

# SIGMA EI Series



## Great Leaders Redirect Attention



## GREAT LEADERS REDIRECT ATTENTION

“ You have power over your mind – not outside events. Realize this, and you will find strength.

– Marcus Aurelius

No one escapes challenges, especially in the workplace; from daily stressors to bad performance evaluations, conflicts, lay-offs, lost clients, failed projects, or missed promotions, challenges are to be expected. For this reason, it is important to remember that we can choose to find the good in any situation. This, in essence, is what mood redirected attention is all about. Mood redirected attention involves reinterpreting negative experiences in a positive light. This is an especially important skill for leaders.

The ability to use mood redirected attention helps leaders make the most of challenging times. Studies have shown that difficulties can spur us to learn and grow, put our values into focus, and foster positive behavioral changes.<sup>1</sup> For example, losing a big client could push an organization to innovate, improving their products and services, which then allows them to attract new clients. It's especially important for leaders to practice mood redirected attention, as this will allow them to grow amidst challenge and maintain an optimistic outlook on life. This benefits leaders' own mental health<sup>2</sup> and resilience<sup>3</sup>, and it also helps motivate and inspire others.

In assessing your ability to redirect your attention, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I take the time to reflect on what I've learned from challenging experiences at work?
- Can I point to benefits that have resulted from experiencing negative emotions at work?
- When faced with difficulties at work, am I able to find something positive?
- When I think about negative experiences, am I able to identify things I am thankful for?

### Strengthen Your Mood Redirection Skills

**Learn through other's stories:** When we undergo difficulties, it can be hard to keep our struggles in perspective. If you are having a hard time finding the upside to a negative situation, it can be helpful to listen to stories about others who have gone through hardships and come out stronger or even grateful for those experiences. Some examples you might find inspiring include the biographies of Malala Yousafzai, Victor Frankl, Frida Kahlo, Nelson Mandela, Oprah, and Christopher Reeve.

**Reflect on your values:** When we experience challenges at work, it is an opportunity to reflect on what we value most. For example, if you are turned down for a promotion you will likely be disappointed. However, rather than focusing only on what you've missed (e.g., a raise), consider the things you may also have had to give up. Perhaps the new role would have meant more business trips and client dinners, taking away time from family and friends. Reflect on your values and decide how much each of these things matter to you. Maybe maintaining your current work/life balance is more important than the prestige of a new job. Alternatively, maybe you decide the trade-off is worth it. If so, you may find yourself motivated to work harder towards similar opportunities in the future. By maintaining an awareness of your values, you can reframe challenges as an opportunity to reinforce what really matters to you.

**Counter your negativity bias:** Most people are biased to pay more attention to the negatives than the positives. Although this is thought to be an adaptive survival mechanism that allows people to avoid potential threats, it is not always helpful in our everyday lives. Particularly in the workplace, a negativity bias can prevent you from connecting with others, innovating, and doing your best work.<sup>4</sup> For example, when receiving feedback, most people focus on criticisms and overlook the compliments. To counterbalance this tendency, take time to appreciate the good things that happen every day. Even small things, like your morning coffee or a smile from a co-worker, can help you focus on the positive and develop a sense of gratitude.<sup>5</sup>

## Start Doing These 3 Things Now to Enhance Your Ability to Redirect Your Attention

The following steps can help you improve your ability to redirect your attention:

- 1. Remember past challenges.** When you're facing a stressful situation at work, it can be helpful to reflect on the prior challenges you've faced and how you got through them. Knowing that you have encountered similar situations in the past and survived them can give you the confidence to know that you will get through this difficulty too.
- 2. Manage your stress levels.** When we experience hard times, it can be easy to get stuck in negative thought patterns. The more stressed we are the harder it is to notice these patterns, and exercise mood redirected attention. This can cause us to ruminate on negative experiences and become more prone to depression.<sup>6</sup> You can help break this cycle by taking steps to manage your stress. Ensure that you are getting enough sleep, exercising, eating regularly, and investing in healthy relationships. Because stress negatively impacts our mood,<sup>7</sup> taking steps to manage your stress levels can improve your overall mood and help you to take a positive perspective on life.<sup>8</sup>
- 3. Turn obstacles into opportunities.** One powerful method to shift your attention is to practice cognitive reframing. Cognitive reframing is the psychological process of identifying, then changing the way we interpret our experiences. Ask yourself questions like, "What can I learn?", "Is there a greater purpose behind this?", and "What am I grateful for?" Doing so will help you shift the way you view yourself and your surroundings, and help you create more positive interpretations of events.<sup>9</sup>

## Resources



[My Philosophy for a Happy Life \(2013\)](#) – Sam Berns, TedxMidAtlantic



[36 Ways to Find a Silver Lining During Challenging Times – Heather S. Lonczak, Ph.D.](#)



[Develop](#) your ability to redirect your attention by taking advantage of SIGMA's coaching services.

Contact SIGMA for coaching on developing your skills as a leader.

SIGMA Assessment Systems, Inc.

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Call: 800-265-1285

## References

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