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## Attitude matters: Part 1 of 3

# Change your mindset

How you think and feel about situations can transform your life

SHOCKED, dejected and hopeless, Lieutenant Gerald "Jerry" Coffee started praying.

Just a few days earlier, he was soaring in the sky as a United States navy pilot – now he was confined in a six-by-three-foot prison cell in North Vietnam.

During the Vietnam War, in 1966, Lt Coffee was on a reconnaissance mission for the US navy when his aircraft was brought down by anti-aircraft fire and he was taken prisoner by the North Vietnamese.

As he recounted later, his initial prayers were: "Why me? Please get me out of here and unite me with my family."

But he soon realised these prayers were not making any difference to his suffering.

Not knowing what else to do, he changed his prayers to: "Show me how I am supposed to use this difficult situation to be a better person, service man, husband and father."

As his prayers changed, so did his attitude towards his captivity. With a new attitude, his behaviour changed too.

He began exercising, learning new subjects and even a new language. He started working on his memory, and endured with dignity and strength the torture inflicted by his captors.

Eventually, upon his release seven years and nine days later, he was not a broken man, but someone with a strong sense of his own power.

He went on to become an inspiring author and public speaker, and a shining example of the power of attitude.

Stories abound of ordinary people like Lt Coffee who have faced extraordinary setbacks.

Some lost limbs, faced debilitating illnesses like paralysis, others were imprisoned for years in despicable conditions or abused in childhood, or experienced catastrophic business failure.

The common factor was that they came out from their darkest days stronger and wiser.

### Triumph against the odds

What makes these people triumph despite impossible odds?

Basically, life leaves no choice to them, but to realise that the only thing they have control over is their own mental response to a bad situation – their attitude.

Dr Viktor Frankl, an Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, captured this phenomenon precisely when he said: "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances."

But the rest of us, who have not faced such extreme adversities, don't realise the hidden power of attitudes in shaping our circumstances.

Unknowingly, we end up owning attitudes that don't support us in the best possible ways.

The word "unknowingly" is important because most people are not aware of their dominant attitude, let alone understand its impact on their lives.



**In a bad situation, the only thing you have response to it – your attitude.**

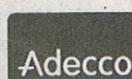
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**In a bad situation, the only thing you have control over is your mental response to it — your attitude.**

## What's an attitude?

Interestingly, you may not consciously think about your attitude, but you can often sense it in others by observing their behaviour.

When you come across two nurses in a hospital — one extremely concerned and caring, and the other totally business-like and stern — you know, despite having the same qualification, that the caring nurse has “something special” about her.

Similarly, you can sense the presence or absence of this “something special” in cabin crew, counter staff in banks, bosses, subordinates, students and teachers.

But what is an attitude?

It is what we think and feel about situations, people, ideas, objects — basically anything that concerns us.

And an attitude is usually binary: positive or negative, favourable or unfavourable, good or bad.

Holding a particular attitude is like having a hidden labelling machine inside us that keeps generating labels (positive or negative) to be pasted on whatever we come across.

We have an attitude towards colleagues, work, bosses, learning, books, the environment, traffic, hygiene, maids, construction workers, teachers, vegetarian food, excellence, charity, quality standards — just about everything.

Most important, whether we like it or not, our attitude shows up in our behaviour or actions, which in turn affect the circumstances of our life.

Don't believe it? Watch Lt Coffee's talk on YouTube at: <http://youtu.be/jgZxK-7xfoE>

Tomorrow: Why your attitude matters

Article by Atul Mathur, an engineer and an ACTA-certified trainer. He will be conducting a workshop “Attitude: Your Ultimate Qualification” on May 3. For details, visit [www.atulmathur.com](http://www.atulmathur.com) or e-mail [atul@atulmathur.com](mailto:atul@atulmathur.com)

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