

# Think Positive

*A Q&A between Robert Garvey of Entrepreneur Magazine and Bobbe Sommer, PhD*

## From "Entrepreneur" interview...

**Entrepreneur:** Can we really program ourselves for success?

**Bobbe Sommer:** Yes, [but most people program themselves] for failure or accepting the status quo.

There is a part of the brain called the reticular activation system (RAS). Its job is to sort through the many alternatives in our environment and cull the ones to bring to our attention. In bringing some thing to our attention, the RAS also keeps us from noticing many other. Buy a new red Ford and, all of a sudden, what do you see everywhere? Red Fords. What don't you see? All the other cars.

When you're on a highway and suddenly realize you're hungry, what do you see everywhere? Billboards for food. You didn't see them before but they were always there. Entrepreneurs can put this principle to work for them by stimulating their RAS to seek growth opportunities. Pretty soon, what will they notice? Opportunities they might well have ignored in an increasingly busy, hectic world.

**Entrepreneur:** Can this principle work against us?

**Sommer:** We all suffer from a psychological blind spot -- we don't see what we don't want to see. If you have a negative attitude about your business prospects, you'll see gloom and doom everywhere

## Introduction

Is your mind on your side as you build your business? Don't be too quick to insist it is. Many of us undermine our business growth and success by getting stuck in old negative-thinking habits, warns Bobbe Sommer, author of *Psycho-Cybernetics 2000* (Prentice Hall), the authorized revitalization and update of the late Dr. Maxwell Maltz's classic self-help bestseller *Psycho-Cybernetics* (Prentice Hall, 1960). "Negative thinking is epidemic, and worse, most of us are unconscious that we're doing it. That's what makes it so dangerous," says Sommer.

The good news is that positive-thinking habits are easily formed, and once they're set in our minds, we'll find ourselves taking faster steps toward our goals and building success upon success, promises Sommer. "We can program ourselves for positive or negative results," she says. "The choice is ours."

Sommer herself is vivid proof of positive thinking. Fifteen years ago, she was a psychotherapist in private practice. By chance, she happened to learn about Maltz's pioneering work in the psychology of success and decided to put the theories into action.

Starting from ground zero, she set a goal of becoming an acclaimed international speaker. That was a huge leap -- one of her psychiatrist partners even said she was nuts ("That was his professional opinion," Sommer quips) -- but today she is a busy speaker and business consultant as well as creator of the videotape "How to Set And Achieve Goals" (Career Track). Sommer shares the mental strategies that can put you on the path to similar success.

and won't notice the possibilities more optimistic competitors may be seizing.

We can consciously -- or unconsciously, which is more typical -- set our course for failure. ..or success. If we become aware that we're programming ourselves for failure, we can consciously make changes.

**Entrepreneur:** Do most entrepreneurs have a positive attitude or a negative one?

**Sommer:** Have you heard of the "knock-on-wood syndrome"? If I report that my business is prospering, my kids are doing fine, and my health is great, somebody's bound to say, "Knock on wood." It's a cliché, but it puts a disclaimer on all the positives.

There are dozens of these sayings: "It's too good to be true," "All good things must come to an end," "Don't get your hopes up." We've all heard them, often from our own parents, and we can still hear them in our minds.

How many positive sayings are there? Not many. Unfortunately, the negativity around us becomes part of our conditioning. It shapes our expectations -- unless we make a conscious effort to change.

**Entrepreneur:** You're saying we let false beliefs rule us?

**Sommer:** Most of us do exactly that. We hear it's impossible to make a profit with a restaurant or too difficult to do business in Southern California and, right there, we stop ourselves in our tracks. We won't even test the beliefs validity.

In that regard, we're little different than trained elephants. You've seen them at the circus, held in place by a short chain attached to a stake that's pounded into the ground. How hard would it be for the elephant to uproot the stake? But the elephant won't even try. Why? As a baby it was staked in place, and it tried and failed to budge the stake. Over time, it learned its lesson: The stake cannot be moved. Of course, the idea is completely false now that the elephant has grown, but it doesn't know that. Sadly, in plenty of instances where we let old programming hold us down, [we act just as foolishly].

**Entrepreneur:** One of your mottoes is "Fake it till you make it." What does that mean?

**Sommer:** Back when I decided I wanted to be a speaker, I began to see myself as though I had gone through the process of becoming a speaker. I joined the National Speakers Association. I made five cold calls a day to potential clients. I had a whole list of to-dos.

In this process, I was changing my self-image and mentally seeing myself as a speaker. Of course, I knew I wasn't one yet, but I also knew that if I kept taking the steps, completing the interim goals, I would get there. The benefit is that this faking stimulates your RAS so it begins to look for and find opportunities that help turn faking into reality.

**Entrepreneur:** Can't we get into trouble faking it? If we fake we're wealthy and spend accordingly, that's a prescription for disaster.

**Sommer:** Exactly. Sometimes this idea is put forth minus the steps, the interim goals, and, yes, that

kind of faking can cause difficulties. That's not constructive faking; it's destructive.

When I talk about faking, I mean do your homework. Then you can fake already having arrived at the goal because you know you're taking the steps that will make the end result a reality.

***Yes, you can program yourself for success!***

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