

A GUIDE FOR TRANSFORMING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS INTO POSITIVE BELIEFS

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*“We don’t see things as **they** are, we see them as **we** are.” ~ Anais Nin*

We have the ability to create our own reality. For the most part, we can look at a situation and see the good or we can look at the same situation and choose to see the bad. Often times the lens we use to view what’s happening is filtered by our thoughts.

Positive thoughts create more positive circumstances. Alternatively, negative thoughts contribute to feelings of dissatisfaction and disappointment. Therefore, changing our negative thoughts is essential to achieving happiness and peace. (Question: why tackle the thoughts and not the feelings to change first?)

The following are the most common negative thinking behaviors. Becoming aware of these is essential to transforming negative thoughts into positive beliefs.

1. Become aware of your thoughts. (Innerviewing)

You have control over what you think, but first you need to pay attention to it. Since reactions are so automatic, we usually don’t even notice them. Make a conscious decision to pay attention to your thoughts, and each time one enters your mind tell it to “stop”. Say it out loud if you want and can, then tell it there is no room for negative thoughts in your system. Let us talk about a process called “Innerviewing” that allows one to become aware of one’s thinking and also dilate time between thought and response.

2. Change or replace your thoughts. (“E tu Brute”)

(“When you consistently maintain a positive frame of mind, you’ll become known as a problem-solver rather than a complainer. People avoid complainers. They seek out problem-solvers.” Joseph Sommerville)

When you catch that negative thought, either change it or replace it. If you worry about your health or paying the bills, change that thought and frame it in a positive way, even if you can’t see anything positive in the situation. Think of how much healthier you are now than you were, realize that you are becoming healthier each day, recognize that you are in control of your health and financial situation. The other method is to simply replace the negative thought with another, not necessarily related thought that makes you happy and has recently happened or is currently happening to you. This takes the attention off the negative thought and allows you to create a different reality.

3. Step away. (Positive Distraction)

If you really feel in a rut, take a break and lie on a comfortable surface, such as a bed, the fragrant grass or a recliner. Put a small towel over your eyes to block out light and do some deep breathing for 15 minutes. Alternately, go for a walk or workout, change your environment or put on some positive, uplifting music. Breathing techniques, Meditation, Progressive muscle relaxation, guided imagery and visualization, etc. are but some ways that have demonstrated ability to help you relax and take your mind away from the immediate problem. Let us talk about some of these.

4. Try to Associate more with positive people.

(Attitudes are contagious. Are yours worth catching? ~Dennis and Wendy Mannering)

Unless you feel strong enough to help someone, avoid pessimists or people that complain a lot! It will rub off on you and will make it harder to get rid of your own negative thought patterns. Sometimes it’s tough to avoid such people, e.g. at work. If you hear people saying negative things, don’t accept what they say and put up a mental barrier. Imagine an invisible, soap-bubble like layer between you and the person, one that is bendable but impenetrable to negative thoughts. Positive thoughts can come in, like rays of light, but negative ones are too thick and heavy and are stopped. Play with this visualization or create your own. If you can find a task to further attract your attention away from the negativity. In cases

where you anticipate being exposed to negativity, utilize previously practiced techniques to avoid it. Prepare yourself in advance, if you can.

5. Become aware of your words.

(If you hear a voice within you saying, "You are not a painter," then by all means paint; and that voice will be silenced. Vincent Van Gogh)

Replace not only negative thoughts with positive ones, but replace words such as “would, could, should” with “will, can, shall”. This will make you more determined in your actions and will take away some of the doubt, hesitation and guilt. (e.g. “I should really get around to finally doing that...” carries all three of these negative emotions) - When we should on ourselves we are issuing negative judgments about our actions and behaviors.

Consider the following statements: “I should be a better parent; I should be making more money, and I should be happier.” These should statements suggest our current status is not good enough. These thoughts are negative and prevent us from seeing what is positive. Should statements put our thoughts and attitudes in a box and constrain us from seeing other solutions. Remember, it’s a matter of balance. We can be a good parent without having to be a perfect parent; we can provide for our families, financially, and still possess the desire to earn more; and we can be happy with all we have and continue to look for ways to bring more happiness into our lives. Give yourself permission to be imperfect. Allow yourself to be human.

6. Analyze instead of criticize.

(“Any fool can criticize, condemn and complain.. and most fools do.” Dale Carnegie)

So what went wrong? You’re only human, and if you didn’t make mistakes you wouldn’t advance yourself. Try to take the emotion out of it and think through what happened logically. Learn from the experience so you can leverage this new knowledge in the future.

7. Stay away from “all-or-nothing” thinking.

(No one is perfect... that's why pencils have erasers. ~Author Unknown)

“You see, when weaving a blanket, an Indian woman leaves a flaw in the weaving of that blanket to let the soul breathe.” ~Martha Graham

I've decided that the stuff falling through the cracks is confetti and I'm having a party! ~Betsy Cañas Garmon)

When we slip into “all-or-nothing” thinking we see our circumstances as either black or white with not much in between. By shifting to someplace in the gray, a fresh perspective is created that helps us to realize that more options DO exist.

To lead an emotionally healthy life we need to have balanced emotions. Words like: always, never, impossible, terrible and perfect, are rigid and allow little room for interpretation or flexibility. Instead, when we live somewhere in the middle then we are in a better position to find sturdier footing which will lead to improved balance. Yin-Yang.

Look for the gray in these statements:

I can be an intelligent person and still do something stupid.

I can love my partner and still be angry with her/him sometimes.

There are parts of my life I enjoy and there are parts of my life that create stress.

My children bring me joy and they sometimes drive me crazy.

The most important word in each sentence is and. The word “and” suggests a balance; it paints a shade of gray in our lives. So practice adding both sides of things using “and”.

8. Avoid the temptation to Over-Generalize.

Overgeneralization is best characterized when we believe that if one bad thing happens, then everything else is doomed to go poorly. You see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.

Think of over generalized statements as exaggerations. For example, “You never listen to me. He always interrupts me. She always thinks she’s right. He doesn’t like anything about me. Everybody thinks I’m stupid.”

The biggest overgeneralization red flags are words like never, always, should or everybody. Understand that an over generalized statement is another form of a negative thought.

Re-think your words and reconsider the circumstance. Attempt to find something positive.

For example, the over generalized statement of “You never listen to me.” Can be reframed to, “There have been times in the past when you were very attentive and I felt as though you heard me. At this moment, however, I’m experiencing you as not being interested in what I have to say.” The second statement is more truthful and less exaggerated. As a result, a more positive outcome can be expected.

9. Labeling and Mislabeling

This is an extreme form of overgeneralization. Instead of describing your error, you attach a negative label to yourself: “I’m a loser.” When someone else’s behavior rubs you the wrong way, you attach a negative label to him: “He’s a loser.”, “He can’t understand me.”

Or, someone asks you how you are feeling today and you say, “I’m so tired, I’m dead”. Think about this: Your brain hears these statements coming out from you – with your voice, etc. It will conform to what it hears. You will then have less vitality and more negativity.

Mislabeling involves describing an event with language that is highly colored and emotionally loaded. It is also often extremely inaccurate!

10. Would you rather be right or happy?

“There are always flowers for those who want to see them.” Henri Matisse

“Take your life in your own hands and what happens? A terrible thing: no one to blame.” Erica Jong

We can be very stubborn. At times our stubbornness has cost us. “It has caused me to miss the opportunity to accept an apology or consider a different point-of-view. I was more determined to be right than to be happy.”

The need to be right cultivates more negative thoughts because of our unwillingness to let go of whatever the issue was in the first place. To find some peace and happiness, sometimes we just need to let it go. Many times Ego and the need to save face or prove our point may cause us to lose much more than we thought. Identify the voice of your Ego and gently tell it to not be your enemy, but rather your ally. Even if you have to tell it to, “shut up”. A healthy dose of Ego is healthy. Too much Ego becomes toxic. Remember, seek balance.

11. Change your mental filter.

(Every day may not be good, but there's something good in every day. ~Author Unknown)

(You pick out a single negative defeat and dwell on it exclusively so that your vision of reality becomes darkened, like the drop of ink that colors the entire beaker of water)

Persistent pessimism can develop into a habit if we are not careful. Left unattended, chronic negative thinking can begin to shape the way we see the world. For example: The glass will always be half-empty. We can begin to change our mental filter by allowing positive thoughts to sift through it too. Try to see the good in every circumstance. A long line at the grocery store is a wonderful opportunity to chat with your partner or child; a stressful time at work will give you a better chance to realize the inner strength you possess; and the world’s current economy is a great time to get back to developing and maintaining a budget for your personal expenses.

The adage, “When you're handed lemons; make lemonade,” is the perfect reminder to be aware of the mental filter we use and the importance to transform it from a negative one to something more positive.

12. Watch your tendency for jumping to conclusions.

You make a negative interpretation even though there are no definite facts that convincingly support your conclusion.

Here are two of the many variations to consider:

A. Mind reading. You arbitrarily conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you, and you don't bother to check this out.

B. The fortune teller error. You anticipate that things will turn out badly, and you feel convinced that your prediction is an already-established fact.

When confronted with what might appear to be an unwelcomed circumstance, consider taking a deep breath; a full step back, to look at the event at a more holistic level in order to get all of the information.

Example: Beth and John - "We have an expression we use with our children: "What's the rest of the story?" When they come home with a failing grade and begin to blame the teacher, we ask, "What's the rest of the story?"

Even with more serious issues, you will find that by falling back to this question you will be provided with better opportunity to see the whole picture. This additional information is invaluable when it comes to how we react and respond.

By asking, "What's the rest of the story," we are in a better position to monitor our negative thoughts and keep them from trumping what is really going on. The clarity we gain empowers us to have a more rational and positive reaction.

13. Be aware of emotional reasoning.

You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are: "I feel it, therefore it must be true." – Remember dysfunction always distorts perception and thinking. Distorted thinking generates negative emotions.

Not many of us are Vulcans - like the character Spock from Star Trek who is consistently logical and rational no matter the circumstance. Even though we often have a rational response to a difficult event, we also have a tendency to slip into emotional reasoning when confronted with an especially challenging situation.

A good example of emotional reasoning goes something like, "I feel shame therefore I must be a bad person." On the contrary, there are many very good people who feel shame – like all of us. Just because we are experiencing a certain uncomfortable emotion doesn't mean our character, our soul, has been downgraded. It just means for that moment, in that small space of time, we feel a certain way about ourselves.

When we allow ourselves to be human and give our spirit the grace and mercy it deserves, we are in a better position to reframe self-limiting thoughts and keep them from manifesting to the point they begin to define who we are.

14. Disqualifying the positive

(Become aware of this and stop poisoning the water you drink...)

You dismiss positive experiences by insisting they "don't count" for some reason or other. In this way you can maintain a negative belief that is contradicted by your everyday experiences. This process is very destructive and it can be happening consciously or subconsciously.

15. Try not to take everything personally.

(It may be hard to hear, but not everything is about you and not everything is about me, either.)

Fear, paranoia and perhaps a measure of insecurity can lead us to believe the way other people react, or the things they say, are directed to us. Sometimes people are insensitive, judgmental or just plain in a bad mood. People are not perfect!

Example: John said, "One of my biggest challenges when a person makes a negative comment about one of my projects, is to keep my temptation in check and not internalize the comment. What I often hear is that "I am not good or effective – not so much about the project itself but rather about ME." What I hear is also rooted in old, negative tapes playing in my head. My task, then, is to replace these old tapes with newer, more positive ones that suggest I'm capable, well-meaning and successful regardless of what someone might say."

In many cases of abuse, toxic shame is responsible for this type of thinking. Any form or degree of judgment or criticism is perceived as a derogatory statement about "who I am" – i.e. shame.

16. Dial back from magnifying (*Catastrophizing*) or minimizing a problem.

(this is often called the "binocular trick.")

(Remember, our perception creates our reality!)

There is perception and then there is reality. Our negative thoughts start to churn when we confuse the two. You exaggerate the importance of things (such as your mistakes or someone else's achievements, etc.), or you inappropriately shrink things until they appear tiny (your own desirable qualities or the other fellow's imperfections).

Seeing a situation for what it really is, instead of what it feels like can help us stay grounded. Magnifying a problem only gives the problem more energy and provides the opportunity for the situation to become larger than it was ever intended to be.

17. Drop too much Cynicism from your life... immediately!!!

("A cynic can chill and dishearten with a single word" – Ralph Waldo Emerson)

Cynicism is a skeptical, scornful or pessimistic attitude; an emotion of jaded negativity, or a general distrust of the integrity or professed motives of other people. Oxford Dictionary defines it as "...a disposition to disbelieve in the sincerity or goodness of human motives and actions..."

The main thing to notice about cynicism is the presence of negativity. A cynical person will almost always choose to doubt, disbelieve or discredit, even when there is no logical reason to do so. When one is cynical toward others, one does not realize that (behind the momentary satisfaction he/she gets) one is rapidly poisoning oneself. Cynicism is one of the strongest poisons of the soul and is always truly aimed to the one who releases it. Cynicism – like any dysfunctional attitude – if not stopped, will be passed from parents to children.

18. Celebrate.

("If you don't think every day is a good day, just try missing one." ~Cavett Robert)

Celebrate the good things when they happen. Don't simply dismiss them or minimize them.

There is no question some days have a few setbacks, a couple of obstacles and sometimes pain. There are even some days when we feel as though someone has emptied our hearts of the passion and strength we need for life. So, on the days we are blessed and have positive things happen, no matter how small and insignificant they may seem, allow yourself the time to enjoy them and be invigorated by them.

19. Thank yourself.

(I had the blues because I had no shoes until upon the street, I met a man who had no feet. ~Ancient Persian Saying)

Acknowledge where you are and what you have right now. Acknowledge the progress you are making, and especially the decision you have made to change. Be grateful that you are strong and growing stronger each day.

20. Be more Gentle and Kind to yourself for a change. (... if you want change to come to you.)

("How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving, and tolerant of the weak and strong. Because someday in your life you will have been all of these." --George Washington Carver)

Change has to start from within. Unless you give yourself permission to accept and treat yourself kindly, you have not truly changed. Numerous scientific studies have shown that being kind results in significant physical, mental and emotional health benefits:

- It maintains good health and diminishes the effect of disease.
- Endorphins or natural pain-killers are released as well as a physical sensation of euphoria, which leads to improved emotional well-being.
- Stress related problems including depression tend to improve after performing kind acts.
- Self-esteem is enhanced as well as feelings of optimism and happiness.
- The immune system is strengthened and physical pain decreases.

Wouldn't you like to reap these physical, mental and emotional benefits? If so, be kind to yourself!

Here are 25 ways you can be kind to yourself, make small changes in your life, and rest in the process:

1. Celebrate your accomplishments and any small successes you achieve this week. Buy a birthday cake, light the candles and have a solo party, even if it's not your birthday.
2. Don't overly dwell on your failure moments. We all have them. They make us grow stronger. Learn from them to increase your opportunities for success in the future.
3. Send yourself some flowers, a card, or buy a small inexpensive gift. Don't forget to wrap the gift. When you unwrap it, express your delight and pleasure vocally as you savor the moment.
4. Each week, plan a special meal. Set the table with your fine linens, good china, stemware and utensils (instead of paper plates, cups, napkins and plastic forks).
5. Take a REAL vacation--you know, the old fashion kind where cell phones, emails, wireless connections, etc. are banned!
6. Pop some popcorn, relax in your favorite chair with your feet up, and watch your favorite TV show or DVD.
7. Take a long relaxing walk. Reflect on the scenery and environment around you. Notice the little things like a blade of grass or the shape of a leaf or a cloud in the sky.
8. Carve out at least 10-15 minutes each day to spend on yourself--any way you choose. Put it on your calendar to ensure that it gets done. Make it so.
9. Make a cup of herbal or green tea and sit quietly thinking about the fun things you would like to do. Put these ideas on paper and take action.
10. Listen to some sweet music during your day – Let it play softly in the background while you do your chores.
11. Get plenty of sleep (whatever amount is appropriate for you).
12. Take a bicycle ride or a walk through a field or park.
13. Go to the spa for a manicure, pedicure, or massage.
14. Read for fun--a novel, poetry, short story. Avoid business books or academic treatises.
15. Laugh a lot--especially if you have a hard time doing so. See the good humor in nature--two squirrels fighting over an acorn, a duck as it waddles to a pond, etc.
16. Start writing in a personal journal. Record as many positive thoughts, actions--whatsoever is lovely about you.
17. Re-start your hobbies. Pull out old unfinished projects or just simply start a new one. Just Do It.
18. Get a checkup and physical exam. Implement whatever strategies are needed to promote good health. Take vitamins and other supplements to keep your energy at its most productive level.
19. Get a new haircut or style.
20. Organize your closet or drawers. Tackle a sock or lingerie drawer; hold a tag sale, or donate your materials, furniture, and clothes that are in good condition.

21. Take a different route to work. Take yourself off auto-pilot and watch the cars and people around you.
22. Build a new relationship with a co-worker, acquaintance or someone who shares your interests.
23. Go all out to do something kind and compassionate for yourself.
24. Respect yourself. Refuse to berate, put-down or belittle yourself.
25. Forgive yourself. Accept the fact that you are not perfect. Choose to move forward instead of remaining stuck in the past or replaying a mistake you made over and over again in your mind.

Have some fun with this. There are many more things you can do to be kind to yourself. Make your own list and when you complete every item on it, start a new one.

Like attracts like. Positive thoughts and happiness create more of the same.

With a little determination and practice you'll get there.

Even if you don't feel it, continue to replace your negative thoughts with positive ones, launch a stream of positive self-talk and you'll begin to feel it and more importantly believe it. Don't stop and don't give up!

Remember, we are what we believe. My all-time favorite quote is: "I will see it when I believe it!"

Stan

THOUGHT REPLACEMENT CHECK LIST

Please check the areas you would like to concentrate more.
 Feel free to add your own based on your personal needs:

	I used to do	I need to do	I do
1. Become aware of my thoughts – (Practice Innerviewing.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Change or replace my negative thoughts. (“E tu Brute”)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Take a moment and step away. (Positive Distraction)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Be with positive people. (Attitudes are Contagious)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Become aware of my words.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Analyze instead of criticize.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Stay away from “all or nothing” thinking.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Avoid the temptation to over generalize.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Labeling and Mislabeleding.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. I would rather be happy than right. (What do you chose?)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Change my mental filter. Choose to focus on the positive.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Watch my tendency for jumping to conclusions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Be aware of emotional reasoning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Disqualifying the positive.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Try not to take everything personally.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Stop magnifying the problem.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Drop cynicism. Now!	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Celebrate more.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Thank yourself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Be more gentle and kind to yourself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Stages of Change Recovery



Stage 1:

I walk down the street.

There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I fall in. It takes forever to find a way out.

It's not my fault.

Stage 2:

I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I pretend I don't see it.

I fall in again. I can't believe I am in this same place. It still takes a long time to get out.

It's my fault.

Stage 3:

I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I see it is there. I fall in... but my eyes are open. I know where I am.

It is my fault – and I'm upset... It's become a habit.

I get out immediately.

Stage 4:

I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.

I walk around it.

Stage 5:

I walk down a different street.