

The Greatness Project

Are We Primed For Greatness?

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With whom do we surround ourselves? Do the people around us vocally offer encouragement? The power of what they say to us has more impact on our success or failure than any of us may realize.

Whenever you sit next to someone who is complaining about life, about work, and about everything else, do you sense that you're losing energy? Do you start feeling depressed? If so, you are not alone. The other person's griping affects us on a subconscious level and for a period of time afterward, we will be more critical and less accepting of the challenges that confront us. The words we hear have a direct, powerful, and immediate impact on our reactions and behaviors.

John Bargh, a psychologist affiliated with New York University, conducted a series of what he terms "priming experiments." He wanted to determine how much impact words have on human behavior. In one experiment, subjects were asked to take a series of scrambled words and put them into sentences. Within the scramble were words directly related to aging. Bargh discovered that research subjects walked more slowly and gingerly out of the room than when they arrived, apparently affected subconsciously by words within the test.

A second experiment proved even more revealing. Two groups of subjects were asked to complete a scramble test in which one group worked with words specifically related to aggression, while the other group unscrambled sentences with words relating to patience. The tests lasted five minutes after which the subjects were asked to walk down the hall and talk to one of the test administrators. Bargh set up the scene so that the administrator would be engaged in a 10 minute conversation. He wanted to see if after being "primed" differently how long it would take subjects in either group to interrupt. The group that was primed for aggression tolerated five minutes before interrupting the conversation. What amazed Bargh was that 82% of subjects in the second group never interrupted at all. If the experiment

hadn't ended after 10 minutes, some of the "patient" subject group might have continued to wait.

The effects of priming aren't trivial; they begin early in our development as we learn what to think about boys and girls, men and women, different races and ethnicities and, most importantly, what we think about ourselves. Professor Bargh's experiments help us to realize that priming continues throughout our life.

Can people be primed for greatness? With enough positive words and images can success be assisted? Two Dutch researchers worked with positive and negative imagery to assess its affect on tests. One subject group was asked to think for five minutes about what it would mean to be a professor and then write down what came to mind. A second group was asked to do think about what it would mean to be a criminal and then write it down. Next, both groups took the same 42 question test. The "professor" group correctly answered 52.6% of the questions; the "criminal" group answered 42.6% correctly. The first group was primed to be in a "smart" frame of mind.

Every time we hear feedback, we process it consciously and subconsciously. This feedback and our awareness of ourselves has a powerful impact on our performance. To whom do we listen? Who encourages us? Are we priming ourselves—and others—to achieve greatness?

The Greatness Project™ is researched and written by Scott Asalone & Jan Sparrow.

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