

Energy is a constant battle of give and take, positive and negative. As humans in a world obsessed with power, oil and consumption, it's easy to see why many believe we take more than we give, at least in the U.S.

Imagine a world void of caffeine and nicotine, a world where people are energized—dare we say—naturally. There's more to it than food, water and rest. There's the energy we receive from a stranger's smile, a friend's laugh, or a family member's hug. This is the positive energy that charges us up and gives us the boost we need to, in exchange, exude positive energy ourselves. Of course, there is the flip side to every energy equation. For example, consider the blow to our internal energy level when a cabbie cuts us off in the morning and gives us the finger. In analyzing our daily lives, we know human energy is contagious. But is one type of energy—positive or negative—healthier or more sustainable in our lives?

Let's begin with the basics: a smile versus a frown. These facial expressions are so ingrained in our interactions as humans that even in the world of email, text messages and Twitter, we have created a way to express those emotions: :) or :( According to the famous psychological Swedish study "Unconscious Facial Reactions To Emotional Facial Expressions," both positive and negative emotions are contagious. The researchers exposed participants to images of faces while they monitored their facial muscles through electromyographs (EMGs). When exposed to happy faces, participants moved their zygomatic major muscle (used in smiling); when exposed to sad faces, participants moved their corrugator supercilii muscle (used in frowning).

So, both smiling and frowning are contagious but is there an advantage to smiling versus frowning? According to Dr. Mark Stibich there is. The Duchenne smile specifically has the best results.

Duchenne smiles are the ones that are real and authentic. The smiles where your eyes light up, and your face wrinkles. These smiles are proven to:

- Boost the immune system
- Increase positive affect
- Reduce stress
- Lower blood pressure
- Enhance other people's perception of you

And that's just the benefits for you, the smiler! You also have to account for the benefits of the person on the receiving end of your contagious smile and the positive energy you are spreading. Frowning, in contrast, has negative health effects such as tension, which can lead to migraines and stress.

Laughter has many of the same health effects as smiling, just intensified. This would explain the rising boom in laughter yoga, and an emerging therapeutic field known as humor therapy. Our Awakening Consumers are big fans of the practice, ranking "laughter" as most the most contagious expression of the group and the highest source of positive energy, followed by nature (see survey for full results).

For argument's sake, let's suppose everyone started off their day with a full tank of positive energy. Is it possible to sustain that level by giving and taking only positive energy? Maybe. There must be a reason the concept of "what goes around comes around" is pervasive in so many cultures around the world. Kindness is one form of positive energy and has been the guiding force for some of our most influential leaders. The Dalai Lama has said, "My religion is very simple. My religion is kindness." Verena von Pfetten, of the *Huffington Post* believes,

*“once you start thinking kind thoughts and forcing unkind ones out of your head, you’ll find that you start attracting the type of people who are energizing to be around. These are the type of people you want as customers because they will continue to feed your business with positive energy and spread the word to people they know. There is absolutely no downside to kindness. The more you give it, the more you get back and the happier and less stressed out you become—that’s power.”*

There is, of course, power in negative energy as well. So knowing that both positive and negative energy are both powerful and contagious, the question remains, which is more sustainable? According the Awakening Consumer 87.7% believe positive energy to be more sustainable, and I have to say I agree. So while everyone is in the race for the most energy efficient car or house or computer, maybe some of the solutions are right here, within ourselves. How will you choose to charge your human battery, with positive or negative energy? And equally as important, how will you choose to charge others?