

# validation & hope vs. "positivity"

Unhappiness is detrimental to workplace efficiency. Unfortunately, too many business gurus put that lesson in their books and rolled out the idea that positivity—in the face of all factors, all setbacks, and all other emotions—was the only way forward. In doing so, they started to choke out happiness in the workplace with toxic positivity.

## Validation and Hope

This is hard. You've done hard things before and I believe in you.

I know there's a lot that could go wrong. What could go right?

All vibes are welcome here.

It's pretty normal to have some negativity in this situation.

It's probably pretty hard to be positive right now. I'm putting out good energy into the world for you.

Sometimes giving up is ok. What is your ideal outcome?

It's never fun to feel like that. Is there something we can do today that you'd enjoy?

It's probably really hard to see any good in this situation. We'll make sense of it all later.

## Toxic Positivity

You'll get over it!

Just be positive!

Good vibes only!

Stop being so negative!

Think happy thoughts!

Never give up!

Just be happy!

See the good in everything.

One of the primary issues with toxic positivity is that those who are possessed by it fail to listen. You can tell they aren't listening because no matter what you say, no matter what the workplace struggle is, the answer is basically the same. It's often some variation of: "Never give up!", "Good vibes only!", "Just be happy!".

If only true happiness was granted by such a glib reminder.  
The reality is that such responses can be damaging in several ways.

**Not all positivity is toxic.** *Just because toxic positivity can cause real damage in your life and workplace doesn't mean positivity, in general, is to be avoided altogether.* There are many situations in which, instead of "seeing the good in everything", there's more value in stopping to recognize that a coworker is facing a difficult situation.

Once you've let them know that you understand, you can offer to help untangle the issue when the moment is right. Without a doubt, there's a great deal of power in having a positive mindset. But that power is not capable of overriding all obstacles in all situations. Instead, you'll be better off analyzing any given situation and being compassionately honest about how you feel—and what the data says.

From there, you can consider if a more positive outlook is going to be the best way to move forward.