

Attitude is Everything to Improving Outlook on Life

Stop looking back and start looking forward.

That's advice given by Radford University Anthropology and Sociology Chair and Professor Paula Brush when discussing how an individual can make changes to his or her attitude and outlook on life.

It seems simple enough, but many people often have difficulty making adjustments. People often get stuck in a rut and it's important for them to take steps necessary to make a life change and become happier and more productive, Brush says.

The professor knows how a person's outlook can affect lives, not just the life of the person needing a change, but the lives of the person's family, friends, and colleagues. Since joining Radford University, Brush has helped the faculty in her department make a quick turn around after the department had suffered through a period in which a significant number of professors had retired at once.

"Following one semester, we had 55% of our faculty retire," Brush said. "The pressure was on everyone to make things work even after such a huge loss." During that time, Brush said the number of majors in the department dropped from 75 to near 40.

The department members, Brush said, were feeling the pressure and many of them felt responsible for taking up the slack.

"I came in and told them there was no way anyone could have made up for the loss," Brush recalled. "No single person was responsible for it. I came in with the attitude that we are all good workers and we want to see the department shine."

One way Brush and the Anthropology and Sociology Department changed its outlook was to set realistic goals. "We made numerous changes in attitude by stopping our focus on the negative and instead focusing on positives."

Soon thereafter, the department, with a rejuvenated faculty, quickly raised its number of majors back to 70. "We began doing something here in a positive direction to change our lives," Brush said. "We stopped focusing on what we had been and where we had ended up and began thinking about what we as a department wanted to be."

There are many steps, Brush said, for individuals to take toward making their own positive adjustments toward a better outlook on life.

"One of the first things you should do is say your problems out loud," she said. "Communicate your problems to others, and often you will find people will say, 'Me, too. I feel the same way.'" Reenvisioning what you want to do and the direction you want your life to go is also a positive step toward outlook adjustment, Brush noted. "We do get caught in ruts sometimes and it's important to ask yourself if there are new things you would like to try or new things that you need to do."

Brush said taking on a new project or taking up a new hobby could be an excellent way to focus energy in a more positive direction. "When you carry burdens inside of you, it's a weight you carry throughout the day at work and at home," she said. "There may be something active you can do that shifts the energy. That's where you need to be focused."

It's all about attitude, Brush noted. When people's attitudes become more positive, the effect is felt all around by friends, family, and colleagues. "I've had friends and family of individuals say to me, 'So-and-so has changed so much. When he gets home, he's like a new person.'" When people make a change, whether it's a new attitude or a new diet and workout plan, there's always a fear of falling back into the old lifestyle. Sometimes that fear keeps a person from even beginning to make a change. However, Brush says people should not allow themselves to think of failing in their new endeavor.

"It's not about going back to the old, it's about embracing the new energy," she said. "The momentum of the positive energy works in a person's favor and we feel bad when we can't or don't continue with our new positive direction."

Brush says one way to stay focused on your new positive self is to pat yourself on the back for a new accomplishment. "We should celebrate when we do something good," she said. "That makes us more creative. It makes us want to do the next project. It makes us want to be on board for the next committee that comes along. We should always look forward."

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1135 M Street, Suite 400
Lincoln, Nebraska 68508
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