

THE GREATER BATON ROUGE

BUSINESS REPORT

IT'S YOUR BUSINESS TO KNOW

Think good thoughts, get good results

As you make your last push toward work, some guy in a red sports car cuts you off in traffic. You walk into the office, and the server's down, so you can't send or get any e-mails.

It's Monday. You've got back-to-back meetings until lunchtime, and your right-hand staffer wants 15 minutes to discuss all the things that are going wrong with her latest project.

How do you react? Do you rant, saying, "Someone cut me off in traffic, darn it. There's no way I'm going to be able to meet my deadline without e-mail. Meetings are a waste of time, so why do we bother?"

Or do you dig right into the day, saying, "Whew. That driver must really be stressed. Without e-mail I'll have a chance to call Jim and see how he's doing. Meetings sometimes go on and on, but there's no better way to get the pulse of the company."

Most of us slide easily into the negative mindset, says Bill Phillips, president of Career Assessment Services in Baton Rouge. **When things go wrong, "we tend to 'awfulize' it."**

A split-second soar—or dip—in your thoughts can change the course of your day, your career and even the fiscal year.

"Recent studies show that optimists excel in school, have better health, make more money, establish long and happy marriages, stay connected to their children and even live longer," writes psychiatrist Alan Loy McGinnis in his book, "The Power of Optimism" (Harper, 1993).

The Bureau of Labor Statistics figures that U.S. companies lose in the neigh-

borhood of \$3 billion a year to negative attitudes and behaviors at work.

One might argue that rose-colored glasses went out the window with the Pets.com puppet and Enron stock. But there's nothing Pollyanna-like about taking a centered, level-headed look at the dilemma du jour.

Doing so actually gives you an edge over those who catastrophize, Phillips says. **It's the difference between being a victim and being an owner.**

Victims, he says, often need a reason to be happy. Owners, on the other hand,

live their lives independent of every day ebbs and flows.

"We think the event causes the emotion," Phillips says. **"The truth is, it's not the event that causes the emotion. It's the thoughts about the event that cause the emotion."**

While victims often feel they have to do this-or-that in order to satisfy others, owners know they are choosing actions that will make life better for themselves and co-workers.

Victims tend to be fragile as eggshells, easily offended. Owners let things roll off their backs.

To communicate owner-versus-victim mentality and behavior, Phillips shows portions of the 1995 film, "Apollo 13," directed by Ron Howard.

In one scene, mission control flight director Gene Kranz, played by Ed Harris, is trying to figure out how to bring back the crew of Apollo 13 after their ship falters.

Mission control staff are yelling and running around like Thanksgiving tur-

keys. A few have solutions, but the general consensus is that there's no way the ship can be brought back to earth.

"We've never lost an American in space, and we're not going to lose one on my watch," Kranz says. "Failure is not an option."

His never-say-die attitude cuts through the catastrophe and makes way for the keen thinking and creative problem solving that eventually help bring the spacecraft home.

"How do you become a Gene Kranz?" Phillips asks. In other words, how does one move from playing the victim to taking ownership in life?

Good question. Here's Phillips' answer: **Begin by attacking one single negative thought that pops into your head more than you'd like.**

Example: Instead of, "Here comes our CEO. He's always strutting like he owns the place, when it's really we staff who do all the hard work," try "Wow, that guy is confident. I'll bet he made some really good choices to get to his level. We can probably learn a lot from him."

Once you've gotten one negative thought under control, you'll be able to move onto the next, then the next, Phillips says, **until many of your views are upbeat.**

What about management? How do you teach your staff to take ownership? **Lead by example,** Phillips says. **"To be a great leader, you have to be someone who takes ownership. Nothing is better than modeling it."**

Business Report staff writer Amy Alexander has doled out management advice internationally through a column for *Investor's Business Daily*. Send questions and suggestions for future columns to aalexander@businessreport.com.



Amy Alexander