

Book Review

The positive dog by Jon Gordon: Book review

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Journal of Online Higher Education

ISSN: 2575-1204

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Jon Gordon is an author and speaker known for preaching behaviors that lead to positive attitudes and positive outcomes. He has worked with Fortune 500 companies and professional sports franchises to build morale, positive energy, and motivation skills. In this book, he takes an approach that at first makes the reader think they have picked up a self-help book for middle school students. However, there is wisdom behind the pages that is presented in a unique and oddly charming way. Gordon presents the content in the form of a discussion between two dogs. This is what leads to the rather juvenile feel of the book as it gets underway. One you get past the seemingly childish theme, however, you begin to understand the wisdom of the message and why it was presented in such a simple way.

Gordon is trying to get across a message that sounds so simple but is indeed immensely challenging: “when you are positive, you not only make yourself better, you make everyone around you better” (Gordon, 2012, p. 56). Reading this book seemed especially fitting considering the state of uneasiness and panic in the age of COVID-19. Gordon outlines in simple steps how to increase positive energy, even considering the negative states we may occasionally find ourselves in. Gordon begins by sharing basic points about serotonin and references research linking behaviors as simple as smiling and laughing as ways to naturally boost serotonin response. The book is an extremely quick read, with several chapters as short as two pages. Each chapter delivers a brief nugget of information based on research in positive psychology.

An excellent summary quote from the message of the story is “all of our negativity is rooted in fear. Complaining, anger, jealousy, and sadness are ultimately caused by fear that expresses itself in negative ways” (Gordon, 2012, p. 43). The book gives examples that are almost parable in nature. These include points such as starting and ending the day with gratitude results in the subconscious replaying positive moments more. Gordon relates negative energy to fear in a way that makes the reader sit back and contemplate what fear is, i.e., driving a negative attitude on any given topic.

In the current COVID-19 pandemic, negative news is everywhere. The book stresses the importance of not always paying attention to the negative news, as it just saps your positivity. With the world in the state that it is presently in, online students and instructors may feel increasingly isolated. When online students and instructors live in normal times, they can get their social interaction at work, with friends, or out on the town. Social connectivity can breed

positive outlooks in people. It falls on higher education leadership to maintain the positive energy and share positive messages to keep morale high with isolated instructors and students. The instructions in the book focus on myriad ways to turn negativity into positivity, turn bad experiences into developmental experiences, and provide a unique perspective to people who do not have those in-personal connections available. Leaders can spread these methods of building positivity with instructors, who can then pass it on to their students.

Many readers will shy away and think the book is geared toward a younger audience if they simply react to the manner in which the story is told rather than the message behind it. This is the genius of this book. It is written in a way that even a child could understand the story and the themes. Working adults, however—facing the stress of work, parenthood, financial insecurity, or fear of the unknown with COVID-19—may find a deeper meaning. Adults may see this quick read as a reminder to regain that positive outlook they were taught as they were raised. Too often it is easy to get bogged down in the stressors of the day, and not sit back and feed off the positive events that still are going on. Behind the juvenile veneer, a method to rethink some parts of our outlook shines.

References

Gordon, J. (2012). *The positive dog*. John Wiley & Sons.