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Tips for More Positive Thinking

Changing the way you think can help you put a more positive spin on what happens in your life. This makes you more productive overall.

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Thinking and Believing

Changing your thinking habits can make many things less disagreeable. For example, if you do not like your job, you may:

- Habitually think about what a chore it is
- Think about how much you hate it
- Think about how much you would rather do something else for a living

You may think negative thoughts about your job from the time you get up to go to work until you get home, and this may keep you miserable all day long.

You will feel better about working at a job you dislike if you practice positive thoughts, such as:

- "At least it pays the rent."
- "I sure do like my paycheck."
- "I'm going to do the best I can."

If you are depressed or anxious, think of the opposite. Instead of dwelling on the worst-case scenario, imagine the most unlikely best-case outcome. Both are equally unlikely; it is absurd to predict the future accurately. So, at least by imagining the best-case scenario, you will stop accepting what pops into your mind and believing it to be true.

How You Might Start Out

Pick an area in which you are having trouble, and then create or invent new memorable, extremely favorable, ridiculously absurd options to deal with that situation.

For example, if you are uncomfortable around your supervisor at work or your relatives, imagine positive scenes in which you solve conflicts or make adjustments.

If your confidence and self-esteem are low, imagine:

- Scenes in which your confidence is increased
- Being praised for your efforts
- Being successful
- Finally receiving the acceptance or affection from those who have not provided it in the past
- The best possible outcome you can feel.

It may sound strange, but your brain will think your life is better (it only knows what it is told), and chemically, your mood will lift gradually.

Moving Forward

Taking these positive steps may not be so simple.

For example, you may be fighting low self-esteem because of prior abandonment. To change your self-image, you affirm, "I am good, beautiful, worthy and strong." However, your unconscious mind sabotages your efforts to create a new positive identity by releasing the negative counter-thought, "You are an insecure, awkward, homely loser."

This negative thought has had control of your self-image for years. It is a well-established thought circuit that does not give up its power so easily.

The negative thought maintains its power unless neutralized by a stronger, positive thought. With practice, eventually the positive thought will grow and associate with other positive thoughts, such as:

- "I am a good person."
- "There are many successes in my life."
- "People like me."
- "I have a lot to offer."

It is up to you. You can choose at any time to deploy an army of positive thoughts that will rapidly and effectively neutralize the negative ones.

Then, when the same triggering situation arises to test you, your mind stays positive, poised and peaceful.

Steps to Take

Affirmations may sound (and feel) a little stiff and unnatural at first, but do not worry – they work anyway.

Once you get the feel of affirmations, relax and develop your own style. Affirmations are more effective when the mind is relaxed, opened and less defensive, such as just before going to sleep or just after awaking.

You can practice affirmations before, during or after a particular problem surfaces.

Affirmations are best stated in the present tense because, if affirmations are in the future tense ("I will ..."), your unconscious mind feels no urgency to act now.

Make your affirmations believable and realistic so that you can say them with sincerity. Begin with small, easily achievable goals, and work your way up to bigger accomplishments.

Below are some sample affirmations that others have found helpful:

Maturity - replaces feeling immature

- "I am a grown-up now."
- "I am not playing a role from childhood."

Belonging - replaces feelings of unbelonging

- "I belong to myself."
- "I belong wherever I happen to be."

Security - replaces insecurity

- "My security is not in material things."
- "My security is not in phony idealism."
- "I am secure within myself."

Trust - replaces distrust of oneself and others

- "I can trust other people."
- "I can trust myself."

Equality - replaces feeling inferior or not good enough

- "I am no more and no less human than anyone else."
- "I don't have to prove I am equal. There is nothing to prove."

Liberation - replaces feeling trapped by old roles and attitudes

- "I am liberated from my childhood fears."
- "I am liberated from my childhood misconceptions about people, life and myself."
- "I have liberated myself. I had the courage to do my homework."
- "No one else can liberate me. I must liberate myself."

Independence - replaces feeling dependent

- "I am competent to live my life on my own terms."
- "I can validate my own successes."
- "I can trust my own judgement."

Accomplishment - replaces "I can't win"

- "I did it. I made it happen in the real world."

- "I didn't do it perfectly, but I did it well enough."

Success - replaces feelings of failure

- "I can succeed after all."
- "I deserve to succeed."
- "I am not driven to succeed; I am free to succeed."
- "I succeed not because I have to prove myself. I succeed because it is in me to do."

Confidence - replaces self-doubt

- "I did it once; I can do it again."
- "I have earned the right to feel confident within myself."

Courage - replaces discouragement

- "Courage is the willingness to take a risk."
- "I took the risk. I had the courage."
- "I know that if I don't succeed, it will hurt. But it won't hurt as much as it did when I was a child. It won't be the end of the world. I won't take it personally."

Appropriate Responsibility - replaces too much responsibility or too little

- "I didn't assume too much responsibility."
- "I assumed appropriate responsibility for myself."

The Power of Choice - replaces reacting to situations

- "I am not powerless and out of control. I have the power of choice. I chose to do my homework. I am choosing to validate myself of my own free will and volition."

Trust in Our Judgment - replaces doubt that our judgment is not good enough

- "I decided to do my homework. That was a pretty good decision."
- "It wasn't perfect or worthless. It was good enough and getting better."

Good Enough - replaces feelings of inferiority

- "Good enough is as good as I am right now."
- "I don't have to be any better than that. If I am better still tomorrow, that is all right, too."

Proactive - replaces reactive

- "I am operating independently on a realistic basis."
- "I am not against anyone; I am for me."
- "I am using adult judgment, not attitudes."

Peace of Mind - replaces turmoil and chaos

- "I am at peace with myself."
- "I am free to be at peace with others."
- "I can let down my guard. It wasn't preventing anything anyway."
- "I can take life as it comes."
- "I can have peace of mind in the present."

Begin by spending 15 minutes every day capturing your thought process on paper. Looking at your thoughts on paper helps you to identify the exaggerated pessimistic thoughts you have.

After identifying your negative thoughts, write several positive statements for each negative one. First, focus on what you can do about the problem. Replace unfulfilled longing with realistic goals or plans for change.

When you cannot do anything to change a situation, work toward acceptance. Use thoughts like, "I don't really need it."

Keep a list of your most common negative thought habits and positive alternatives for each. Refer to this list whenever negative thoughts arise until you can substitute helpful alternatives from memory or immediately make up new thought alternatives to counter the negative thoughts.

Repeat your affirmations when you are engaged in activities that do not require your full attention, such as:

- Walking
- Cooking
- Cleaning
- Stuck in rush-hour traffic

Resources

- National Institute of Mental Health: www.nimh.nih.gov
- National Association for Self Esteem: www.self-esteem-nase.org
- La Belle Foundation: www.selfesteem.org
- National Alliance on Mental Illness: www.nami.org
- Mental Health America: www.nmha.org

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