

The Power Of Having An Internal Locus Of Control

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Do things happen to you, or do you make things happen?

While the question might seem trivial to you, people actually feel very different about the answer.

In the world of psychology, the term locus of control refers to the extent that people believe they can control events that effect them.

A person with an internal locus of control believes that it is their own behavior that leads to the events in their life, whereas a person with an external locus of control believes that other factors besides their own involvement chiefly determine these events.

In other words, someone with an internal locus would view themselves as making things happen, and someone with an external locus believes that things happen to them.

We can think of a person's locus of control as residing somewhere on a continuum, with an internal locus on one side and an external locus on the opposite end. Most if not all people are somewhere in between the two extremes.

If you think about it for a moment, you can probably approximate where you would be on this axis.

Keep in mind that there is nothing inherently wrong with having a particular locus.

Rather, the *consequences* that a particular locus has on your life is what we are concerned about here.

As you may have guessed from the title of this post, I believe that having an internal locus of control tends to result in the best consequences for one's overall happiness.

That being said, there are serious drawbacks to an internal locus as well.

Advantages Of An Internal Locus Of Control

- More likely to actively try to improve your situation
- More likely to observe factors you can use to create positive outcomes in the future
- Less likely to feel like a victim of circumstance

Disadvantages Of An Internal Locus Of Control

- Sometimes events are random and out of your control
- More likely to come across as arrogant to others
- Likely to be unstable or neurotic if the internal locus doesn't realistically reflect your competence.

After reviewing this list of advantages and disadvantages, we can now come up with an appropriate strategy for optimizing our locus of control.

What we want is a locus that is both as empowering as possible while accurately reflecting reality.

Put another way, we want to believe we have control over the events in our lives that we actually do have control over.

How to Optimize Your Locus of Control

The first step is to realize that you always have a choice.

It is within your power to change your situation at least in some way, even if none of the choices seem particularly satisfying at the time.

Let's take an extreme example, suspiciously similar to the plot of the awesome show *Breaking Bad*.

You are diagnosed with late stage lung cancer, and you will die within a couple years at most if you don't do anything about it. With treatment, there is a small chance of recovery, but it is an incredibly uncomfortable and expensive process.

It's hard to imagine a worse situation, and it's very easy to feel persecuted or like things are out of your control.

But as we just saw, there are choices.

You *can* influence your situation, even if only a little bit.

And if you are a brilliant chemist, you can cook methamphetamine to help your family pay the bills!

While I wouldn't recommend that course of action, my point is clear: you do have some degree of control.

Even if you are locked in a cage and have no physical control whatsoever over your circumstances, you do have some choice as to how you respond to your situation emotionally.

There is always a choice.

Important note: I am not saying we are at fault and deserve blame for our own suffering or feelings. What I am saying is that we are the ones who control our own

thoughts, and we are free to [interpret a situation any way we want](#). I'm sure if Buddha were trapped in a cage, he would still feel content.

Once you have accepted that you always have choices, the next step is to take the situations where you feel trapped and actually brainstorm the choices that you have. This will both solidify the belief that you have choices as well as help maintain realism.

After a few options have been written down, you should analyze the situation and determine the best course of action, knowing that you chose it consciously.

To someone with an extreme internal locus, being explicit with the choices available would help to keep them realistic.

The man with lung cancer in the earlier example would realize how ludicrous the meth cooking option is unless they have an advanced degree in chemistry.

This process, applied regularly, will lead to a more internal locus of control.

For People With An Extreme External Locus

Some people have such an extreme external locus that it would be difficult to do the above technique.

For these people, it might be necessary to start with other interventions, because they need more confidence that they actually have the ability to make choices that have an effect.

If this is the case for you, don't be alarmed or ashamed of it.

First of all, there are a ton of people like this. Seriously. I would be willing to bet that more than half of people are more external than internal, and that a large percentage of those with an external locus have it to an extreme degree.

Second, as I stated before, there is nothing inherently “wrong” with any locus.

That being said, there is evidence that people with an internal locus are happier, so it makes sense to strive towards that direction.

[Setting goals and working towards them](#) is the best way to build self-confidence in your ability to make choices that effect your situation.

This post is not about goal setting, so I won't go into detail here. If you would like to read more about goal setting, go [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

For people who are not used to the idea of setting goals and going after them, I would recommend starting small.

Instead of making your goal to lose 100 lbs (even if it could happen eventually), try to lose 5 lbs instead.

Then as you work towards this goal and achieve it, the idea that you have choices and can control your circumstances will be reinforced.

You should also [start paying attention to your self-talk](#).

To be honest, this is something that everyone should be doing, but it is of particular importance for someone with an extreme external locus of control.

If you find yourself thinking things like, “I don't have a choice but to...” try to replace it with “I may not like my choices, but I will...”

Again, this will help condition yourself to remember that you do in fact have control over your situation.

Conclusion

Having an internal locus of control that is optimized to reflect reality is one of the most important things a person can do for their long term happiness and mental health.

Everyone is at a different point on this spectrum, but it is very possible to shift this point with consistent application of the above exercises: understanding your choices, goal setting, and monitoring your self talk.

<http://feelhappiness.com/the-power-of-having-an-internal-locus-of-control/#>