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Lecture: 15

Role of Positivity in Public Speaking

Good morning friends and welcome back to NPTEL course on Public Speaking. If you all

remember well, in the previous lecture we had talked about glossophobia--- that is anxiety of

speech. We also talked about nervousness and we could also find out how this glossophobia

actually halts our speech, our presentation and at times it actually raises the anxiety level to

an extent when a person, despite having the content well prepared, is not able to speak out.

Now we discussed various reasons for it but then today we are going to talk about how these

can be controlled. How these can be overcome. And for this we have titled today's talk as

"Role of Positivity in Public Speaking." For that matter I think positivity is not only essential

in public speaking but in life as well. Now where does this positivity come from or what are

actually the different ways to become positive. Because by positivity what actually we are

trying to understand is the importance of positive thinking in handling the moments of

turbulence, the moments of nervousness, the moments of stage fright, where we think of

flight or fight. And so, positive thinking is the urgent need to have a control over

glossophobia or anxiety. Now what is this positive thinking? It has been discussed by many

authors, many people in varied ways but when we talk about positive thinking, one name that

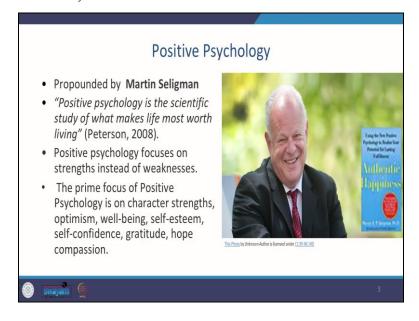
comes straight to our minds is none other than Norman Vincent Peale.

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Defining Positive Thinking "Positive thinking is a positive mental attitude that firmly believes that things will soon be better and with that belief, one can overcome any type of difficulty in his favor." - Norman Vincent Peale

Now, Norman Vincent Peale while defining positive thinking says--- "Positive thinking is actually a positive mental attitude that firmly believes that things will soon be better and with that belief, one can overcome any type of difficulty in his favour. Now, we have earlier talked about attitude. Today we are going to talk about that positive attitude positive, mental attitude which can actually help an individual come out of difficulty. Or can help one control the difficulty or overcome the difficulty and bring the difficulty in his own favour. One can overcome any type of difficulty in his favour with the help of positive thinking. And this positive thinking can be considered as positivity. Now, before we go into the details of positivity, it is time that we discussed positive psychology. My dear friends, this term positive psychology was first propounded by Martin Seligman.

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In earlier lectures also we have come across this name, Martin Seligman. Now Martin Seligman when he discusses this positive psychology, he has several ways to offer, isn't it? In this regard, it is worth mentioning what Peterson says—"Positive Psychology is the scientific study of what makes life most worth living." All of us have at times some weak moments in our life we are low, low in terms of our confidence.

We actually, at times, feel there are certain things which are going to get us down. We are going to be written off very soon. And especially in public speaking while a person goes to the dais and at the very moment when he has to face the crowd and address the crowd, he is under the grip of a glossophobia and is not able to speak at that time. What can come to his help is this positive attitude.

This positive psychology focuses on strengths, instead of weaknesses. There are several ways to be positive. We shall also discuss and throw light on them. So, when we talk about positive psychology, positive psychology focuses on strengths. If you simply sit for a while in isolation and think about yourself-- what are your strengths and weaknesses, then you will find that you have quite a good number of strengths but only a little bit of nervousness can bring the entire thing to a halt.

So, the prime focus of positive psychology is on character strength. We have talked about personality where we have also talked about well-being, happiness, fine? Now while we are talking about these character strengths, you will find most successful people on this earth have been those who have been very optimistic. Now when we talk about optimism we all know that there is optimism, there is pessimism. The optimist will always see something hopeful whereas the pessimist will always think something to be dark, shadowy where he always feels like I am going soon to be fainted. I cannot do this it is not in my control. So, optimism is very important. Now how can this optimism come to every individual? Actually, in many books, many psychologists have gone to the extent of saying that one should always have a belief in one's ability. One should always have a sort of self-esteem, self-confidence, gratitude, hope and compassion. These are actually the traits of positive psychology.

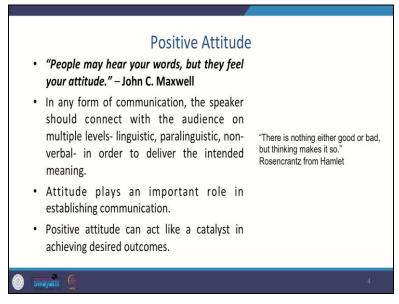
Now if one actually delves deep into the world of positive psychology, one will come across positive attitude. I mean as Maxwell has rightly said people may hear your words but they feel your attitude. Have you to also not at times judged a person based on the way he uses

words but also the way because through his words he is also showing his own attitude. Through one's action through, one's emotion, through one's behavioural pattern, through one's reaction.

So, and especially in public speaking you will find that audience members actually judge a speaker based on the speaker's actions and also of a speaker's words. You know, my dear friends, the world is full of words. Now for the optimist he will always choose words which have got strengths whereas for the pessimist, a pessimist is a person who always looks at the dark side of things.

And for them even things which are very small and things which can be done very easily they appear to him to be very difficult because he is weak in his confidence. He is low in his confidence. In this regard if we can take one line from a Shakespeare's *Hamlet* where one character named Rosencrantz says,

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"There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so". What actually is the implication of this sentence? I mean if a man always looks forward to, if a man always thinks of good things, good things may happen to him. But then there is another category of person who always has a lurking fear in him that things may not be good and for such people things, of course, do not turn out to be good.

In any form of communication especially in terms of public speaking, you will find the speaker-- the person who addresses a gathering a crowd. He actually has to connect on

multiple levels, what are those levels. As a speaker, we bring a sort of content---- the content

is full of words, it is full of sentences, it is full of phrases but then apart from that I mean why

we say that multiple levels? It is not only at the level of language that is linguistic. But para

language because you know you not only concentrate on the person's words you also

concentrate on the person's non-words. I mean one's non-verbal behaviour because you know

when a man speaks something you can get a sort of affirmation or a negation the way he uses

that words and you can see that a person which optimistic will show much of radiance while

using the words.

So, paralinguistic also. Then non-verbal in order to deliver the intended meaning. All of you

when you get a topic for a presentation or a or a speech. Now what one does one actually

goes to choose the words depending upon the audience members- the audience members are

multilingual, multicultural, multi levels of experience they have, and that is why the choice of

the words lies with the speaker.

We have from time to time been saying that words do not have any meaning. People actually

attach meaning to the words. That is why when you watch a play you can find when a

character utters a dialogue. The way the dialogue is delivered and the way the emphasis is put

on the words you actually get to know the entire interpretation of the dialogue and that is also

with the help of the attitude.

So, attitude I mean here, positive attitude plays an important role in establishing

communication. We have already been saying right from the beginning that communication

has to be two-way--- between the sender and the receiver, and it actually has some common

grounds where credibility matters co-operation matters. Where there is mutual cooperation

existence cordiality. And in this regard positive attitude can act like a catalyst in achieving

desired outcomes.

So, is not positive attitude very important for a public speaker? Yes. Now I can give you

certain examples which I have culled from some book. Actually there can be happiness, there

can be sorrow, there can be anger, there can be sadness. So, there can be three types of

happiness. Happiness which accrues from life's satisfaction. We can see the sentences which

often foretell are the sort of happiness one has.

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Examples	Causes
• I think my life is great • I am satisfied with my job	A good income Achieving one's goals High self-esteem
Enjoying life Loving others	Supportive friends Interesting work Extroverted personality
Few chronic worries Rarely sad or angry	Low neuroticism One's goals are in harmony A positive outlook
Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under <u>CC BY-SA-N</u>	NC
	I think my life is great I am satisfied with my job Enjoying life Loving others Few chronic worries Rarely sad or angry

I think my life is great ---that is an optimistic view. I am satisfied with my job. But at the same time how can you be how can you have such feelings, maybe you have a very good income, you are able to achieve your own goal you also have a sort of high self- respect ,self-esteem. So, the first category of happiness is life satisfaction. Satisfaction in life and for that you need a sort of positive attitude.

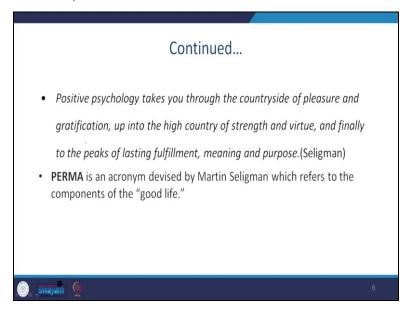
Now, one can have positive feelings also in life what are those positive feelings one can enjoy life no we often tell people enjoy life the way it comes to you. Life may have certain ups it may also have certain downs. And you know when one is very positive one always looks forward loves others enjoys life. One has a lot of friends, one also finds one's work very interesting and such a person is often extrovert.

We have in previous lectures talked about extrovert people, introvert people fine. We can categorize people on four levels. Somebody may be imposing, one who will trust one's views on you somebody who will be hideous, he may smile and smile and yet be a villain. There may be another category of people who will be optimistic. He will always see a sunshine wherever possible but then another category of person who is pessimistic negative.

He will always say---- oh no, no I cannot do this. The world is a very bad place to live in. Now there are people having low negative feelings such people often have chronic worries mostly they are found fine sad angry. We can also call such people as hypochondriac, is not it? Such people can never enjoy life and then such people the causes of such people being low in terms of their esteem or feelings is because of low neuroticism.

One does not find one's goal in harmony and one actually has even though has a positive outlook but always finds a sort of negativity.

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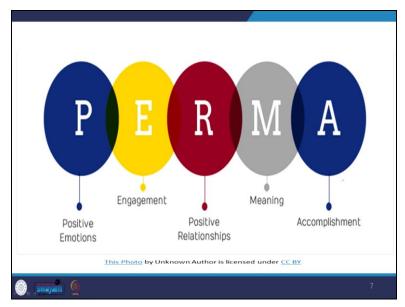
Now since we are harping upon positive psychology we must also understand what positive psychology can do. It can actually help us take to countryside of pleasure and gratification. The sort of esteem that you can find not only within yourself but the sort of gratitude that you find when you deliver something when you give something to somebody or when you impart love when you impart compassion fine. So, up into the high country of strength and virtue as Seligman says and finally to the peaks of lasting fulfilment. My dear friends, we from India always believe that life is full of joys but then in order to get those joys, one has to limit one's ambition. You will find there are certain people in life who have got lots of ambition but the ambition is not transferred into action. So, simply having ambition cannot bring you happiness.

And then life has got a meaning and purpose. How many occasions can one find to estimate oneself very honestly, fine? If one sits in isolation and makes an appraisal of his own achievement, one will really have the satisfaction that one's remuneration, one's respect one's recognition is in consonance with the sort of work that one has done with a sort of level that one has shown.

Now in this regard Martin Seligman gives an acronym that is called PERMA. I mean these are all alphabet fine. So, P E R M A, PERMA it is derived by Martin Seligman which

actually refers to the components of good life. Now most of you might be interested to know what is this PERMA.

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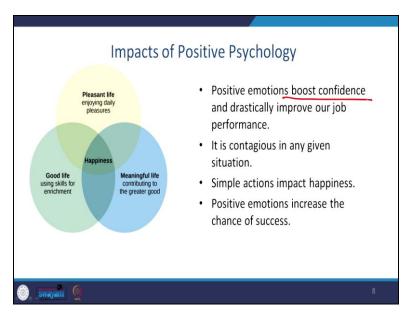


Every letter stands for something, what are they? P stands for positive emotions engagement. A person who does not have any engagement is always bound to have negative feelings. We always say an empty mind is a devil's workshop. But a person who is always engaged in his profession and enjoys his profession, fine, will always find that life is meant for him. Then comes relationships.

Ask yourself how many people are you related to and what is your relationship with other people. I mean there are people who have got too less friends. There are people who do not have any access to society. There are people who find life to be meaninglessness, often get frustrated. Because the person who does not have a friend or friends will always tend to be frustrated. Where should he go what should he do where should he go, what actually are the preferences and then finally one can also think of one's accomplishment.

So, this is actually PERMA as per the acronym which was given by Martin Seligman the propounder of positive psychology. Now this positive psychology can impact us as I said in the beginning not only in life but also in public speaking. So, how as a public speaker if you are optimistic if you are positive you will find your confidence is boosted.

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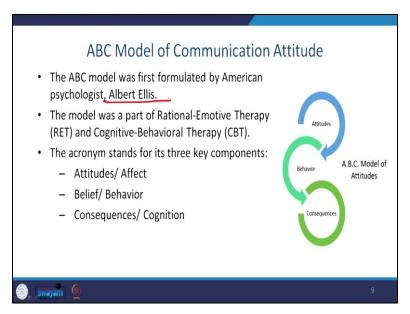


So, it helps you boost your confidence and it will also improve your job performance. So, if one is always sunny if one is always full of energy one will bring warmth not only to himself but to other colleagues of his also. But if you come across such a person who is a saddist, a masochist, who always tries to derive you know displeasure out of it will not enjoy work will not have a sort of satisfaction.

Because these things are contagious fine these things are contagious. Meaning thereby it can affect it affects you it also affects others. Things good or bad both these things actually affect us. Simple acts of happiness can actually spread a sort of atmosphere or a set of ambience where everyone feels pleased to walk in. And these positive emotions can increase the chances of success in life.

We always have been discussing that a person who gives in very easily, writes something very easily or writes off just in a haste cannot enjoy life rather his life will become a sort of waste. One always has to be tenacious, one has to be consistent and one always has to be forward looking. Now we can also take another model of communication especially a positive communication attitude.

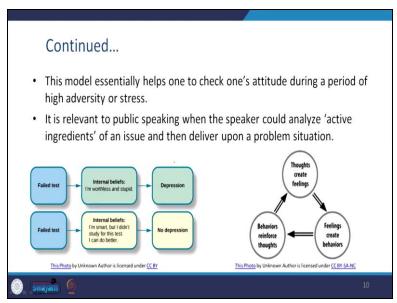
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We call it ABC model which was actually propounded by Albert Ellis another American psychologist he actually started rational emotive therapy and cognitive behavioural therapy CBT. I mean when you come to know something, when you come to have a sort of cognition of a problem, and then based on this there can be a therapy. And, then again there is another rational emotive therapy. All of us are emotional.

But let us not be emotionally blind let there be some amount of rationale. So, while we are talking about this ABC model of communication attitude. This a stands for attitudes, which actually means affect A for affect B for behaviour and C for cognition. So, this ABC model of communication tells us that our attitude can affect others, our attitude can help us behave better with others and we have also to understand we have actually to recognize.

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This model essentially helps to check one's attitude during a period of high adversity or stress when somebody is under glossophobia. Next time one can sit and with the help of this model one can find that if there is some problem with one's attitude. Because this perhaps might have created a sort of crisis. This might have brought him down while he started addressing the crowd suddenly he was overcome or gripped with a sort of fear, or a sort of anxiety of speech as we have seen in the previous lecture.

So, why you also might be thinking as to how it is relevant to public speaking. Because when the public speaker can analyze active ingredients of a problem or an issue and then he can work upon that. For that you have to recognize first that is why cognition. So, if you have recognized fine and then based on this recognition you can always improvise, my dear friends, how. So, there can be two tests here-- failed test, internal beliefs. Why does a person fail.

I am worthless and stupid naturally it will actually result in a sort of depression. But if somebody has got a sort of internal belief--- I am smart but I did not study for this test I can do better. Now in the first instance we found that he already declared that I am worthless and stupid because he does not want to come out of it. In the second one we find he says-- I am smart but I did not study for this test. Recognition, I mean admission in this case there will be no depression rather you can take something out of it. So, thoughts always create feelings and these feeling create or results into behaviours and your behaviour can reinforce your thought.

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Now as a public speaker why should one go and opt for positive content to deliver. I mean when one has got a sort of positive communication it is not only about the content but it can also be about the phatic. Now you might be thinking what fatigue initially when a person goes we have discussed in some of the lectures that when you go to speak the very first moment what is needed is a sort of greetings because you have to create a sort of credibility.

I mean phatic communication includes greetings and utterances such as nice meeting you of course you cannot as a speaker tell them that nice meeting you. But through your non-verbal behaviour, I mean a simple smile can actually bring a lot of advantage. I mean if one can stand for some time and spread just a little smile that actually helps in creating a sort of rapport. It is actually a sort of constructive approach.

It can help actually help us create a sort of conversation think of some other occasions when you met a stranger and for some time both of you were silent and then perhaps you started with a sort of greetings and this greeting was one way to open the communication and while you started the communication with the greeting, communication could prolong could go forward. Communication actually emulates good emotions for not only for the speaker but also for the listener.

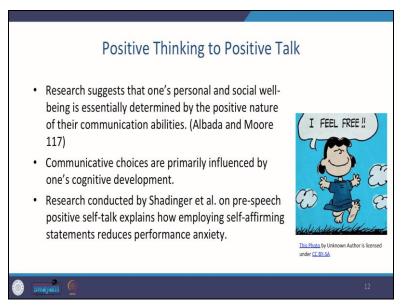
And that also in an implicit manner. Have you not realized that when you have talked to a stranger just for the first time and after that you sometimes have a feeling oh what a nice chap, what a nice talk what a sort of information that I got from this person? It was of course a nice meeting with him. But for all these what one requires is a sort of intention the world is good because you think the world to be good.

There is there goes a very small quote 'good mind good find' adaptation one has to adapt and your adaptation depends not only while you are conversing but as a public speaker when you are speaking you will find that in the midst of your talk there might be certain you know hindrances. And you have to adapt yourself according to the situation, say for example there was just in the midst of a talk there was actually a sort of void.

There is actually a sort of silence there is actually a sort of noise there is actually a sort of disturbance. Now it is up to the speaker how to adapt himself to that change his stand and

then your active listening can also serve as essential to establish positive communication. But in order to do that, one has always to stand, one has always to stay positive my dear friend.

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Now this positive thinking can help us have a sort of positive talk. I mean there has been quite a good amount of research in this area and research suggests that one's personal and social well-being is essentially determined by the positive nature of their communication abilities. I mean if I am by nature positive, naturally my personal life as well as my social life as well as my social well-being have got a lot to do in this regard.

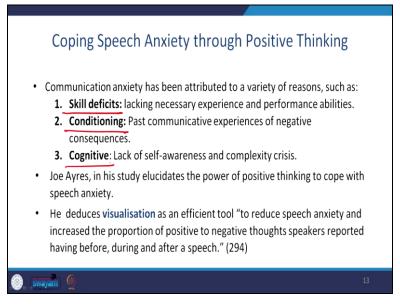
This is actually the outcome of one research by Albada and Moore who say that one's personal and social well-being is essentially determined by the positive nature of their communication abilities. We'll also if time permits will also throw some light on nature versus nurture theory communicative choices as a communicator you have a choice as a public speaker also you have a choice.

So, your choices are primarily influenced by your cognitive development by your cognitive development. If you are able to recognize the lapses, the gaps the hindrances research conducted by Shadinger and others on pre speech positive self-talk. Now here let me spend some time there was actually two cases they had and they said that if students are asked to give a speech in the class it is quite certain that most of them will be a little bit nervous or anxious they will have a sort of speech anxiety. So, if they can have some amount of self-talk I mean before the real talk it will actually help. So, this self talk explains how employing self affirming statements reduces performance anxiety. That is why at children you might have at

times been told to read loudly. As a presenter also or as a novice presenter when they are under at the grip of fear and anxiety, they should also be told to have some self-talk before they come to the real talk that will not only boost their confidence but that will actually provide them with a lot of positivism. Because you know, as I have already said in one of my lectures that when one is under the grip of glossophobia, one actually finds some bodily reactions where one's throat goes parched, hands tremble. Fine?

The heartbeat actually becomes very fast but then there is a positive side to it and the positive side is that only the speaker knows it and the speaker feels it and the speaker should know that this nervousness is natural. Nothing is going to happen--- neither the sky going to fall down nor the earth going to crumble. Only you have to keep your own confidence at the proper level and you know if you understand the reason, the reason is during such hours during such moments there is actually a sort of adrenaline surge in your body which actually will pump some extra energy and that will actually help.

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This communication anxiety has been attributed so many reasons but then these reasons which we can cite here are perhaps skill deficits, conditioning and cognitive. Now what are skill deficits--- somebody who lacks the necessary skills naturally is frightened of his own performance. Everyone--- those people who get nervous they become nervous only because they have the ambition to perform.

And this performance anxiety actually sometimes or the other is resulted because of the deficiency in terms of his skills. Conditioning--- his past experiences of negative

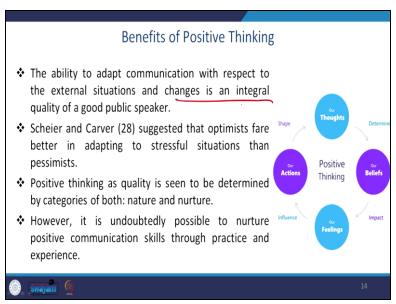
consequences suddenly he comes to the dais and again he is reminded of how he failed the next time because he was not able to have a sort of cognition. And then he did not work on it, he had a lack of self-awareness and he had a sort of complexity crisis.

In this regard, there has been a very beautiful piece of research by Joe Ayres, who in his study says---" The power of positive thinking can help cope up with speech anxiety", and he also suggests let there be a sort of visualization fine. You remember in one of the previous lectures I talked about catastrophizing where you feel as if I am going to fall down I am going to faint any moment, fine.

So, that was catastrophizing but there is a solution to it and the solution is visualization let me come out of it. I am fine I am an experienced speaker and I can do well think of some beautiful incident think of some memorable incident as a visualization process and this visualization process while you are giving a presentation or a talk why cannot you think of a beautiful rose before you. And then think of how happy you had become the day when you had plucked this beautiful rose. So, if you have some pleasant feelings within, it can actually be reflected and it can help you reduce the speech anxiety and increase the proportion of positive two negative thoughts speakers reported having before during and after a speech. So, my dear friends, let us have some amount of visualization.

Think that I am going to win. After my talk comes to an end I can come across lots of applause I can come across lots of bridges. There are benefits of positive thinking.

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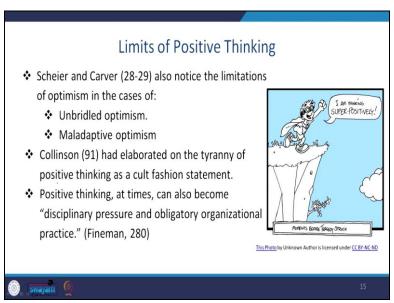
And what are these benefits? There are actually changes, fine, in the quality of a good public speaker if he has some amount of positive thinking Scheier and Carver have suggested that optimists I mean people who always look at the bright side of things they are better at communication. So, they adapt to stressful situation very soon. But remember here even if somebody is optimistic.

But unbridled optimism is bad. What is this unbridled ambition? Unbridled optimism, I mean, if you have you are too optimistic that is also bad fine. So, they say that positive thinking as a quality can help determine categories of both nature and nurture. It may be some way or the other there is within but one can nurture, and nurture how? One can from the past experiences one can take certain cues and work upon.

Though it is undoubtedly possible to nurture positive communication skills how through practice through performance and through experience fine. But then there can be certain limits also positive thinking I as I said unbridled optimism. So, unbridled optimism may not always be good. So, please be careful, be optimistic only to a level again maladaptive optimism there is optimism.

But this optimism may be difficult also. In psychological terms this can be called a sort of defensive optimism when you try to defend yourself even if you are wrong.

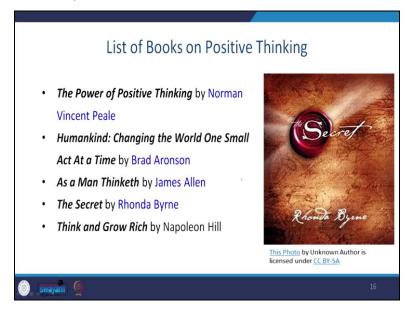
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Collison had elaborated on the tyranny of positive thinking as a cult fashion statement and then another quote by Fineman who says 'disciplinary pressure and obligatory organizational practice'. That also can harm your positive thinking at times it can also become disciplinary pressure. So, one can also have a sort of pressure and this pressure can also lead to a sort of optimism but optimism in a way that it at times becomes very unbridled uncontrolled.

My dear friends, we can continue to talk on optimism and pessimism and positive thinking but I am reminded of this beautiful book by Norman. Fine?

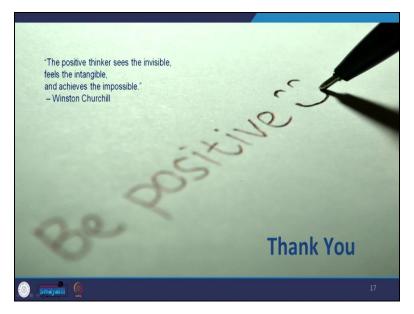
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By Norman Vincent Peale *The Power of Positive Thinking* where he says always think of god to be on your side and make god always your witness. And if meaning thereby if you can have a faith in some power that can also help. There are certain books that can help you come out of this speech anxiety and that can help you develop some amount of optimism and positivism. One book by Brad Aronson *Humankind Changing the World one small Act At a Time*.

As a Man Thinketh by James Ellen and The Secret by Rhonda Byrne, Think and Grow Rich by Napoleon Hill. If you can consult all these books, I think you will get plenty of thought and you can feel stimulated, you can feel energized, my dear friend. Before we come to end this talk because we can continue to tell you about the various ways of adapting positivism in order to bring a positive outlook not only your life but on your performance.

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But it is always better to remember what Winston Churchill says-----" The positive thinker sees the invisible." I mean, somebody who is positive, he thinks positive and such a thinker 'sees the invisible, feels the intangible, and achieves the impossible.' So, if a person with positivity can see the invisible, if he can feel the intangible, he only can achieve the impossible. And my dear friends, you are actually the citizens of a world where we have different resources to invite optimism in our life. It is time that we became optimistic and tried to do things in the most positive manner so that we are not run down by glossophobia or anxiety of speech. I think if you can keep these things, if you can think of these points and remember these points, I think you will always be positive. Because positivism always plays things which a person who is pessimist can never think of. With this let me come to wind up this talk and thank you very much. I wish you all a good day.