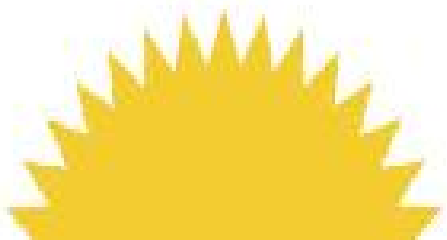


A YEAR OF
Positive
THINKING

**DAILY INSPIRATION,
WISDOM, AND COURAGE**

CYNDIE SPIEGEL





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ALTHEA
PRESS

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Interior Designer: Liz Cosgrove

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Production Editor: Andrew Yackira

Illustrations: Anugraha Design/Creative Market Labs Inc.

Author photo: © Ira James Photography, 2018.

ISBN: Print 978-1-64152-241-0 | eBook 978-1-64152-242-7



To my Mom:

Thank you for teaching me resilience, fierce honesty, and unconditional love. I am the woman I am because of you.

To my brothers:

You are worthy and you matter. Thank you for teaching me what strength and resilience truly are.

And of course to Ira:

Without you, I wouldn't have the words to write this book. I love you.





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Introduction

In some ways, I'm an unlikely candidate to write a book on positive thinking. I'm a realist, and I was not raised to view the world through rose-colored glasses.

My mom was a tough and protective, yet loving and softhearted, stay-at-home mother who had her first of four children at age 20 and had to raise us all largely on her own. My father was a hard-drinking, bighearted, blue-collar nomad until I was eight years old, when he finally moved into our home. We lived in a fairly poor neighborhood where there was little in the way of community support, and my three older brothers and I were troubled kids. We often learned life lessons the hard way—lessons like the world isn't always fair, but it is what it is. That we would do what we could with the cards we were dealt. That there's no use crying over spilled milk. And those things may absolutely be true.

As an adult, I've learned other valuable lessons that are equally true. I've learned that the world is filled with both abundance and scarcity, cruelty and kindness, despair and hope. I've learned that our lives are very similar to the segments and the peel of an orange; they are both bitter and sweet, and we can't experience one without having the other.

I have also learned that the ability to see light within the darkness creates a world of wide-open, heart-bursting possibility. I've learned that this perspective is a choice and that choosing positivity over negativity requires both clarity and courage. These lessons have come to me as I've immersed myself in practices, traditions, and fields that explore how we can affect our *mind-set*, including yoga, meditation, Buddhism, Hinduism, traditional academic education, and most notably, positive psychology.

Positive psychology has helped me cultivate a mind-set of positivity, grace, and abundance, allowing me to make them key parts of my everyday experience. It also reinforced the qualities of grit, resilience, and post-traumatic growth that I acquired early in my life. With this mind-set as my foundation, I was able to make a major career change in my mid-30s and then create multiple successful businesses. Today, the theories of positive psychology are what I practice and teach every day as a strategic business coach and transformational speaker. They are also the framework for positive thinking.

Here is the most empowering thing you should know as you begin reading this book: You can physically change your brain by consciously changing your thoughts. And you have the capacity to change your thoughts regardless of your race, socioeconomic background, or religious beliefs.

How exactly do your thoughts reshape your brain? Through neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections throughout our lives. Because new thoughts create new neural pathways and repeated thoughts reinforce existing ones, our thoughts

can literally change the structure and the function of our brains. By using repetitive mental activities like positive thinking, we can retrain our brains to become more inclined toward positive feelings.

But focusing on the positive can be a challenge, because of our brain's *negativity bias*; essentially our brains are neurologically wired to look for what is wrong instead of what is going well. Negativity bias is the reason negative experiences weigh much heavier on our minds than positive ones of the same intensity.

Barbara L. Fredrickson, PhD, a well-known scholar of positive psychology and author of the book *Positivity*, says that it takes approximately three positive thoughts to outweigh just one negative thought. Visualize a balance scale—one of those that has a horizontal crosspiece with a weighing pan hanging from each arm. In one pan are feathers; in the other are pebbles. The feathers are positive thoughts, and pebbles are negative ones. To get the scale to tip toward the feather side, we need three feathers for every one pebble. We need *a lot* of positive thoughts to counteract the negative thoughts that are affecting our brain.

So, when you decide to exercise your ability to consciously engage positive thoughts, you are engaging in some powerful, mind-shifting magic. And when you change how you think, you change how you act and who you are in the world.

I've compiled this book of wisdom, courage, and inspiration so that you can experience the power of positive thinking and positive psychology for yourself, in quick and

easy ways. By reading just one entry in this book each day, you can steadily shift your mind-set from one that clings to every negative experience, to one that embraces hope, encouragement, bravery, resilience, and possibility.

My wish for you is that, as you turn each page, you become more empowered to show up in your life with positivity, grace, and courage. And for those days when you can't, my wish is that this book will comfort you until you are once again ready to experience the world through the lens of forgiveness, resilience, and love.

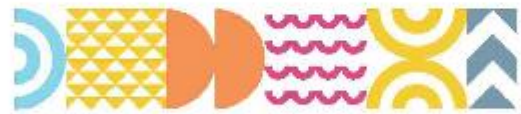
I hope that you find in this book the words you need to heal, live, love, thrive, and courageously be whoever you are meant to be in this wild, crazy world. As you read these pages, my hope is that you feel redeemed in your humanity and that you feel more understood—not only because of your strengths, but also because of the strength that you inhabit within your perceived weaknesses.

If you're ready—*really* ready—to live your best life, then let's begin, shall we?





JANUARY



1

JANUARY

RIGHT WHERE YOU SHOULD BE

You are in exactly the right place.

That place may be scary, boring, exciting, or heartbreaking. But whatever it is, *sit tight*. Instead of fighting your way out of it with everything you've got, sit still.

Experience it.

Let go.

Rock on.

You are exactly where you should be.

2

JANUARY

THE WISDOM OF KINTSUKUROI

Kintsukuroi is a kind of Japanese ceramic style. The word *Kintsukuroi* means “to repair with gold.” In the *Kintsukuroi* tradition, when a ceramic piece breaks, an artisan will fuse the pieces back together using liquid gold or gold-dusted lacquer. So rather than being covered up, the breaks

become more obvious, and a new piece of art emerges from the brokenness.

Kintsukuroi embraces flaws and imperfection, but it also teaches the essence of resilience. Every crack in a ceramic piece is part of its history, and each piece becomes more beautiful because it has been broken.

You will fall.

You will fail.

You will break.

You will stand up and dust yourself off.

You will repair yourself again and again.

And eventually, though you will be different than before, you will again become whole.

You will be even more beautiful precisely because of all of this.

You will be a better person because of your imperfections, not in spite of them.

3

JANUARY

TAKE THE INITIATIVE

“Don’t wait around for other people to be happy for you. Any happiness you get you’ve got to make yourself.”

—ALICE WALKER

4

JANUARY

THE WISDOM OF IMPERMANENCE

Every experience that you have is simply *one moment* in time. Every moment that you struggle within, sit with, or dance your way through will eventually pass.

This truth applies to all things—the good and the difficult, the darkness and the light, the just and the unjust. It is all transient, momentary.

There is both grace and wisdom in knowing that this moment, too, will eventually pass.

5

JANUARY

CREATE YOUR OWN SUNSHINE

If you want happiness, choose it. Don't wait for anyone to bestow it upon you. Live your life like you mean it, damn it. This is all there is. Appreciate the nuance of who you are. Find wonder in your surroundings. Notice the rainbows after the rain. And when rain gets you down, create your own sunshine because you are the only one who can.

6

JANUARY

DON'T GIVE YOUR THOUGHTS TOO MUCH POWER

Your thoughts are subjective and flexible, so don't allow them to rule every choice that you make. Just like you think negative thoughts, you can think more positive ones, too. You can train yourself to think differently by acting in ways that align with the thoughts you'd prefer to have and catching yourself when you have thoughts that don't align. Changing your thinking is a practice, but one well worth the time. Considering that you have between 50,000 and 70,000 thoughts per day, it pays not to give your thoughts too much power over your life.

7

JANUARY

EXPECTATION: THE THIEF OF JOY

Be careful of expectations that you set for others, but more importantly, be careful of the ones you set for yourself. Expectation rarely leaves room for the wonder and magic of the unknown.

8

JANUARY

YOU ARE COMPLETELY RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR LIFE

This truth is equal parts empowering and terrifying. It means that you have to consciously let go of blame, misunderstandings, and excuses that don't support you. Though it doesn't justify any wrongdoing that you've experienced, it does give you the power to change what makes you unhappy. By accepting responsibility for where you are right now, regardless of how you got here, you are better positioned to change the way your story plays out.

9

JANUARY

YOU WILL MAKE MISTAKES

You will make mistakes because you're human, but how you learn from them is solely up to you. There will be times when you get it wrong, and your ego will feel the sting. But trust that you don't have to know everything or have all the right answers. You will learn what you need to when you need to. To move forward with grace and humility, be open to the opinions of others and to learning from your mistakes.

10

JANUARY

BELIEVE

be·lieve \ bə- 'lēv \ verb

1. Accept (something) as true; feel sure of the truth of.

You unconsciously create experiences that match what you believe about yourself and others. So ask yourself these questions often: “What do I believe about myself and my life? Is what I believe truly serving who I want to be in the world?”

Be mindful of what you accept as truth. Because you become what you believe, for better or worse.

11

JANUARY

IN GOOD COMPANY

Spend time in the company of those who can stand up for you when you are unable, those who believe in you when you are unwilling, those who honor the magnitude of your greatness, even when you are not quite ready to yourself.

They see you for who you are. Trust them, show them love, and honor these relationships.

12

JANUARY

KINDNESS

When someone says something kind about you, choose to believe them.

13

JANUARY

YOU WILL FIND EXACTLY WHAT YOU EXPECT

When I question my own perspective, this anecdote, shared by one of my teachers, reminds me to be more mindful of my thoughts:

A woman walked up to a gate of a guarded community and asked, “What kind of people are here in your community?”

The man at the gate replied, “What kind of people are there where you are from?”

“Well, they are mean, rude, nasty, and shortsighted,” she said.

“You will find the same people here,” he told her.

A few minutes later, another woman walked up to the man and asked, “What kind of people are here in this community?”

The man at the gate replied, “What kind of people are there where you are from?”

“They are kind, loving, authentic, and good,” she said.

“You will find the same people here,” he told her.

And so it is. We often find exactly what we believe we will.

14

JANUARY

IT DOES GET BETTER

You will experience moments when you feel like the world is against you, when nothing seems to work, when it feels like everything that can go wrong has.

There are some circumstances that can't be fixed or made better immediately. There will be times when your world does not feel okay.

As best as possible, you must sit and honor this truth.

In those moments, allow yourself to cry, shout, or be upset. Feel what you feel. But then surrender into what is.

I can't say when or how, but time, surrender, and healing will allow you to find solace.

It does get better. Know this.

15

JANUARY

SHOW UP AND SPEAK UP

Show up in the world in a way that makes you proud. Speak words that you wouldn't be ashamed to hear repeated back to you.

16

JANUARY

YOU CAN BEGIN AGAIN

There will be times when you've come as far as you can, when your heart is broken open and you see no way through.

When those moments present themselves to you, sit quietly, courageously feel what you feel, and then, and only then, let go—as gracefully as you can.

Grace is knowing for certain that you will inevitably be hurt again and knowing just as certainly that you are strong, you are resilient, and all of it will make you more beautiful.