

What is your explanatory style?

Our explanatory style is how we interpret the things that happen to us. Optimists tend to explain positive events in terms of personal, permanent causes and negative events in terms of external, temporary causes. This matters because optimists tend to feel better about themselves, be more motivated, and achieve better life outcomes. The good news is that with practice we can become more optimistic!

Our explanatory style has three dimensions:

Personalisation – whether an outcome was caused by oneself, or by external factors.

Permanence – whether an outcome will always be like this or could change in the future.

Pervasiveness – whether or not an outcome affects or is like other areas of our life.

After something happens, optimists and pessimists will tend to explain things as follows. Notice how an optimist and pessimist are likely to interpret a positive and negative event in more or less opposite ways.

	Positive event	Negative event
An optimist will say...	It's permanent – things will usually happen like this It's pervasive – good things happen to me It's personal – I was responsible for this	It's temporary – things won't always be like this It's specific – not everything that happens to me is bad It's external – outside factors were responsible for this
A pessimist will say...	It's temporary – things like this won't usually happen to me It's specific – good things don't usually happen for me It's external - outside factors were responsible for this	It's permanent – things will usually happen like this It's pervasive – bad things usually happen to me It's personal – I was responsible for this

We need to use common sense and be responsible for our actions. We can't use optimism to avoid the need for change or growth. But reflecting on our explanatory style can help us to dispute unhelpful pessimistic thinking and replace it with more helpful optimistic thinking. If you catch yourself being pessimistic about an event, ask yourself:

- What's the evidence for my pessimistic explanation?
- What beliefs or stories are behind my pessimism?
- What counter evidence suggests this explanation might not be true?
- What optimistic explanations can I think of instead, which also explain what happened?
- Which explanations are most true?
- Which explanations best help me to move forward towards my goals?

A neuroaffirmative life coach who listens without judgement to create safe, creative thinking spaces.
Remarkable conversations for breakthrough moments. Transformative changes for deep, lasting impacts.
If you can't think it through on your own, I'll help you make it happen.

Let's start your own remarkable conversation: guilmantcushcoaching.co.uk guilmantcushcoaching@gmail.com