



## Reprogramming Your Negative Thinking: The Art of Re-Framing

### An Important Statistic to Know

While no one knows for sure, experts estimate that we have between 50,000 and 75,000 thoughts on any given day. Of those, roughly two-thirds to three-fourths are negative thoughts...everything from "I'll never finish this on time" to "I look fat in this" to "I can never do anything right." Big or small, this kind of negative thinking undermines our ability to do what we want to do and to feel good about it. Those negative tapes take a toll on your subconscious, and eventually, on your conscious thinking. To break the habit of negative thinking, it's important to expose counterproductive thinking for what it is and choose to *re-frame* that thinking in a more productive manner.

### The Concept

This exercise deals with the idea of mental re-frames. Basically, when we choose to reframe something, we opt to view it through a different lens than the one we started out with. This simple truth is that re-framing helps you make a *conscious decision* to focus on positives rather than negatives or on constructive steps rather than roadblocks.

For example, one evening I left work quite a bit later than I had hoped to as a result of some last-minute deadlines. I began cataloguing all of the things I had planned to do that evening; pay bills, work out, make some calls to family members, work on some marketing concepts for my business, and have some quiet time with my husband. By the time I pulled into the driveway, I was frustrated and anxious thinking that I'd missed my opportunity to get to all of those things on my list. I looked at the clock and thought "It's already 7:30. I'll never get everything done."

Then for some reason I remembered how I used to view time in my college days when I worked full time during the day and went to school full time at night. When the professors would let us out of class 15 minutes early, I remember thinking "Wow...this is found time! What am I going to do with all of it?" I saw it as a gift...this precious bit of time that previously had been accounted for. Yet somehow, I had lost that ability to look at my time in such a positive way. Too many to-dos and too lofty expectations for myself had led me to have a much less constructive perception of my time. So, as I sat there in the driveway, I decided to re-frame how I was seeing the situation. Instead of saying "It's already 7:30 and I'll never get done what I need to do tonight," I chose to re-frame it into "Wow, it's only 7:30. I have 3 full hours before I go to bed. That's plenty of time to do the things that are most important to me." I walked into the house with a much more peaceful outlook and chose to make a clear plan of how to move forward—to focus on meaningful steps towards the most meaningful goals I had for that evening. For me, that meant postponing my workout to the next day, doing only a portion of the marketing work I had set aside, paying the most important bills, and spending the rest of the time with my husband and family phone calls. I was satisfied with the choice, and much more satisfied with my mindset that evening.

### The Practice

Re-framing is actually pretty easy. It's a matter of building in a mental "Stop Sign" that you can visualize any time you feel that your thinking is getting too negative, counterproductive, or out of control. Maybe you are getting anxious about having too much on your plate, or feeling overwhelmed by your to-do list, or just having trouble focusing on the positive side of a situation. When you're in that space make the conscious decision to Reflect, Reframe, and Recommit...and you'll be on your way to a more constructive mindset:

1. **Reflect:** *Take a moment to perform an objective assessment of the situation.* You might be thinking, “I’ll never get it all done,” to which your response could be “So what’s the result of that...will the world stop spinning? Will people stop, point, and laugh? Will I be marked as a lazy, inefficient clod for the rest of my life?” Chances are, the answer to all three of these questions is a resounding “NO!” So, you move on to the next step. If you’re hung up on the fact that this stumbling block might
  
2. **Re-frame:** *Decide how you will view the situation in a more rational or more productive way.* Look at the actual consequences or outcomes of what is going on.
  - If you will have to postpone something you intended to do, is it really that big of a deal?
  - If you’re worried about letting someone down, is that a rational fear? After all, people are generally much more forgiving of our human nature than we are of ourselves.
  - If you’re disappointed in yourself because you’re not moving towards a goal you’ve set, have you taken the time to review your progress towards that goal? You’re probably further along than you think.
  
3. **Recommit:** Choose to recommit yourself to the vision you have for improving your life *and* to the actions you want to take to move towards that vision. When you re-visit what’s REALLY important to you—the big picture—it’s much easier to put the little speed bumps of life in a better perspective. And once you focus your energy on the actions you need to take to move towards that vision, you won’t have time or energy to waste on what isn’t working right now.

So....give it a try. Next time you find yourself having a mental rainstorm, try shifting your gaze towards the clear skies in the distance. You might be surprised by what you see!

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