

Stop Whining. Start Winning.

First published in the October 2001 issue of *Succeed Magazine*

The tragic events of September 11th caused a remarkable switch in South African attitudes. For the first time in years many started celebrating this great country. Sentiments like "I'm so happy to live here" spewed from local's lips. Suddenly the whining halted. Moans about crime, Robert Mugabe, the economy and other obsessions were silenced as one of the world's 'havens' suffered such horrific attack. Unfortunately the local cease-fire on whining was pretty short lived.

Now we're back to our peculiar brand of insular griping. Sure the Rand has taken a dive. As a reflection of our own attitudes, it is to be expected. Many a foreign investor has been known to say: "How can we invest in SA when you don't even have confidence in yourselves?"

From a personal perspective, we know if we lose faith, it's hard to make our lives work. On a national level the difficulties are just escalated. When millions of people are negative, the force becomes really potent. So it's no wonder whether the dollar is weak or strong, the Rand continues its downward slide. Yet for those in tourism, manufacturing, gold and exports, it is great news for business.

Of course no one is denying that the country has problems. But how are we going to solve these with our incessant complaining? Especially when whining wastes the energy we need to act upon the issues that irk us. So, if success is what you personally want, you've got to quit the habit right now. It's bad for you and severely damages the country.

Whenever I train I ask people to write down a list of all the things they moan about. These lists tend to be lengthy. Then I get them to write a new one listing the things they've done to help solve these problems. Although a few try scraping the barrel, these lists tend to be somewhat skimpy. Obviously whingeing may seem easier, but it costs. It has gotten us into the state we are in right now.

Don't however imagine that you can solve the country's problems - or the world's for that matter - on your own. This is exactly what immobilises us. But instead of whining, pick the one thing that bugs you most and put your effort in there. If you can't manage a cheque, give your time. If you're short on time, send money. But do something because we simply can no longer afford the luxury of indulging in this overwhelming negativity.

Here we can learn a major lesson from the USA. As a symbol of their self-belief, the American flag was sold out in many stores just one week after these terrible events. Imagine what we could achieve here if adversity forced us to stick together rather than causing us to moan ourselves apart.

With holy war currently holding the greatest threat to world peace, we in SA have lots to be proud of. During the recent World Conference on Racism, South Africa was applauded for leading the way. After all, other countries have been struggling with this for decades. Yet in less than ten years we are showing them how to deal more appropriately with race issues.

Of course this does not mean we have solved all our challenges. We still have a clash between western arrogance and a self-esteem problem instilled in millions by apartheid conditions. Yet when people are made aware of this, they conclude that we are more similar than different. If only world powers could come to terms with this reality.

Also as South Africans we are acutely aware of the dangers of a conflict based on religion. Not too dissimilar from our own race war, we know to ask what can be gained? With the exception of the arms industry, our conflict was at great cost to everyone. Armed with the power of this experience, we are aware that the same is inevitable internationally.

Although our war was a lose-lose situation, we now have a mature solution where - with lots of work and major shifts in attitude - we can win. Already we have come a long way in dealing with emotions like fear and anger. It is a rocky road the US is only starting to embark upon. Although the Americans may have had more of a handle on crime, no one could have predicted the extent of the violence inflicted upon its citizens.

So instead of accepting the effect of these awful events on our economy, we can start fighting for ourselves. Admittedly the change we have weathered has produced chaos but chaos always leads to opportunity. It depends what one chooses to focus upon. This is why being positive is so important. It is the energy that opens our eyes to opportunity.

When it comes to your own life, what do you focus upon? No matter what you answer, your attitude will be reflected in your business. If it's doing well, you are obviously managing to stay positive. If not, only a shift in attitude will improve bottom line.

So it is for our country. Knowing how powerfully national self-esteem influences the economy, November 2nd is being declared *National Be Positive Day*. Get involved from a personal point of view. Ban negativity from your ear space - there are many more interesting things to talk about. Act positive - especially around your children, their future cannot be drowned in your negativity. Be creative. Look for the countless opportunities this country offers. Also support your own economic prospects by buying local products.

So often one hears people say that individuals cannot make a difference. Well you can. For the biggest contribution is to make one's own life work. From the thinking on emotional intelligence we know that success does not depend upon education or IQ. Everyone has the potential but it is only released by being positive and resourceful. Imagine the great nation and strong economy we could have if the only change was everyone focused on making their own life work.

Sure to some this may sound selfish. Yet think about it. When you are successful your achievements inspire others to greater heights. What better contribution could you wish for?

So while the world grapples with issues we're already coming to terms with, let's stand proud as South Africans. Indeed we can show them the stuff that Africans are made of. To do so we need to refocus our thoughts, quit whining and BE POSITIVE!

November 2nd is National Be Positive Day:

What you can do:

- Focus on the positive
 - Find opportunities to grow
 - Quit whining - about anything - it won't help anyway
 - Talk positive / Act positive
 - Ban negativity
 - Be resourceful
 - Be creative
 - Live generously
 - Laugh a lot
 - Have fun
 - And buy South African
-

Stephanie Vermeulen of *The Effective Training Corporation* runs practical training programmes on Applied EQ in both business and public forums as well as being an inspiring conference speaker and personal coach.

Her books, *Stitched-up: Who Fashions Women's Lives?* and *EQ: Emotional Intelligence for Everyone* are available from all leading bookstores and online from Amazon and Kalahari. She can be contacted on:

Phone: +27 11 486 1211
e-mail: steph@theeqsite.co.za
website: www.theeqsite.co.za