



## The Positivity Ratio, by Barbara Fredrickson

Imagine you're a water lily. It's early dawn and your petals are closed in around your face. If you can see anything at all, it's just a little spot of sunlight. But as the sun rises in the sky, things begin to change. Your blinders around your face begin to open and your world quite literally expands. You can see more. Your world is larger.

Just as the warmth of sunlight opens flowers, the warmth of positivity opens our minds and hearts. It changes our visual perspective at a really basic level, along with our ability to see our common humanity with others.

We know this because we've done studies that show this. [...] Researchers find that when you induce positive emotion, people's brains can't help but pick up on the context, even when they were told to ignore it. When people are feeling neutral or negative emotions, they don't see the context at all.

This suggests that when people experience positive emotions, they have a wider awareness -- which may explain why people have a better memory for peripheral details when they're remembering episodes that were positive. Positive emotions quite literally help us see more possibilities.

But how much positivity do we need in our lives to reap these benefits -- how much is enough? Our research has concluded that a ratio of at least three-to-one -- three positive emotions for every negative emotion -- serves as a tipping point, which will help determine whether you languish in life, barely holding on, or flourish, living a life ripe with possibility, remarkably resilient to hard times.

It's important to note that the ratio is not three-to-zero. This is not about eliminating all negative emotions. Part of this prescription is the idea that negative emotions are actually necessary.

Consider a sailboat metaphor. Rising from the sailboat is the enormous mast, which allows the sail to catch the wind and give the boat momentum. But below the waterline is the keel, which can weigh tons. You can see the mast as positivity and the keel down below as negativity. If you sail, you know that even though it's the mast that holds the sail, you can't sail without the keel; the boat would just drift around or tip over. The negativity, the keel, is what allows the boat to stay on course and manageable.

When I once shared this metaphor with an audience, a gentleman said, "You know, when the keel matters most is when youâ€™re sailing upwind, when youâ€™re facing difficulty." Experiencing and expressing negative emotions is really part of the process for flourishing, even -- or especially -- during hard times, as they help us stay in touch with the reality of the difficulties weâ€™re facing. [...]

Thereâ€™s a Sufi proverb: There wouldnâ€™t be such a thing as counterfeit gold if there were no real gold somewhere. So how can we tap into those genuine, heartfelt positive emotions without grasping for the counterfeit gold?

\_A NOTE FROM THE AWAKIN TEAM: Thanks to our community, we note that the positivity ratio has been thoroughly debunked. The author has also withdrawn her support for that construct. We should have cross-checked this one better. That said, here is a hat-tip to the awesome community of commenters who brought in a gentle balance through their life wisdom in the comments below.\_