



**The true cost of
negativity bias for
your business**

TRACOM[®]

CONTENTS

Introduction	3	Scenario 2: Employee departure – Magnifying	10
Overcoming Our Human Nature	4	Scenario 3: Sales targets – Catastrophizing	11
Why Negativity Traps Should Be Prevented	5	Scenario 4: New project proposal – Blaming	12
What Does a Resilient Employee Do Differently?	6	Scenario 5: Deal or no deal – Internalizing	13
What Triggers Our Negativity at Work?	7	Scenario 6: Offshore acquisition – Assuming	14
What Can We Do to Adapt Our Mindset and Reduce Negative Thinking?	8	The Benefits of Adaptive Mindset® for Resilience from TRACOM	15
Negativity Bias in Action	9	The End Game: Resilience	16
Scenario 1: Monthly C-Suite meeting – Comparing	9		

For most businesses, employees are one of your biggest—if not the biggest—asset. But looking after the wellbeing of your employees is a job that is never completed.

In today's world, the sheer number of inputs and stressors that we are exposed to daily puts our mental wellbeing under pressure. Sometimes we get overwhelmed and when that happens, we are not operating at our best. When that feeling is multiplied across whole teams and departments of employees, you see how this has the potential to cause a downward trend in output and business success.





Overcoming Our Human Nature

We have an inherent human tendency to focus on the negative. This is called the negativity bias and is a part of our DNA. The negativity bias has played a role in the survival of the human species for millennia.

It's human nature to fear the worst because as we evolved, our very existence depended on it. The racing heartbeat and surge of panic we feel when our boss calls us into the office or our presentation fails is the same biological response our ancestors felt when their safety was threatened by a predator or lack of food.

Before we know it, a stress response kicks in and negativity bias plays havoc with our day and our performance. We don't see the opportunity for learning or growth—we just see the predator on the horizon.

But today, we don't have the same threats to our safety. Instead, our negativity bias manifests during periods of uncertainty at work, when we feel under pressure to perform, and when we fear the worst. It's our natural tendency to expect the worst that causes us to fall into the negativity trap.

There is good news. Research shows that 91% of the things we worry about don't happen. And when our fears do come true, most of the time things work out better than we expected. The negativity bias causes us to expend energy worrying about things that almost never happen when we would be better served using that energy productively. We shouldn't always expect the worst.

Why Negativity Traps Should Be Prevented

There are two ways to look at it: from a personal perspective and from an organizational perspective. Of course, both are linked, given that the people who work at your company are such an important asset.

At a personal level, negativity traps triggered by our negativity bias cause more stress. This stress results in poor focus on the work at hand, low engagement with the company, and reduced effectiveness. Emotions are contagious, and when this impact is multiplied across a large portion of the workforce, you can easily see how company performance is at risk through reduced productivity, high staff turnover, and a negative company culture.

But it is possible to change these mental patterns. Our negativity bias can be interrupted, and we can learn skills to adapt our mindset.

We can learn how to become more mentally resilient.





What Does a Resilient Employee Do Differently?

Those with a resilient mindset have developed a fundamental way of thinking that allows them to persevere through challenges. They adapt to stressors and change in a way that not only allows them to bounce back, but to grow from the experience. In other words, they bounce forward by finding opportunities in adversity.

In our research, we've found that resilient people share several characteristics. They:

- ▶ Believe they control their own future
- ▶ See the world in a positive but realistic way
- ▶ Maintain a sense of calm and focus in the face of stress
- ▶ Have a strong social support network
- ▶ Face stress rather than withdraw from it

This is all good news for your business, and it's why falling into the negativity trap should be avoided.

What Triggers Our Negativity at Work?

Negativity bias tips employees into the negativity trap. So, to avoid this happening, let's look at the six main ways that negativity bias can present itself. They are:

▶ **COMPARING:**

This happens when you interpret events using unrealistic standards, or you focus on others who seem to do better than you.

▶ **MAGNIFYING:**

This happens when you fall into a loop of focusing on the negative aspects of a situation and ignore the positive.

▶ **CATASTROPHIZING:**

This happens when you think that the worst possible outcome is the most likely outcome.

▶ **BLAMING:**

This happens when you blame others for the situation and don't take appropriate personal responsibility.

▶ **INTERNALIZING:**

This happens when you attribute a disproportionate amount of blame to yourself when things go wrong and fail to see that some events are out of your control. It's almost like the opposite of blaming.

▶ **ASSUMING:**

This happens when you generalize from negative things that have happened before and think they're going to be true in every other similar situation.

What Can We Do to Adapt Our Mindset and Reduce Negative Thinking?

The Adaptive Mindset® for Resilience training program from TRACOM uses techniques rooted in cognitive behavioral therapy to help individuals replace automatic, negative thoughts with active thinking and a more realistic response.

Unexpected things will happen to everyone. But people can learn how to not derail themselves with negative thoughts. They can prevent the negativity trap from triggering at all or recover faster when it does.

They learn about skills that research shows strengthen mental resilience, and they create an individual plan to practice these skills to be better prepared for adversity and change. These skills include:

▶ **REALISTIC OPTIMISM:**

The ability to stay positive while remaining grounded in reality.

▶ **SELF-ASSURANCE:**

The belief in yourself to successfully perform your work.

▶ **SELF-COMPOSURE:**

The ability to manage stress and remain calm under pressure.

▶ **SOCIAL SUPPORT:**

Having at least one person with whom you can have meaningful and supportive discussions.

▶ **GOAL ORIENTATION:**

Making your future concrete by developing specific and achievable plans instead of passively hoping that the future will work out.

▶ **COURAGEOUS COMMUNICATION:**

Speaking candidly during difficult times when the situation requires it, which is much more effective than delaying these challenging discussions.

▶ **PROBLEM SOLVING:**

The ability to plan and effectively resolve problems, generating innovative solutions that enhance your belief in yourself to manage issues in the future.

These skills don't just benefit the individual in isolation. When teams are equipped with the same training on avoiding negativity traps, the organization sees the benefits.

Negativity Bias in Action

It's helpful to look at some example scenarios where negativity bias might impact your people and your business. By flipping the switch to a more grounded, realistic outlook, you create resilience in individuals that translates into resilience for your business.

Scenario 1: Monthly C-Suite meeting – Comparing

Negativity bias WINS:

“I’m not as good at my job as you.”

Marketing Director Katrina watches Sales Director Steven present his monthly figures on an impressive PowerPoint slideshow with colorful graphs, nifty widgets and powerful quotes from customers. She compares her own simple presentation to Steven's, wishing she'd been more creative. As a result, Katrina lacks confidence in her own suitability for her job and her presentation falls flat.

Negativity bias is DEFEATED:

“My work is valuable and meaningful.”

Katrina realizes that although Steven's graphs and slides are attractive to look at, her simply presented figures actually show an upward trajectory while his are stagnant. As a result, she feels confident in her ability to do her job and focuses on what's important to the CFO in that moment—the numbers.



With a resilient mindset, leaders are **14%** more likely to stay engaged in work during times of high stress.¹

1. Connection Between Resilience and Job Performance, TRACOM Group Research

Scenario 2: Employee departure – Magnifying

Negativity bias WINS:

“This hard work has gone to waste.”

Laura, a team leader who is working on a big new HR project, is due to leave the business four weeks prior to the completion of the project. Her co-lead Amanda magnifies the potential problems associated with Laura’s departure and worries about how the team will cope without her knowledge of the project. Amanda feels demotivated about the project because of her fears that it might be derailed at the last minute, or they might not meet the deadline.

Negativity bias is DEFEATED:

“This project will succeed.”

Amanda focuses on the new employee who is taking Laura’s role and the potential fresh skills, ideas, enthusiasm, and motivation which she can bring to the project in the closing stages. Rather than assuming the project won’t succeed as well as expected, Amanda realizes it could be an even bigger success than if Laura had remained until the end.



Resilient individuals are better at finding opportunities in workplace challenges.

Scenario 3: Sales targets – Catastrophizing

Negativity bias WINS:

“I’m not going to reach my targets.”

Lead salesman Gunter is worried he’s not going to hit his quarterly sales targets and begins to panic about the promises he has made to his wife and children—a trip to Disney and possibly a new car—based on the bonuses he was expecting. He catastrophizes what this will mean for his family life and loses confidence in his own abilities. His personal stress levels translate into lackluster, tense sales calls which perpetuate the problem.

Negativity bias is DEFEATED:

“I’m capable and likely to reach my targets.”

Gunter keeps his targets at the front of his mind every time he picks up the phone to make a sales call. He knows he can reach his target—he’s done it before—and comes up with new strategies and offers that will help him reach it.



Thanks to resilience training, sales teams can see a **16%** increase in consistently high performance.²

Scenario 4: New project proposal – Blaming

Negativity bias WINS:

“I wasn’t given enough time to prepare.”

Neil receives negative feedback on a project that he has been championing and learns that the review team expected more detailed responses to their questions. He blames his boss for not supporting him enough and for not giving him enough time to prepare his proposal.

Negativity bias is DEFEATED:

“This was my responsibility; I’ll learn from this experience.”

Neil realizes that he didn’t provide enough supporting data and substance in his presentation, thinking that his enthusiasm would be enough. He recognizes that the responsibility rested with him to ensure he planned, researched, and completed his proposal to ensure it was well received.



Resilient employees are rated **18%** better at fostering a positive workplace culture.³

Scenario 5: Deal or no deal – Internalizing

Negativity bias WINS:

“It’s all my fault this has gone wrong.”

Sofia has put in hours of work with a prospective client and built up a strong relationship but suddenly the client calls to say that they can’t sign the deal due to last minute budget cuts. Sofia internalizes the situation, focusing on her failings as a salesperson, questioning the interactions that didn’t go according to plan or the times she missed a call from the client, wondering where she went wrong.

Negativity bias is DEFEATED:

“This outcome was out of my hands.”

Sofia listens to the client’s reasons and understands that the client cannot sign the deal because her budgets have been cut, rather than it being a reflection on Sofia as a person, the product itself or her sales skills. She refocuses her efforts on discovering new client opportunities.



Optimistic salespeople sell **56%** more than their pessimistic counterparts.⁴

4. Achor, S., The Happiness Advantage/ The seven principles of positive psychology that fuel success and performance at work. New York/ Crown Publishing Group

Scenario 6: Offshore acquisition – Assuming

Negativity bias WINS:

“Why does this keep happening to me?”

Mike works for a company that has just been acquired by an offshore business. This is the third time he’s worked at a company that’s been acquired and he feels like it’s his “personal destiny” to end up in this position. He assumes this time will be just like the others and he’ll get transferred to a lower status position before being made redundant. He complains to colleagues, affecting their morale too.

Negativity bias is DEFEATED:

“This is just random luck and has nothing to do with me.”

Mike realizes that acquisitions are common, and that it’s just random chance that he’s been affected so many times. He takes positive action by seeking out colleagues in other departments to make connections and gather more information. He realizes that the acquisition could mean new career opportunities and starts to investigate what these might be, while also preparing to search for a new job, just in case.

In scenarios like these, it’s helpful to slow down our initial negative responses to challenges and reduce the negative emotional impact, allowing us to instead focus on realistic outcomes.



Individuals who’ve undergone resilience training are rated **21%** better at positively influencing others during times of change.⁵

The Benefits of Adaptive Mindset® for Resilience from TRACOM

The benefits of Adaptive Mindset® for Resilience can be divided into three areas: personal, team and organizational.

On a personal level, individuals benefit from:

- ▶ Lower fear reactions to stressful situations.
- ▶ Improved overall health and wellbeing and a reduced chance of burnout.

Resilient individuals are **22% more likely to be unaffected during stressful situations.** ⁶

At a team/departmental level, managers will see:

- ▶ Engaged and focused employees who bring more motivation and perseverance to their tasks and projects.
- ▶ Better engagement with colleagues and the ability to maintain a more optimistic and productive outlook on situations to ensure consistently good morale.

Strong team players who can see opportunity are **15% more likely to initiate appropriate action to challenges at work.** ⁷

At an organizational level, companies will see:

- ▶ Increased employee satisfaction and reduced employee turnover.
- ▶ Overall improved productivity and a more agile organization.

Resilient individuals are **15% more actively supportive of change in the organization.** ⁸

The End Game: Resilience


The power of Adaptive Mindset® for Resilience from TRACOM is that it doesn't stop employees experiencing negative bias. Instead, it gives them the tools to recognize when it is happening, interrupt those negative thoughts, and reverse them.

Resilience is what we develop when we employ this active thinking to overcome our negativity traps.

Resilience is not just a soft skill; it is a survival skill that enables people to move through life's challenges; to not only bounce back but to bounce forward and grow from adversity.

Resilient employees are exactly the kind of people organizations need. You can develop these skills throughout your organization. The result is a team of high-performing people with good attitudes who are committed to your organization and thrive in periods of change.⁹ They are capable of meeting today's ever-changing work demands.

9. Shin, J., Taylor, M.S., & Seo, M., Resources for change: The relationships of organizational inducements and psychological Resilience to employees' attitudes and behaviors toward organizational change. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55(3), 727-748



Want to know how negativity bias might be influencing your company's performance? Get an inside look at the Adaptive Mindset® for Resilience program from TRACOM by signing up for a showcase.