


 Mindset Exercise n/a Client No

My Learnings List

There are valuable lessons to be learned from experiences we might describe as negative or unpleasant. While these experiences might permeate our thoughts and behaviors long after an incident is over, we do not need to focus solely on the negative effects of adverse events. We tend to identify an experience as positive or negative subjectively based on our perceptions of it. However, it is possible to challenge one's past declarations about negative experiences by looking for the positive lessons within each.

Benefit finding, or the process of deriving positive growth from adversity, has been shown to reduce stress while improving resilience and coping skills [1]. Moreover, benefit finding shows a positive correlation with posttraumatic growth [2], provides direction and meaning in everyday life, and helps adults make sense of significant personal loss [3]. Learning positive lessons from negative life experiences is at the heart of developing a growth mindset [4] and serves as a powerful catalyst for personal improvement. People with a growth mindset tend to perceive failures as an opportunity to learn and develop, not as a condemnation [4,5]. Further, the act of writing down and recording one's experiences of benefit finding has been associated with increased positive affect and growth [6].

Learning to translate negatives into opportunities for growth allows us to better understand past events, modify our behavior in the future, and gain insights into our attributes [7]. Indeed, in the wake of negative life experiences, many people discover a newfound appreciation for their resilience and strength, increased closeness with others, greater compassion, and changes in life philosophies [8]. Ultimately, the times that challenge us the most also have the potential to be transformed into valuable life lessons. This exercise will guide clients through the process of benefit finding by uncovering the potential positive lessons emerging from negative experiences.



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Goal

This exercise aims to promote a growth mindset through the process of benefit finding from adversity. In doing so, clients will create a personal "Learnings List" that will help them uncover positive aspects of negative experiences.



Advice

- A Learnings List should be thought of as an ever-growing list that will help clients find positive aspects of negative experiences. Adding to the Learnings List regularly can help clients get in the habit of making the most out of difficult times instead of focusing solely on the negative. With practice, clients will begin to look for positive lessons in challenging situations naturally. Clients should continue adding to their list as they recall past experiences or go through new ones.
- Clients should ensure that their Learnings List is displayed in a prominent location to serve as a reminder to use the list, reflect upon it, and add to it when needed.
- Clients may use the worksheet provided (Appendix A) or use a notebook or journal to record the lessons learned from negative experiences. Example workbook entries are also provided (Appendix B).



References

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My Learnings List

No one is immune to negative experiences, and life is full of things that we would not want to repeat. While these experiences are never desirable, they are ripe with opportunities to learn important lessons about life and ourselves. When we look for ways to grow as people, we tend to look to positive experiences. However, we can also learn positive lessons from negative experiences. Negative experiences can be turned into positive learning experiences, but only if we consciously look for the benefits. For example, a rejection might remind us to be grateful for what we have, the loss of a job might create an opportunity to expand one's education, or the end of a relationship may mean that other relationships can flourish.

This exercise will help you explore past negative experiences and guide you through the process of benefit finding so that you can create a Learnings List. This list will be a powerful reminder of the lessons you have learned from the negative experiences in your past.

Step 1: Identifying a negative experience

In this step, you will take a moment to think of a negative experience from the past that left you with the thought, 'never again.' This might include an event, behavior, or action, or an unpleasant experience that was particularly challenging or emotionally difficult. For example, perhaps you let someone down, maybe you lost your job, made a big mistake at work, or stayed in a relationship that made you unhappy.

Write this experience down in part 1 of the worksheet provided (Appendix A). Completed examples can also be found in Appendix B. You may record your Learnings List in a notebook or a journal. You should continue to add to this list anytime you have an experience you do not wish to repeat.

Step 2: Identifying why you never want to do this again

The best way to learn from your experiences is to understand them. In this step, you will think about this negative experience in greater detail and list reasons why you wish to avoid repeating it in the future. The following questions will help you see the experience a little more clearly and make better choices in the future and avoid going through the same thing again.

Use your responses to the questions below to complete section 2 of the worksheet provided.

- How did this experience make you feel?
- What three words would you associate with this event or experience?
- What negative consequences did this experience have?
- What is the main reason you wish to avoid this in the future?



Step 3: The lessons I have learned

This step is all about making the most out of negative experiences by looking for the lessons that can be learned from them. Consider someone who has recently become unemployed. While this experience tends to be mostly negative, it still has the potential to teach positive lessons. For example, this person may have been unhappy in that position and feel that he/she can finally pursue another role, have more time to work on themselves, or return to education. Even negative experiences can teach us valuable lessons about ourselves and the world around us.

Keeping the negative experience clear in your mind, consider the following questions, and use your responses to complete the final part of the worksheet provided.

- What has this experience taught you about yourself?
- What are some positive things that emerged from this experience?
- What has this experience made you feel grateful for?
- In what ways has this experience changed how you think about things you cannot change or control?
- Has this experience strengthened your relationships with others?
- In what ways has this experience helped you grow as a person?
- If this experience were to happen again, what could you do to make the most of it?
- In what ways do you think this experience has prepared you to face similar challenges in the future?
- If you find yourself in a similar situation in the future, what would you do differently?

Remember, your Learnings List is an ever-changing record that will continue to help you learn about yourself. Display your list in a prominent location and keep adding to it as you recall past negative experiences or go through new ones.

Step 4: Reflection Questions

What was it like to complete this activity?

What feelings came up for you throughout the exercise?

What did you learn from this exercise?

What other events or experiences will you add to your learnings list?

In what ways has this exercise changed how you think about negative life events?

What is the most valuable lesson you have learned from a negative experience?



Appendix A: My Learnings List Worksheet

1. In the future, I do not want to

2. I will avoid repeating this because

3. This is the lesson this experience taught me:



Appendix B: Learnings List Worksheet Examples

Example 1:

1. In the future, I do not want to waste money on things I don't want or need to impress the neighbors.
2. I will avoid repeating this because it makes me feel so ashamed afterward. When I spend money on pointless things, it puts more pressure on my family and me. Sometimes it means we can't pay our bills on time. It's not fair to them, and it's irresponsible of me to keep spending money on things we don't need.
3. This is the lesson this experience taught me: I have learned that I must budget and stick to it as much as possible. I know that when I put my mind to it, I can do it. As a family, our money goes much further when I plan ahead and work out a spending plan. I have also learned that I do not need to impress my neighbors - my family's happiness is more important.

Example 2:

1. In the future, I do not want to say 'yes' to something that I know I won't be able to do.
2. I will avoid repeating this because I hated how it felt to disappoint my loved ones. I said I would help when I knew I didn't have time to do so. They depended on me, I let them down, and they were annoyed with me, and I felt guilty because of it.
3. This is the lesson this experience taught me: It is better to say 'no' to something that I know I won't be able to do. I have to learn to be honest with others, even when I want to help out. If I stop saying 'yes' to every little thing, I don't have to break promises that I have made, and I don't feel so guilty when I don't have time to help.