MASTERING YOUR MINDSET

Nine Negative Habits that Hold Executives Back— and How to Break Them for Accelerated Business Performance

CLARIS CONSULTING

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INTRODUCTION

Since the 2008 economic collapse, organizations of all sizes and industries have experienced record budget cuts and financial troubles. But even more than fiscal shortcomings, negative thinking and a negative mindset are wreaking havoc on businesses around the world.

It seems that an epidemic of negative thinking has swept through corporate America and is infecting the ranks of employees at all types of organizations—from IT and healthcare to financial services and higher education. The mantra we frequently hear nowadays is, *"We don't have enough resources to get it done."*

It is true that most businesses are strapped for resources and this has become the new norm. But what's more concerning is that organizations lack the *resourcefulness* to achieve strategic objectives—and they'll never realize them without a dramatic mindset change. The truth is that executives and their teams have the ability to transform adversity into opportunity, creating powerful solutions to seemingly impossible problems. The primary obstacle standing in their way is what is going on in between each employee's ears.

This report is a roadmap for executives to fight the nine most common negative thinking habits that pollute both boardrooms and cubicles, robbing businesses of unrealized value every day.

I've created the *Mastering Your Mindset* report to provide executives with twenty-seven proven and real world strategies to create a flourishing mindset for themselves, and the motivation to cascade the same strategies throughout their organization. When these strategies are implemented, accelerated results will be realized. Just by reading this report, you're already taking a major step toward shifting mindsets at your organization. The key strategies to combat the nine negative habits will make a meaningful difference—both personally and professionally—to you, your team and your organization.

Before we jump right in, let me first explain why mindset is so important to me.

Until I was forty-five years old, I was a successful entrepreneur with a poverty mindset. A native Scotsman, I was born in Glasgow and came to the United States with my parents at the age of nine. My mother was a coal miner's daughter and my father was the son of one of the wealthiest men in Glasgow. Circumstances might have been different if my father hadn't been one of ten children. But as it happened, when my grandfather passed away, my father was left to fend for himself as his two eldest brothers took all the family resources.

My mother and father were wonderful parents, but they struggled financially. When I was six years old, three men arrived at our house to repossess our furniture. I remember distinctly my mother screaming for my father to *"stop this"* and my father being forced to ask his brothers for financial help. And so when my parents and I immigrated to the United States, we brought a poverty mindset along with us.
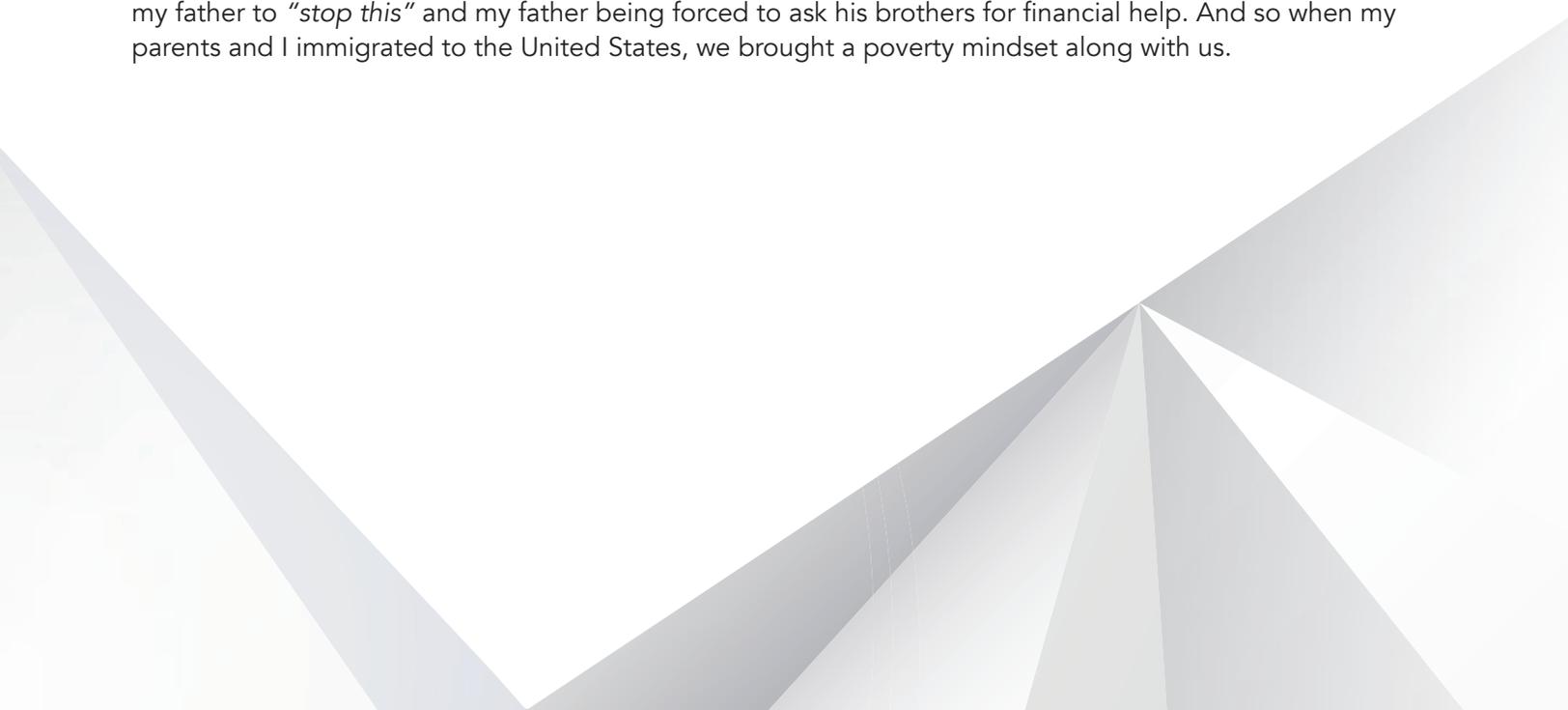
I'm telling you my family story because it is inseparable from my experience as a business owner and entrepreneur. It wasn't until I sold my last company and founded Claris Consulting in 2009 that I realized I had to dramatically change my mindset to achieve the potential I knew I had.

The results have been extraordinary. Since conquering my poverty mindset, my company's revenue has increased by 400 percent. Yes, you read that right. In just six years' time, the revenues of my business have grown four-fold, fueling my personal and professional growth in unprecedented ways. In turn, my ability to contribute to charities and community organizations increased seven-fold. By changing my mindset, I've been able to directly benefit the people around me, giving more to those in need.

As my sense of well-being, gratitude, and generosity have increased, so has the value of my relationships. Both at work and at home, all my relationships have become more rewarding and enriching not because the people I've been in relationships with have changed, but because how I engage with people has changed. As soon as I banished negative thinking from my life, my clients began to achieve even greater results and my personal friendships flourished. How is that possible? With a poverty mindset my view of what was possible was limited and restricted. Without my poverty mindset I can see newer, more expansive possibilities and create results aligned with my new thinking. Quite simply, my interactions are no longer clouded by negativity or uncertainty.

My experience with negative thinking is all too common. I've worked with companies in seven countries, across three continents, and in 43 states to help strategize organizational growth. What I've learned is this: The biggest obstacle to achieving increased value as an organization is the negative mindset of the people working inside the organization.

Whether you call it a negative mindset or a poverty mindset, the ramifications of negativity are the same for any business. Effective plans are thwarted and innovative ideas fail to thrive in organizations where people lack the right mindset for business success.

I have learned how to successfully change my mindset to unlock my potential for personal and professional growth. This report isn't theoretical or intellectual—it is full of real, tangible ways to combat the most common forms of negative thinking in your business.

Beliefs and perceptions drive behavior. We all behave in ways that are aligned with our beliefs and perceptions of people and events. So the most important part of this process is for you as a leader to change your own beliefs and perceptions about mindsets and how thinking impacts growth, innovation, and learning. When you do, you are then positioned to dramatically impact your team's behavior.

There are nine major habits of negative thinking that do the most damage to organizations. I'm going to teach you how to identify those behaviors, and how to successfully change them into a business mindset that converts your human potential into accelerated results.

Hugh Blane
President, Claris Consulting
March 2016

HABIT #1
HOLDING ONTO
THE PAST

The past is a powerful force, capable of propelling us toward our goals or holding us back from our potential. Unfortunately, most of us let it hold us back. One of the most common negative habits is failing to let go of the past. This thinking pattern usually includes self-destructive narratives such as:

> "Because I didn't get in to my top-choice school, I could never _____."

> "Because my parents weren't _____, I wasn't able to _____."

> "Because my employer didn't recognize my talent, now I can't _____."

> "Because my company increasingly hired young people, I was held back from _____."

Do these refrains sound familiar? I'm willing to bet you've either heard them or said them yourself. So many of us think this way, and we end up holding grudges as a result. Carrying the past into the future can easily spoil the present. A mentor of mine once put it this way:

"The past is the past. Get on a train. When the train is up to speed, throw your baggage overboard."

In corporate America, failure to let go of the past can create an overreliance on past successes as well as an unhealthy focus on past wrongs or slights. Left unaddressed, this type of thinking stifles collaboration and fuels resentment. When one team or person resents another it is the death knell of

higher performance. Instead of unfamiliar ideas being met with curiosity and a willingness to learn more, they are dismissed simply because of their source. The most common example occurs when a team or leader repeats, *"That's not the way we've successfully done things in the past."* This sentiment only serves to suppress potential innovation and discourage the team from taking creative, new approaches to projects. It also sends a message that the one who expresses new ideas has nothing to offer.

Another common scenario occurs when a project is delayed or unsuccessful, leading to accusations that the project manager is responsible for the failure. Understandably, the project manager can feel attacked as a scapegoat, and personally blamed for the project's failure. It is no surprise that the project manager then carries resentment toward the people who she feels sabotaged her. This resentment leads to lower levels of collaboration in the future and restricts new ideas from getting the full consideration necessary to be successful.

And the resentment doesn't just go away—instead, it lingers and has long-term adverse effects on the work output of that project manager. It also infects the rest of the team, straining the working relationships between leaders and employees.

In my own life, letting go of the past has been crucial to my success. I've had two business partners who embezzled money—the first was 27 years ago. At the time, I thought I was a hot-shot investor and management consultant. I invested in a company only to later find out that my money had been *"mishandled."* My other former business partner drained the company checking account after he retired from the company without any notice or conversation. He claimed that the money was a repayment for outstanding debts.

As you might imagine, it was difficult for me to put those situations in the past, where they belong, and not look back. But six years ago, I told myself, *"Carrying the past around with me wherever I go is ruining the present. I have to let the past go."* The effects were almost immediate. When I stopped focusing on the regret and hurt caused by those past events, I found that my worry and anxiety dramatically decreased. This decrease in stress led to an increase in motivation and energy. Unhindered by thoughts of past conflict, I felt more creative—and more willing to learn, grow, and experiment in my business.

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1. REFRAME YOUR PAST

You have to be able to look at negative events in the past and say, *"they may not have been ideal, but here's how I'm going to view these events and what I've learned."* In choosing to focus on what is positive you become highly resilient, which will shape your character in positive ways. This can be hard at times, but reframing negative experiences into positive ones is incredibly powerful and within our control.

2. RECLAIM YOUR FUTURE

In order to have high hopes for the future there must be a hope, dream, aspiration or big idea that has grabbed hold of you and that prompts you to reply with a bold and unequivocal *"yes"*. Big dreams and aspirations trigger the *"under no circumstances will I take no for an answer"* type of response. When a big hope, dream or aspiration grabs hold of you there is no way out and there is no backdoor. When you say, *"I will accomplish this,"* you have reclaimed the idealized 2016 you have in mind.

3. RECALIBRATE YOUR PRESENT

Recalibrating your present requires discerning what things you should not do again and what things you absolutely should do again. This strategy requires recalibrating what worked and what didn't work in the past. What was something that accelerated your performance? What created hope for you, and what created anxiety? Identify the areas of your present that will get in your way and do whatever you can to reduce them or eliminate them. Find those things that are going to help you create greater growth and really double down on them.

If you as a leader reframe your past, reclaim your future, and recalibrate your present, you will become a role model for your team. By sharing these strategies with your team you will create a culture of greater accountability.

HABIT #2
USING DEFEATIST LANGUAGE

Words plant ideas and beliefs in the fertile soil of our imaginations. They can grow incredibly useful, positive ideas—or they can grow negative, destructive ones. Consider this short and powerful poem written by Emily Dickinson:

> *A word is dead*
> *When it is said,*
>
> *Some say.*
>
> *I say it just*
> *Begins to live*
>
> *That day.*

Dickinson's point, of course, is that words have lasting consequences. That's why language is a critical part of the right business mindset.

I'll be the first to admit that I once regularly practiced defeatist language. I would say, *"I can't do that,"* all too frequently. This was one of the most disempowering habits I had. I would frequently use defeatist language to talk about things that had happened to me in the past. Compounded together, my defeatist language and my inability to let go of the past were huge obstacles to my business progress.

When I made the conscious decision to change my language, all of the most important areas in my life were transformed.

I not only changed the language I used with myself—I also changed the language I used with my clients. Gone were the words that created fear, uncertainty and trepidation, and instead I used words of faith, hope and optimism. This one shift vastly improved the way my clients engaged with me because I was a more approachable and confident person.

Successful business leaders recognize the power of language and how specifically their language affects the way others perceive them. When a leader's language is powerful, compelling and empowering, the byproduct is credibility and positive influence; both of which have the potential to accelerate the rate of growth and change inside the organization.

The best way to tell if you use defeatist language is to pay attention to the words you use. Do you use phrases like *"I can't"* and *"I have to"*? Both *"can't"* and *"have to"* are disempowering terms that cast you as a victim of circumstance. For example, do you *"have to"* tell your spouse or partner that you love her/him, or do you *"choose to"*? Which would your partner prefer knowing, that you are telling her/him you love her/him out of obligation or out of desire?

1. REPLACE "I HAVE TO" WITH "I CHOOSE TO"

This seemingly simple change had a powerful impact on me. When I used the words I *"have to"* it was most often triggered by an external event or person that left me feeling obligated. When I used the words *"I choose to"* it was grounded in volition and done intentionally. Choosing empowering words and language instills in listeners a belief that we are confident, composed, and credible. In my own case, my clients saw me as responsible and reliable. As a result, they entrusted me to work with them at increasingly more strategic and transformational levels.

2. FOCUS ON YOUR LISTENERS

Before you address an audience, ask yourself: *"What do I want my listeners to feel, think, know, believe, and/or do after listening to me?"* Take stock of who your audience is, and carefully choose powerful language that communicates your message in a respectful, confident and effective way.

One of my favorite examples of the power of language in the executive suite involves Herb Kelleher, the former CEO of Southwest Airlines. Kelleher was on a quarterly call with investors when one of them told him that he spent too much money on employee benefits. If Kelleher reduced the money for employee benefits, the investor would be much happier. Kelleher's response was to tell the investor to sell his stock if he didn't like the way he ran his company. He said that he would never drive greater profits at Southwest at the expense of his employees.

By using such confident language in defense of his employees, Kelleher sent a powerful message to those listening to him. His ability to speak directly and convincingly to his audience made a deep impression on his colleagues. In the end, the language he chose to use communicated volumes to his employees about what he stood for.

3. USE POSITIVE LANGUAGE

The most effective way to avoid defeatist language is simply to use positive language. When you notice a pessimistic twist to your language, say to yourself, *"Wait a minute. My language is negative. Let me frame that idea in a more positive way."* Using positive language is a powerful start to shifting your thinking—and when you change how you think and talk about situations, your behavior follows suit.

Business leaders need to understand that the language they use with rank-and-file employees, managers, and supervisors has a direct impact on everyone's thoughts and actions. In fact, your language has the power to shape perceptions and beliefs positively or negatively. The outcome you experience starts with the language you use.

HABIT #3
BEING YOUR OWN
WORST CRITIC

During annual reviews, leaders and employees might hear ten accolades about their performance over the last year and one area for improvement. Over 80 percent of my clients tell me that, when all is said and done, they focus on the one area for improvement and dismiss what they've done well. This is similar to driving with one foot on the accelerator and the other on the brakes. That is not a strategy for accelerated performance. In fact, it guarantees reduced performance and decreases a person's level of satisfaction and effectiveness.

The dilemma is that every person listens to two mental radio stations on a daily basis. The first station broadcasts positive and affirming messages such as, *"You're really talented. You're exceptionally good at taking complex ideas and making them practical and applicable."* The other station isn't nearly so pleasant to listen to. *"Who do you think you are?"* this station says. *"You can't do that. You're not half as good as you think you are."*

Unfortunately, this second radio station gets far more airtime than the first. It also broadcasts at a much higher volume. In fact, we're so accustomed to listening to the negative broadcast in our minds that thinking positively of ourselves is considered boastful and arrogant.

Of course, that couldn't be further from the truth. Beating yourself up doesn't do anybody any good. You have the capacity to be your biggest advocate or your biggest critic. Every day, you wake up and make the choice. Which radio station are you tuning into?

If you're tuning into the negative radio station playing in your head, it is time to change the station. By taking stock of what you pay attention to on a daily basis, you can determine whether the negative or positive messages get more air time.

If you're listening to your biggest critic more than your biggest advocate, then it's clear you need to make a change.

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Once you commit to shifting your focus from negative perspectives to positive ones, you'll begin to create a different experience for yourself—as well as for those around you. As an executive, it is your responsibility to make sure that your mindset is tuned into the right radio station and that you then broadcast your mindset to others. **Here are three strategies for doing that.**

1. FOCUS ON A BIGGER YES
Articulate the one idea, hope, dream or aspiration you have for your leadership. When you articulate an idea that is inspiring and compelling, your attention automatically shifts to the positive station where messages are of advocacy as opposed to adversity.

2. FOCUS ON SUCCESSES
Recount three or five areas where you were successful over the last year. Identify what allowed you to be successful and be as behaviorally specific as possible.

3. PLAY TO YOUR STRENGTHS
With successes in mind, ask how you will exploit your strengths to become even more effective and successful. List a clear and compelling reason for playing to your strengths and what the pay off is for you to do so. If the pay off is not big for you, you'll revert to listening to the old negative radio station.

HABIT #4
UNDERVALUING OPTIMISM AND HOPE

Lack of optimism is one of the most fundamental contributors to a negative mindset. When business teams lose hope for the future, their organization can't grow because they've accepted their current state as certain, unchangeable, and unworthy of exerting any effort to change. If you extract optimism, hope, and enthusiasm from people's lives, there is nothing left except negativity, and in the world of work that ensures lower performance.

This is why it is critical to avoid the habit of ignoring optimism and hope in your own thinking. In corporations, teams often lose optimism during transitions of senior executives, extreme budget cuts, or other major changes in the organization.

Ensuring that employees retain a sense of hope in the face of change is critical for organizational growth.

All too frequently, business leaders view hope, optimism, and positivity as fluffy, *"soft"* concepts unbefitting the corporate world. This incorrect assumption causes executives to focus on profit-and-loss statements, balance sheets, and other factual metrics that are more easily managed and quantified.

Not only is this misguided, but it is also detrimental to the growth and success of the organization. By neglecting the mental and emotional needs of employees, executives fail to foster the optimism and hope that all meaningful change requires.

Of course, this doesn't mean that you or your employees should wear rose-colored glasses—but it does mean that executives should foster a culture of positivity by regularly finding what is working and celebrating it.

By way of example, let's look at the healthcare industry. It has been proven that patients have a more likely chance of recovering faster and better—with long-term prognoses for full recovery—when they receive messages of hope, optimism, and positivity from their healthcare providers.

In turn, these patients also provide higher patient satisfaction scores when they are exposed to positivity from healthcare providers—a key metric for the American Nurses Credentialing Center Magnet Hospital designation. Positivity and hope can directly improve the success of the healthcare business, garnering better patient reviews and improving the institution's reputation. The same principles apply to every industry.

SUCCESS
STRATEGIES

1. EMBRACE THE NEGATIVE

When leaders learn to embrace the negative aspect of work, they come to understand that within every adverse or negative situation there is the seed of greater performance. Consider the mindset exhibited by Ray Kroc, the founder of McDonalds, who is quoted as saying *"If you have a problem, turn it into a procedure and you won't have a problem any more."* What Ray knew was that embracing what is broken or not working is the jumping off point for greater efficiency, effectiveness and satisfaction.

2. EXHIBIT THE POSITIVE

While embracing the negative can be taken to an extreme by some people, the vast majority of people want a leader who believes in them and has an indomitable belief in the creativity, ingenuity, and tenacity of the people they work with. People want to believe in the power of the human spirit to overcome obstacles and will rally around a leader who can declare, *"Yes we can, and here's how we're going to do it."* A great example is John F. Kennedy and the moon landing proclamation in 1961.

3. ENLIST THE WHOLE PERSON

There are some employees who come to work and have left their creativity and high aspirations in the parking lot. They have become disillusioned or disengaged not because they are political, lazy or manipulative, but rather because often they have worked for leaders who want employees to leave their emotions at home. This guarantees that employees turn off the following: enthusiasm, excitement, joy, happiness, tenacity, creativity, and love. Successful leaders welcome the whole person to work and initiate conversations that leave employees feeling hopeful and optimistic.

HABIT #5
FOCUSING ON WEAKNESSES

China has dominated table tennis for decades, and Chinese athletes are world-renowned as the sport's foremost champions. Yu Cheng Gang, China's foremost table tennis coach, attributes his team's success against the Americans to one simple factor: His team doesn't focus on its weaknesses. Instead, the Chinese athletes focus on their strengths and learn how to leverage each individual player's best skills. The American table tennis team, on the other hand, focuses too much on its weaknesses, and so its game suffered. Focusing on strengths is an unparalleled accelerator for success.

Focusing on weaknesses is a common negative habit that the majority of my clients struggle to avoid. In the healthcare and IT fields, for example, there are teams of quality assurance professionals whose primary responsibility is to identify what is broken or not working. While beneficial in the right context, this mindset can permeate an organization and infuse a focus on weaknesses. This *"what's broken"* type of thinking has never led to highly differentiated services or a competitive advantage.

Focusing less on your weaknesses requires that you direct your thinking to what you are good at and grateful for.

You'll never be able to achieve more if you can't appreciate what you've already accomplished.

When you focus on the negative aspects of your financials, your personal life, or your career, you're limiting yourself to only seeing one side of the equation which will lead you to focusing on and attracting what you don't have.

SUCCESS STRATEGIES

1. START A GRATITUDE LIST

To combat this negative habit, you must start to change the way you view your current state of affairs and identify what you're most grateful for. Take five minutes before your head hits the pillow and list the three to five things you are grateful for from your day. Focusing on these components of your life before drifting off to sleep allows them to penetrate deep into your subconscious. The more you focus on what you do have, the more likely you are to attract more of that into your life.

2. FIND A MENTOR

The best strategy for focusing on your strengths is to invest in a coach or mentor who can help you move on by offering a fresh perspective on your strengths from an outsider's perspective. As the Scottish poet Robert Burns once wrote:

"Oh wad some power the giftie gie us
To see oursel's as others see us!"

But we can't see ourselves clearly. Only by working with an objective outside advisor can you learn to see the truth about your leadership and its impact. This outsider's perspective will enable you to start focusing on strengths as opposed to liabilities.

In my own life, I hired the consultant and coach Alan Weiss as a mentor. I also worked with Kathy Underwood, a sports psychologist, who helped me change my past behaviors and understand why certain things weren't working in my life.

Alan helped me to identify how my current thinking was a barrier to accelerated growth. He is the one who introduced me to the concept of driving with one foot on the accelerator and one on the brake, causing me to travel at half the speed I was capable of. His was a strategic perspective.

Kathy, on the other hand, helped me dissect the concepts I learned from Alan and see them as mental patterns—not absolute truths about me and my capabilities. She offered me hands-on, boots-on-the-ground advice to help me focus on my best qualities, and leave my weaknesses in the dust.

3. GET REAL

There are certainly times when weaknesses must be recognized and accounted for. It is important to be able to say, *"This aspect of my work is not serving me or my customers well. I really need to improve it."* But the key is to always pair such a thought with an equally positive focus on what you can do well. For example: *"I really need to improve upon this aspect of my work—but here are a few things that I do extremely well that I'll use to remain motivated and excited."*

HABIT #6
SPENDING TIME WITH NEGATIVE PEOPLE

Especially in the business world, our mindsets are constantly vulnerable to negative influence from other people. Allowing one person's negative thinking to influence an entire group happens far too frequently in corporate settings. Having worked with dozens of companies across the globe, I've seen first-hand how one person's negative perceptions or beliefs can take root in an organization and rapidly spread to every member of the team.

As an executive, you must take full responsibility for how your own mindset affects your team.

It can be extremely problematic when an executive has a negative mindset about any important issue in the business.

By way of example, I once worked with a senior vice president in higher education whose team was underperforming, experiencing great interpersonal strife, and quickly coming apart at the seams. During an offsite visit with the team, I saw first-hand how the executive's negative thinking and *"can't do"* attitude was exasperating those around her. No matter how many times team members tried to work around this attitude and be positive, they were met with negativity. At the end of the day, I debriefed with the executive and asked her what she thought had happened.

She told me that she had worked incredibly hard all day to be the leader the team needed, but by mid-afternoon she was exhausted. She began to cry and said she thought she should leave the team because she recognized that her negative attitude was adversely affecting it.

When I asked more questions about her health, sleep, and overall well-being, she mentioned that her sleep had recently become problematic, and she always wanted to take naps during the day. I suggested she visit her doctor and request a blood work-up. She did, and discovered that her hormones were severely out of balance and that she likely had sleep apnea. Once both of these issues had been addressed, she returned with new enthusiasm for life and work. By working to address her own negativity, she was able to transform into the type of leader who could create positive experiences for her team.

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While you may not be exposed to such destructive negativity as was dispersed by this senior vice president, you can still take steps to keep negativity from infecting you and your organization. **Here are three powerful ways to reject negativity from others:**

1. LIMIT YOUR EXPOSURE TO NEGATIVE PEOPLE
It might seem obvious, but this is a crucial part of rejecting negativity from others. Don't spend time around people who are destructive to your positive mindset. Don't hire them, either. Use whatever power you have to distance yourself from negative people, and both you and your team will be better for it. If you are considered a negative person, revisit the previous habits and choose two things to alter your mindset.

2. CREATE A POSITIVE, SUPPORTIVE NETWORK OF LIKE-MINDED OPTIMISTS
This group can include three to five people from your personal or professional life who exhibit the kind of positive outlook you want to embody for your team. Surrounding yourself with positive people is one of the most powerful ways to ensure that you remain focused on messages of encouragement, hope, and positivity. This strategy has the added benefit of giving you a ready network of people to help you handle any negative situations that arise within your organization.

3. TAKE ON A ROLE OF SUPPORT FOR SOMEONE WHO NEEDS HELP
This person could be someone at your company, or someone unrelated to your professional life. Either way, commit yourself to being a positive influence on someone and help them grow in a substantial way. When you apply positivity to help someone directly, it will inspire and motivate you to cultivate a positive mindset in each area of your life.

HABIT #7
LIVING IN FEAR

Far too many of us live in fear when it comes to our business lives. For some of us, it's financial fear. For others, it's emotional. No matter the source or type of the fear, fear has a debilitating effect on personal and professional growth over extended periods of time. Fear can be a catalyst for action, but accelerated progress can never be made beneath the shadow of a fearful mindset.

Some people say that fear can be a positive element in our lives. That may be true when it comes to having a healthy dose of caution against overtly risky behavior. But in the business world, letting fear take control is paramount to self-sabotage. When we're fearful, we play not to lose instead of playing to win.

I was told recently that the Bible lists the admonition *"do not be afraid"* 365 times. That's once for every day of the year. Consider for a moment what would happen if you lived your life without fear or trepidation. If you woke up and told yourself that no one was out to get you, and that you wouldn't be pelted with tomatoes while locked in stockades. Instead, what if you focused your emotional energy on taking proactive approaches to challenges and creating powerful solutions to problems at work and at home? Shedding the anxiety of a fearful mindset is a freeing and empowering act.

In the business world, performance decreases as fear increases. If performance is decreasing for you or your team, I guarantee that some sort of fear is behind it. The fear might take the form of anxiety about a new job or responsibility. It could also be financial fear of budget cuts or lack of resources. Either way, this mindset contributes to a loss of progress in the organization.

The best way to fight fear is to identify what causes it.

If you can determine the cause of fear, you can redirect it and make it less frightening for you and your team. Throughout my extensive work with executives as a coach and mentor, I have discovered eight types of fear that are most common to executives. Take a moment to consider each one and identify the ones that are challenging to you.

1. Fear of holding people accountable

2. Fear of making mistakes

3. Fear of leaving a job that sucks the energy out of you

4. Fear of not being seen as smart and successful

5. Fear of upsetting your boss or senior leaders

6. Fear of turning away from current successes in order to have even greater success

7. Fear of investing in oneself

8. Fear of making decisions

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As an executive, there are many different strategies you can employ to address your fear. I have found that the following three strategies are the most effective when it comes to overcoming fear for yourself as well as your team.

1. CALCULATE THE COSTS AND BENEFITS

Converting fear into courage starts with defining the costs associated with a fear and weighing them against the benefits of removing that fear. For example, the benefit of not implementing a $1 million new strategy may be having $1 million in reserves or cash. But the cost is losing $20 million in potential new revenue or a sought-after designation. Evaluating costs and benefits requires sound judgment and discernment regarding the risks associated with the investment. Strong leaders can perform an accurate assessment of the costs and benefits of a potential business move, without allowing their fear to inhibit growth or expansion plans.

2. BE COMFORTABLE WITH FEELING UNCOMFORTABLE

We all have a comfort zone, a place where things are known, safe, and predictable. However, remaining in our comfort zones doesn't allow for growth or innovation to take place. If you want to experience something different, more rewarding, and enriching, you have to move out of your comfort zone and be comfortable with feeling uncomfortable.

I recently spoke with a client who said that the last three months of our working together were the most uncomfortable three months of his professional life. He was referring to conversations we had about his leadership team. He came to realize that he has the wrong people in the wrong roles, and in turn, he understood that his hopes for higher performance would be stalled if he didn't make significant changes—including asking several employees to leave. This CEO accepted that his dreams of elevated performance were dependent upon his willingness to make uncomfortable decisions.

3. HAVE A BIAS FOR ACTION

It's easy to convince yourself that thinking is the same as taking action. It is not. Intellectualizing and philosophizing about something will do little to help you overcome fear. Instead, push yourself to take real action. Put yourself in situations that create new learning experiences, aiming above your goals. This type of exertion will give you the energy, motivation, and momentum to conquer your fears through direct action.

Leaders who instill in their employees a supreme confidence in their abilities have a huge competitive business advantage. When leaders recognize that employees' fears and uncertainties are normal—and that their primary job is to help convert employees' fears into courageous next steps—organizations flourish.

HABIT #8
BEING JUDGMENTAL

Despite the fact that we all know life is nuanced and complex, many people still think in binary terms: good or bad, right or wrong. Ignoring the subtle gray areas of life can translate into bad decisions and even worse outcomes. In the business world, taking a nuanced view of a situation is especially important. If you are too rigid in your thinking, you become close-minded, and you're apt to miss out on tremendous value for your organization by making inaccurate judgments.

That's not to say that having principled opinions is a bad characteristic.

In order to be a successful executive, it is imperative to have strong values that you won't compromise.

But there's a difference between being principled and being too judgmental.

In fact, being judgmental of others is a destructive negative habit that can lead to unnecessary conflict in the corporate world. We can be judgmental based on education or lack thereof, race, ethnicity, religion, sex, and political beliefs. My mother once recounted how during a recession in Scotland she sought work only to be asked where she attended school. When my mother mentioned the Catholic school she attended, she was told *"thank you, but no thank you."* At that time, Scotland was 95 percent Protestant and the businesses where she was applying judged her not based on her merit but on her faith.

Oftentimes, being judgmental is rooted in insecurity. When someone feels insecure they judge others as inferior in an effort to feel secure or superior. When this happens, the person being judged will in turn perform to the expectation this leader or coworker has of her or him. Lower expectations guarantees lower performance. This mindset can damage the good will and reputation of a leader while inhibiting creativity and collaboration within teams.

Let me give you an example. I worked with the CEO of a tech firm in Silicon Valley where all of the senior leaders had PhDs from Stanford in computer science. At team meetings, ideas presented by employees were dissected and judged from a myriad of perspectives by the senior leaders. I watched in disbelief as employees were told to *"leave and rethink their inferior idea and bring it back when it had grown up."*

When I asked the CEO about this process, I was told the senior leaders believed ideas needed to withstand the scrutiny similar to that which the senior leaders had experienced when defending their doctoral dissertations. I asked how many employees attending this meeting had doctoral degrees and were familiar with this type of scrutiny. His answer? None.

The senior leaders' judgment of ideas left employees feeling insecure and inferior. There was a closed-minded belief among senior leaders that all good ideas looked like ones they themselves had put forth in their doctoral theses. They thought they were cultivating rigorous debate and critical thinking by being judgmental. But instead they were cultivating a reluctance to share insights and ideas on the part of well-meaning employees.

SUCCESS
STRATEGIES

To avoid becoming the type of executive who stifles creativity and collaboration because of harsh judgment, **follow these three tips:**

1. CULTIVATE CURIOSITY AND CRITICAL THINKING

Knowing how to ask the right questions is far more important than being seen as the person who has all the right answers. Rather than telling people what to do, or criticizing their ideas, ask discerning questions to promote curiosity and dialogue. If you think an employee's idea is incomplete or lacking in some way, don't say that outright. Instead, ask meaningful questions that prompt the employee to examine the idea further. When you ask the right question, you'll hear a response like this: *"I hadn't thought of that. That's a great question. Let me think about it."*

2. VALUE DIFFERING OPINIONS

One of the most crucial steps to becoming less judgmental is recognizing that other people's opinions are extremely valuable—especially when they differ from your own. In fact, people who think differently than you do are a strategic advantage to you and your organization. If everyone thinks exactly the same way, your team will suffer from a lack of diverse ideas.

3. READ MORE BROADLY

Reading a wide range of perspectives and opinions is essential for any effective business leader. Just as often as you read perspectives that confirm your current thinking, you should read an opposing view. This will help you learn to hold multiple perspectives in equal regard and provide you with a greater depth of issues.

HABIT #9
AIMING FOR PERFECTION

Throughout my 25 years as a coach and consultant, I've met more perfectionists than I can count. People who aim for perfection won't settle for anything short of 99.9 percent accuracy in everything they do—an impossible standard to reach in the real world.

Aiming for constant perfection might seem like a positive characteristic on the surface, but it actually fosters an enormous amount of negativity.

There is a common misconception among perfectionists: They think that everything needs to be perfect, and as a result, they don't take action or make the progress they're capable of achieving. Why? Because striving for perfection is the leading cause of procrastination. If it can't be perfect, perfectionists don't see the value in accomplishing a task. This negative thinking habit leads businesses to get stuck in neutral.

I once worked with the board of directors at a financial institution who defined its strategic objective as being a *"market driven institution"* in their field. To do so, they needed to infuse marketing related ideas and thinking into each department of the institution.

Intellectually, they knew this. And yet they had a perfectionist's mindset when it came to financials. Even the slightest deviation from a tracked metric created high levels of angst and knee-jerk responses when the financials were not perfectly aligned based on budgets. The board reverted to what they felt comfortable with and turned away from the uncomfortable work of learning more, gaining new experiences, and honing its marketing skills. This resulted in lower performance because new markets were never fully penetrated.

SUCCESS
STRATEGIES

To avoid ending up like this organization, you need to stop striving for absolute perfection. Instead, be rational about what you can accomplish. Do not hold yourself and your team to arbitrary or unreasonably high standards. Be flexible.
The following three strategies will help you along the way:

1. FOCUS ON HOW
Overcoming perfectionism requires understanding HOW to move forward. HOW stands for honesty, openness, and willingness. If you are a perfectionist, honestly assessing where your perfectionism is helping or hurting you is essential. Overcoming perfectionism also requires openness and the willingness to not have all the right answers and to be right all the time. Without a commitment to HOW, most efforts to combat perfectionism stall before ever being implemented.

2. AIM FOR PROGRESS, NOT PERFECTION
Our mindset is exceptionally good at communicating that we are not good enough, smart enough, or making enough progress. To combat this negative thinking, recognize that perfectionism leads to procrastination and is a devious form of resistance for doing work that is meaningful and helpful. What customers, employees, and family members want from you is not perfection. They want to feel important, valued, and cared for. If you focus on these things you have a powerful and positive impact on people.

3. PRACTICE THE ONE PERCENT RULE
Commit to becoming one percent better every day in one important area of your professional life. When leaders purposefully look for one idea or suggestion they can use to improve their leadership by one percent each day (a small and manageable increase), over the course of 72 days, a leader will find himself or herself having improved by 100 percent from where they started.

Nelson Mandela

SURVIVED **27 YEARS IN PRISON** AND THEN BROUGHT AN **END TO APARTHEID** AS PRESIDENT OF SOUTH AFRICA

J.K. Rowling

WENT FROM A NEWLY DIVORCED SINGLE MOTHER ON STATE BENEFITS TO **A WORLD RECORD-SETTING AUTHOR**

Steve Jobs

LED THE BUSINESS WORLD'S **BIGGEST TURNAROUND** AND **INCREASED** APPLE STOCK PRICE **9000%** OVER FIFTEEN YEARS.

THESE SUCCESSES WERE NOT ACCIDENTS

They can't be attributed to simply being in the right place at the right time.

In the world of work, the single greatest factor of successful individuals, teams, and organizations **is their mindset—**

WHAT HAPPENS IN BETWEEN THEIR EARS

It is **not the corporate strategy**, it's **not the sales compensation plan**, and it's **not the market segments** they're pursuing.

Rather, it's what each leader, team member, and employee chooses to focus on, to believe, and to create for themselves and for others.

MASTERING YOUR MINDSET IS THE GREATEST ACCELERATOR OF SUCCESS YOU WILL EVER FIND AND USE.

Building supreme self-confidence in what's possible is exactly what Nelson Mandela, J.K. Rowling, and Steve Jobs did to become supremely successful professionally—while also enabling citizens, readers, employees, and customers to live a more rewarding and enriching personal life.

My hope is that in reading this report you will choose to live the most rewarding and enriching life possible. I know the strategies in these pages can help you do so.

Hugh Blane
President, Claris Consulting
March 2016

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hugh Blane doesn't claim to know everything about your business. He does claim however to know more than anyone about converting human potential into accelerated business results—that's why his clients call him the Talent Alchemist.

His consulting firm, Claris Consulting, is retained by clients such as Sony Pictures, Microsoft, Pepperdine University, Swedish Medical Centers, Aramark, Spacelabs Medical, Sodexho, and the University of Texas at Qatar, to challenge assumptions, jettison complacency and catapult growth.

Hugh's specialty is working with high potential employees. He was selected as the exclusive coach for the prestigious Helen M. Young Fellowship at Pepperdine University, and is an adjunct faculty member at its School of Law and Entrepreneurship. Hugh has taught business literacy courses to homeless men and women through the Union Rescue Mission in Los Angeles. He has also served on the Strategic Planning Committee of the Boys and Girls Club of King County.

Hugh and his family emigrated from Scotland to Canada, and then to Birmingham, Alabama in 1969 to escape financial hardship and begin their lives anew. The culture shock he experienced upon his arrival in Birmingham six years after Bull Connor ordered the use of fire hoses and attack dogs, along with the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church, was profound. His commitment to organizational transformation came as a direct result of being witness to a chaotic time that changed the course of race relations in the United States.

Hugh is a serial entrepreneur and doesn't shy away from reinventing himself. After 11 years as the CEO of his own financial consulting firm, Hugh reinvented himself when he was recruited to join renowned business author Tom Peters as a senior level consultant with The Tom Peters Company. After traveling to three continents, working in seven countries and 43 states, Hugh left to become the youngest partner and consultant in the venerable consulting firm, the Effectiveness Institute. After seven years, Hugh recognized that it was time to reinvent himself again and started Claris Consulting.

Hugh once ran with the bulls in Pamplona and learned how not to get gored. He is happily married to Alyson and they love traveling, wine, and good food. They reside in the small beach community of Normandy Park, Washington with a black Giant Schnauzer they rescued named Brooks. They're still debating whether they rescued Brooks or if Brooks rescued them.

Hugh Blane

The Talent Alchemist

Converting Human Potential Into Accelerated Business Result

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