

SUCCESS®

Mom Warned Me about Running with a Bad Crowd

By Lou Solomon



SHUTTERSTOCK

Growing up I often heard my mother say that so-and-so had “fallen in with the wrong crowd.” She told me this as a precautionary tale because that meant this person was taking on the bad habits of the company he or she was keeping.

I’d like to think that adult logic takes over at some point, as we develop critical thinking based on sound argument—but that is only partially true. At any age, we are shaped by the habits of our “kith-mates,” or circle of peers. Social learning, as behavior analysts have discovered, has more influence on adults than we would like to believe, manifesting itself in sometimes subconscious ways.

So, consider this the next time you find yourself spending time with people who are unhappy, pessimistic and, simply put, unsuccessful. You will likely become the same way.

But there's good news—just as you can absorb the bad habits and attitude of the wrong crowd, you can absorb the good traits of the right crowd, who are happy, self-confident and optimistic.

While teaching at the McColl School of Business at Queens University in Charlotte, N.C., I have noticed that the most successful MBA students form cohesive networks of support for one another as they participate in the two-year program. These students keep current on one another's careers and personal challenges. They show their colleagues ways to take risks to be happy. They refer to this peer-group experience as transformational and have gone on to make courageous, life-changing decisions.

The strength of social influence demands a review of your network. Here are five ways to do so:

1. Take inventory. Identify people with negative energy—people around you who are most likely to express an overall bad attitude. Consider who drains you of energy, who is constantly complaining, and who doesn't celebrate your success. Be especially vigilant for emotional states of anger and frustration.

Researchers have discovered an “emotional contagion” phenomenon in which your emotions will actually converge with those of your peers. Negative emotions exert a powerful effect in social situations, so take inventory carefully.

2. Put some space between you and these people. Pull back from spending time with people who are in constant pessimism or drama. Avoid low-energy people who don't encourage you to be your best. There is no need to be abrupt but make choices to avoid exposure to negativity.

3. Prioritize and be intentional. Increase proximity with people who have a successful, energetic spirit. Gravitate to those who encourage your success. Consciously work to cultivate a close, exceptional group of peers and teammates who will help you grow and adopt effective habits.

4. Ask for feedback. In and outside of work, elicit the advice of people you want to emulate. Collaborate with people who are engaged. Ask for their advice, guidance and mentorship. Those wishing to take quantum leaps have no need for people to tell them what they want to hear. Friends and family members who will shoot straight and communicate with candor are priceless.

5. Develop your own positivity as a leader. Successful leaders who express positivity in the workplace are known for having a touch of charisma. This doesn't mean you pour pink paint on everything, which is off-putting. It means you insist

on an environment in which people thrive. It means you develop and reinforce your habits with the help of peers who express positivity. In turn, your teammates will experience a positive emotional contagion and support a culture of productivity.

What could running with the right crowd mean to you? Imagine traveling through life with a group of smart, enthusiastic peers who are completely engaged in living a large, successful and happy life, never settling for less, and always showing you the way to stretch and go for it. What would happen? You would live a large, successful and happy life.

As usual, Mom was right.



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