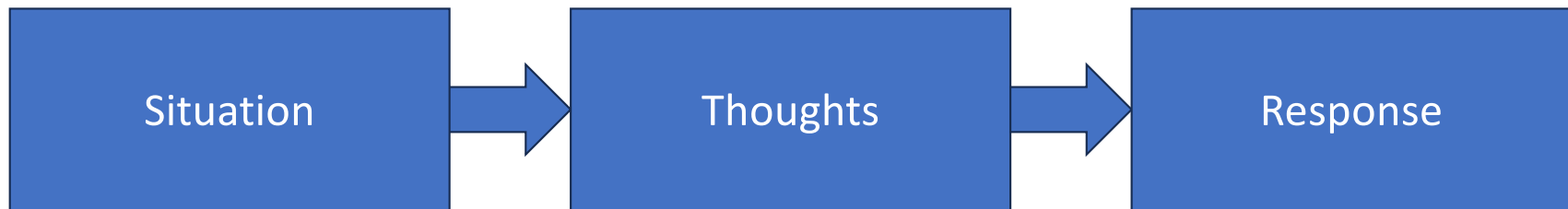
- Intelligence is static
- Desire to look smart
- Tendency to avoid challenges
- “Failure tells me my limits.”
- “I am good at something, or I am not.”

## Growth Mindset

- Intelligence can be developed
- Desire to learn
- Tendency to embrace challenges
- “Challenges help me grow.”
- “I can’t do this...**yet\***.”

Growth Mindset → Optimism

And we talked about how our thoughts about a situation can lead to our next action.



3/31/25

Two sessions ago we  
talked about optimism and  
pessimism.

**Is the world getting better? 6% of Americans agree**

# An optimistic person...

*...believes a positive future is possible despite negative past events (Peterson, 2006).*



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*...explains a negative situation as being changeable, bounded, and from an external source (while keeping responsibility) (Seligman, 2006).*

*...is not blind to reality or negative events (Peterson, 2006).*



# Why does optimism matter for student-athletes?

## NOW

- Optimism leads to better competitive performance and team dynamics... (Borrajo et al, 2024; López-Gajardo et al, 2023)
- ...and happier, better-performing students. (Macaskill & Denovan, 2013)



## NOW & LATER

- Optimists are more likely to succeed at their workplace... (M. E. Seligman & Schulman, 1986)
- ...and can expect better personal relationships. (Assad et al., 2007; Srivastava et al., 2006)



**"Everything negative—pressure, challenges—is all an opportunity for me to rise." ~ Kobe Bryant**

# Marty Seligman and Explanatory Styles

	True?	False?
This is personal and all about me!		
This ruins everything in my life.		
It is permanent—a problem FOREVER.		

“My Coach is on my case for being late and skipping practices because...”

	True?	False?
This is personal and all about me!	I am a loser, I am a target.	
This ruins everything in my life.	My grades suck too.	
It is permanent—a problem FOREVER.	Coach will always be after me.	

# "My Coach is on my case for being late and skipping practices because..."

	True?	False?
This is personal and all about me!	I am a loser, I am a target.	He is annoyed at everyone who is not dedicated, not just me.
This ruins everything in my life.	This is why my grades suck, too.	My math teacher couldn't care less about what I do in cross.
It is permanent—a problem FOREVER.	Coach will always be after me.	You know, I can start being a more dedicated athlete and I bet his attitude changes.

# Tools We Can Use When Facing Adversity

## EXPLAIN

- Is the universe out to get me?
- Everywhere?
- Always?

Inner talk makes a difference

*-(Seligman, 2006).*

## SOLVE

- Make the next steps productive
- Focus on the most likely scenario
- Change in circumstance is possible

*-(Reivich & Shatté, 2003).*

## ACT

- Attack the problem
  - Be proactive
  - If it's intractable, then cope
    - Call a friend!
    - Call your coach!
    - Make a joke!
  - The world is not out to get us
- (Scheier et al, 1994).*

# Being aware of your explanatory style\*.



Think about a recent negative incident.

How could this be all about you, be permanent, and effect everything in your life?



Let's look at this another way...were you really the focus, how long will this last, is the effect limited?

\*This was inspired by an exercise in MAPP 600 (M. Seligman, personal communication, November 8, 2023; Seligman, 2006).

# We have just "reframed" the incident.

- We can develop more optimistic approaches to life and buffer to be more resilient to challenges (Reivich & Shatté, 2003).
- Reframing an incident can grow our optimism and positivity (Fredrickson, 2006).
- Disputation of our negative thoughts and beliefs of a negative incident is a similar, effective approach (Seligman, 2006).



We can be more optimistic, thoughtful, aware and purposeful in challenging situations (Reivich & Shatté, 2003).

# Wrap Up and Homework

- Positive psychology is a science!
- Optimism influences your athletic performance, your life, and your happiness.
- Let's continue the reframing exercise:
  - For the next week, at the end of each day, think of one incident that bothered you.
  - Write down the incident in a way that frames it as something that happened to you, will never end, and will ruin your life.
  - Then, write down the incident from the perspective that...it is none of those things.
- I care about you as a person and an athlete.



**Discussion!**



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