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Rich Material

Life's opportunities to learn and grow

What is Rich Material?

Rich material includes all kinds of situations and scenarios. It could be your child having a tantrum when you are trying to get them out the door on time to catch the bus. It could include finding out your insurance was canceled because you didn't pay on time (your bill was lost in the mail). It could be your cell phone breaking when you dropped it on the cement sidewalk. You get the idea. It's all those things you don't like, don't want and usually don't expect.

How could these examples possibly be opportunities to learn and grow? It is all about changing the questions we ask ourselves to change our focus. Instead of "Why me?" or "How could this happen?" It's asking things like, "How can I use this?" "What can I learn from this?" "How does this help me relate to others better?" It's amazing how a shift in perspective can change the way we think about and react to the "bad things" that happen in our lives.

The following sections include ideas and examples of how to shift your perspective when it comes to those every day challenges. These "little" things give us the opportunity to practice so we are better prepared to deal with the nasty, gut wrenching, heart breaking experiences that are bound to show up in our lives.

THE BEST PART OF HAVING A COLD

What? Is there really anything good about having a cold? When I have a cold, I can't wait until I feel better and can breathe easier. And yet, once I do feel better, I quickly forget how miserable I was and take my health for granted. But right now, in this moment, I am sitting here feeling well and breathing freely so I can take a moment to appreciate the absence of a cold. Ahhhh! It feels good to feel good...

Humans are interesting creatures. We complain and hate feeling bad, but we quickly get used to feeling good and seldom remember to appreciate it. However, we can purposely reflect back and recall the misery of past ailments and remind ourselves how awful it was so we can enjoy our current wellbeing.



When was the last time some ache or pain was bothering you and making you miserable? Was it your back, a joint, your stomach, maybe even a tooth? How does it feel right now? Hopefully it is feeling good so take a moment, remember the pain and appreciate the fact it is better.

PICK A DAY – IT'S YOUR CHOICE

The alarm goes off and you groan as you remember today is going to be very cold and rainy and you have some appointments that require walking outside for several blocks. You don't want to get out of bed because the room is even colder than usual.

Traffic is going slow because of the rain and you get frustrated, worried that you are going to be late. You get a red light and are even more frustrated. One of your appointments is downtown and you dread the drive because there is so much traffic, there are many unfamiliar one-way streets, and parking is difficult. You are stressed and anxious as you finally get parked and rush to your appointment, forgetting your gloves. When you get home, you are exhausted and grumpy. You feel depressed and tired from the gray, rainy day. You don't want to have to deal with anything when you get home. You just want to relax and go to bed.



The alarm goes off and you are thankful for the day and are looking forward to what the day might bring. You savor the hot shower as it warms you up in the chilly room. It is cold and rainy today so you grab your coat, gloves and umbrella so you will be prepared for walking outside for your upcoming appointments.

Traffic is slow because of the rain, but you turn on the radio to enjoy some of your favorite songs, take a few deep breaths, and remind yourself that you will get there when you get there.

You get a red light and realize this is the first one. All the others were green. One of your appointments is downtown, an area you find challenging because you aren't used to all the one-way streets, heavy traffic and limited parking. After you successfully navigate the streets and park, you congratulate yourself for doing a good job and notice it is getting easier with each visit. When you get home, you realize how the dreary, rainy day has made you tired and you are thankful that tomorrow is going to be sunny and warmer and you remember that this summer had so many beautiful, sunny days.

THE END OF SUMMER

Labor Day is coming fast and summer is winding down. This time of year can make me feel melancholy. I love summer with its long days, warm weather, and green scenery. I hate being cold (and I get cold easily) so I don't look forward to winter.



The changing of the seasons is a great opportunity for me to practice using tools I've learned from Positive Psychology. What do I choose to focus on? I can make myself sad by thinking about missing the warm, long days of summer, going for walks, kayaking, riding my bike, etc. Or I can choose to focus on all the wonderful things I still have in my life and remind myself that summer is sweeter because it doesn't last forever. Shifting my thoughts takes effort and intention because our brains naturally prefer to dwell on what we are losing and what we don't like, instead of all the good around us. Some days it's harder than others.

Change is everywhere, whether it's the changing of the seasons or major changes in our lives. It seems that most changes have some good and some bad parts. We can make ourselves miserable by letting our brains instinctively focus on the bad, or we can take control and purposely remind ourselves of the good. Make a list. Re-read it whenever you get stuck thinking about what you don't like about the change. Surround yourself with reminders of the good in your life and the good that may come from the change.

I'm looking forward to cross-country skiing (I stay warm), and snuggly fleece sheets – – and savoring these last few weeks of summer-like weather.

WHY I LOVE MY KITCHEN SINK

Our kitchen faucet sprung a leak the other day. Every time I turned it on,

little sprays from pin holes in the faucet would give me a shower. It was toast.



By now, my husband and I should realize that plumbing projects require multiplying the time we think its going to take by 20 (or more). Things never go as smoothly as anticipated and the fittings are never the same so it usually take multiple trips to the hardware store.

I only had one day where I didn't have a faucet in the kitchen, but what a pain in the butt! I couldn't rinse food, dishes or wash my hands, wipe counters, etc. using the sink. My instinct was to feel frustrated and impatient to get it fixed. Was there another way to look at it? Instead, I tried to shift my perspective and realize I should appreciate how wonderful it is to have hot and cold running water in the kitchen.

It wasn't so many generations ago it was not possible and there are still parts of the world that don't enjoy such a wonderful convenience. Also, I should be grateful that my husband was able to install the new faucet so we didn't have to hire a plumber. And I should be happy it was only one day. The sink is now fully functional and I try to pause and enjoy instantly having hot or cold water in my kitchen.

What inconvenience or unwanted situation made you frustrated this week? Is there a way to take a different view and use it to remind yourself of something positive?

Tina Hallis, Ph.D., is the founder of [The Positive Edge](http://ThePositiveEdge.org), a company dedicated to helping people and organizations fulfill their true potential using strategies from the science of Positive Psychology.

Contact Tina today to speak at your organization's or group's next event.

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