



Are you your own worst enemy?

## Description

# Self-sabotage: Recognizing and overcoming it

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“You can’t do that!” “That’s way too difficult!” “If you try, you’ll probably just fail anyway.” These statements sound as if they’re coming from a tyrannical and cruel person with a mission to destroy self-confidence. Unfortunately, all too often, we can be the tyrant and our target can be ourselves.

Negative self-talk is something we have all probably engaged in at some time. When it rears its ugly head on a regular basis, it can lead to self-sabotage and can stop us from achieving our goals and dreams.

What’s worse is that we usually don’t recognize that it’s even happening. Instead, we attribute our lack of success to inadequacy. This, in turn, strengthens the negative messages we feed ourselves, and we get caught in a self-sabotaging cycle that can be very difficult to break.

Negative self-talk is something we have all probably engaged in at some time. When it rears its ugly head on a regular basis, it can lead to self-sabotage and can stop us from achieving our goals and dreams.

The telltale sign that you are sabotaging yourself is when you grind to a halt when you’re trying to achieve your goals, for no rational reason. The skill, ability and desire are there: it’s just that something stops you from moving forward.

When you feel that you can’t do something you should be able to do, or that you shouldn’t do something, even though you know deep down that you want or need to do it, self-sabotage is at work.

There are some common themes in self-sabotaging behaviour. See if you recognize yourself in any of these



examples:

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### **Procrastination**

- Knowing you should be working on something, but putting it off again and again.
- Starting projects, but never quite finishing them.
- Feeling unmotivated or unable to proceed, even when there are lots of exciting opportunities.

### **Unfulfilled dreams**

- Dreaming of doing something, but never doing anything about it.

### **Worry**

- Fretting over things that really shouldn't matter.
- Fearing that if you fail, others will think less of you
- Worrying that if you're successful, your friends won't like you any more.
- Doubting yourself and your abilities even though you 'know' you are very capable
- Feeling stressed and anxious, and perhaps suffering from unexplained depression or panic attacks when trying to achieve something important to you.

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### **Anger**

- Using aggressive rather assertive communication and not taking steps to change this.
- Destroying relationships with others (family, friends, co-workers) with anger, resentment or jealousy.

### **Feelings of worthlessness**

- Exaggerating other people's achievements, and diminishing your own.
- Taking even unfair or misguided criticism to heart
- Letting others put you down.

Whatever your personal self-sabotaging behaviour is, you **MUST** overcome it if you are to make the most of your career. If you allow yourself to engage in negative self-talk, you erode your self-confidence and self-esteem. And with every failed attempt, you 'prove' to yourself that you can't or shouldn't do the thing you want.

And as you continue spiralling down, you become more and more frustrated, discouraged, and angry with yourself. These feelings trap you and keep you from doing whatever it is you need to do to break free.

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Fortunately, you can escape self-sabotaging behaviour, and this starts with recognizing the negative messages you send to yourself.

## **Breaking the cycle of self-sabotage**



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## 1. Recognize your self-sabotaging behaviour

In order to stop self-sabotage, you first need to recognize your own self-sabotaging behaviour. Ask yourself:

- What goals have you had for yourself for a long time and never been able to accomplish?
- What do you consistently fail at, for no obvious reason?
- Are there particular areas where you find yourself procrastinating or putting off making a decision?
- Are you suffering from a lack of motivation to do something that you should want to do?
- Do you find yourself unreasonably angry or frustrated, and is this affecting your relationships?
- Is there an area where other people (and in particular, your boss) consistently get frustrated with you?
- Is there something in your life that nags at you and causes you dissatisfaction because you know you could do it, or do it better?

Ask yourself questions like these, and tune in to the situations where you may be sabotaging yourself.

## 2. Monitor your negative thinking

Think about what you say to yourself when you engage in this behaviour. Write down all your negative thoughts, however silly or unrealistic they may seem.

## 3. Challenge your self-sabotaging thinking

When you know what your negative self-talk is, or you find yourself behaving in some way that is preventing you from achieving what you need or want to do, ask yourself:

- What deeper thoughts lie behind this self-sabotaging thinking?
- Are these thoughts rational, and based on any clear facts?
- Are past unsuccessful attempts unnecessarily preventing you from making a positive change?

## 4. Develop self-supporting behaviours

Having identified and defeated the false rationale for your self-sabotaging behaviours, you are now free to start rebuilding your self-confidence. Ask yourself:

- What can you say to yourself that is positive or encouraging?
- What options do you have? Is there more than one way to achieve your goal?
- Can you build self-confidence by setting and achieving much smaller goals, on your way to achieving the big ones that you've not achieved in the past?

Turn your assumptions around and put them in the correct perspective. Align them with positive beliefs about what you can accomplish. When your skills, beliefs and behaviours are aligned, you will have the right mental, emotional and physical states to do whatever you set your mind to.

Then use your answers to come up with a message that inspires you to move in a positive direction. For example,



“Even though I doubt that I can complete this project on time, I know I have the resources and skills I need to get me through. When I start tackling the project, I know I will release a lot of the stress and anxiety I have been carrying around while I’ve been procrastinating.”

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Take a look at other people around you who are doing what they set out to do and living the life they were meant to live. Do they actually have better skills than you? Have they been given opportunities that you haven’t?

Probably not, at least initially. What they have is a belief they can do whatever they want to do. They tell themselves they can accomplish their goals and dreams, and then they set in place a plan to achieve this.

## Key Points

Turning your dreams into reality requires solid planning and lots of work and effort. To start the process, however, you need to believe in yourself and your ability to actually do it.

Self-sabotaging behaviour cuts this belief off at the knees. Negative self-talk is an easy pattern to fall into and a difficult one to break out of. But by being aware of negative self-talk, you can ward off the effects of self-sabotage before it wears away your self-esteem. Start today, by tackling your sabotaging messages and behaviours, and put yourself on a path toward greater satisfaction and fulfilment.

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