

Coaching Works

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Self-Sabotage to Success

THE SEVEN SELF-SABOTAGES
TO SUCCESS – WHY PEOPLE SABOTAGE
THEMSELVES AND HOW TO STOP IT

What's your excuse?" Dr. Wayne Dyer asks in his new book, *Excuses Begone! How to Change Lifelong, Self-Defeating Thinking Habits*. "In my role as a counselor, teacher, and parent," Dr. Dyer says, "I've heard many reasons people use to explain an unhappy existence ... and almost all of them fall into one huge category, which I call 'excuses.'" "Excuse," another word for "self-sabotage."

Coaches help people formulate their dreams – their ideal lives. They then assist in creating goals, sub-goals, action steps and timelines. However, along the way, they often find their clients get "stuck." Being "stuck" is usually what motivates us to hire a coach in the first place, so a good coach can identify where and when you get stuck in pursuit of your life's dreams. Usually getting stuck involves one of the following seven major self-sabotages. Most barriers to success are self imposed. However, sometimes the goal is unrealistic – it may be too difficult or this just may not be the right time for it. A good coach can assist you in determining if your goal is "optimally challenging" – that is, not too easy and not too difficult. Coaching can also assist in determining your true values and priorities, and adjusting your life accordingly.

When you stray from your path, your coach can assist you with insight into the nature of your blocks. The following are seven major blockers to one's movement toward their success, along with ideas to overcome them.

Nothing can stop the man with the right mental attitude from achieving his goal; nothing on earth can help the man with the wrong mental attitude.

— Thomas Jefferson



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Dr. Parker has led mentoring programs at Fortune 500 companies such as Accenture where she has addressed issues of leadership development, credibility, career life balance and effective communication. These programs contributed to the organization's winning the Catalyst Award. She has also been a guest lecturer at the Business schools at Northwestern and DePaul University. At DePaul she was part of a course on "What It Takes To Be Successful in Today's Highly Competitive World." She is now giving a talk on credibility – "You Can Send Them Anywhere and They'll Do Well" – as part of her extensive work with executive coaching.

Carole's most recent work has been with *CEO Journey*, where she leads groups of CEO's and other business professionals in transition who aim to increase their personal clarity, courage and humanity in order to leave a greater legacy and identify their future options.

SELF-SABOTAGE #1: "I DON'T KNOW WHAT I REALLY WANT"

Before you can "go for your goals," "do it now," or "make it happen," it is important to *determine what it is you really want*. Many of us have what is called *goal conflict*. You may not even realize you have goal conflict – you are either trying to achieve too much at once, or you want too many different things and cannot start any one thing due to your confusion.

Second, your goal may not be a *realistic* one. Healthy goals are those that take into account your well-being, in addition to the well-being of others. Sometimes our goals or desires are self-defeating. You may be motivated to pursue jobs or relationships that are destructive to your well-being and in the end will hinder rather than further your aims. You need to explore your underlying motives for the goal and discuss them with the people in your life whom you trust in order to determine whether the goal is a healthy one that should be pursued.

You also need to take into account your overall health, by looking at your goals within a holistic framework. We need to explore all areas of our lives and strive for health and balance in mental, physical, emotional, spiritual, interpersonal, and professional areas. Realistic and healthy goals will complement the rest of your lifestyle, will mesh with your other goals, and will therefore serve to build self-esteem. Moreover, the more attractive the goal is to you, the better your performance is likely to be, so it is important that the goal selected is one that you have some passion about.

Don't settle for second best when choosing your road to success; make sure it's the path that you believe in, and then give it your full attention.

— Barbara J. Hall

SELF-SABOTAGE #2: "I DON'T DESERVE IT"

"I don't deserve it" is often an underlying, unconscious thought. It has a great deal to do with one's self esteem, feelings of competence and self worth. *Self-esteem* is an important part of achieving your goals. You can only pursue and keep what you think you deserve. Consequently, lack of self-esteem will sabotage success attempts. When you lack self-esteem, an internalized critical inner voice will attempt to cancel your ambitions through self-doubt and disbelief.

Another possible problem is unconscious *guilt* about your own success or "havingness." Many people describe a feeling of shame, or "awaiting punishment," when their lives are going well. Often, we hear things like, "Things are going too well. I'm just looking over my shoulder waiting for something bad to happen." It is as if every good thing must be followed by a bad thing. People talk about going through a "lucky streak" followed by a "streak of bad luck." These kinds of statements need to be recognized as self-sabotage – they may signal repressed guilt and shame that need to be handled before one can move on.

Reviewing your past successes is a powerful strategy in building self confidence in your ability to achieve new goals. Remember what obstacles you encountered along the way and how you overcame them. Remember how it felt when you were able to overcome obstacles and succeed. This is a process you may be able to duplicate in achieving your new goals.

Another powerful exercise is to dispute your irrational beliefs and replace them with new, positive self statements (cognitive restructuring). Martin Seligman wrote a book called *Learned Optimism* (1996), in which he discusses the importance of cognitive restructuring. Try to catch yourself making negative statements about yourself (aloud or to yourself) and immediately restate them into a positive.

Nothing will ever be attempted if all possible objections must be first overcome.

— Samuel Johnson

SELF-SABOTAGE #3: "I DON'T HAVE THE TIME, MONEY OR RESOURCES"

Tony Robbins (1991) writes, "More than anything else, I believe it's our *decisions*, not the *conditions* of our lives that determine our destiny." Many of our excuses center on not having certain resources or advantages. It is true that some people have advantages, be they genetic, educational, environmental, monetary, or familial. But in *Simple Steps to Impossible Dreams*, Steven Scott (1998) insists that people who achieve "impossible dreams" are generally not very different in resources from the average person: "they *don't* have higher IQs; they have *not* been better educated; and they do *not* have better backgrounds than you. They simply learned and utilized some specific techniques that enabled them to 'dream big' and then to achieve those dreams."

There is only so much time in a day, and only so much time in a lifetime. One of the most widespread problems is *goal conflict*. This means having multiple, conflicting goals, such as a teenager's desire for both total independence and a safe, nurturing home environment. Goal conflict can arise legitimately, but it can also serve as an excuse for abandoning goals before they are complete. Exercises such as time management, values clarification, and creating a "life timeline" can be very helpful. Also, remember that you can do *almost anything* you want, but you cannot do *everything* you want. You need to prioritize and do one thing at a time. When you complain that it is "taking too long," remember that many successful people achieved great things after 90 years of age!

I intend to take time for myself to live the life that I came here to live, and to do it without ignoring my responsibilities as a parent, spouse, or employee.

— Wayne Dyer

This newsletter is intended to offer general information only and recognizes that individual issues may differ from these broad guidelines. Personal issues should be addressed with a professional coach who is familiar with the details of the issues.
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SELF-SABOTAGE #4: "IT'S TOO DIFFICULT"

Even after people have determined their goals, one of the greatest roadblocks to success remains the lack of sustained, concerted effort. Most people are somewhat lazy – our natural tendency is to avoid stress and dedication, and, rather, to do what is fun, easy, and immediate. The most difficult thing to do is to discipline oneself to focus and concentrate, especially when a more immediately gratifying activity beckons.

In fact, most things of value in life take work to achieve. Changing self-statements from negative to positive can be very beneficial during this struggle. Look at your process as a long road, or journey. Describe the path you are on, and where it leads. Describe where you are tempted to veer off, and where that "veered off" path is likely to take you. Remind yourself of the value of staying true to your path, if in fact, your desired success is somewhere along it, even when it is difficult. You do not have to *want* to do it – or *feel* like doing it – to do it! The saying, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going," describes the inner strength one must "summon" in order to continue. It takes tremendous courage, determination and tenacity to continue, or get back up after a fall, during rough times. Support, validation, and encouragement from others are especially important here.

When you get into a tight place and everything goes against you, till it seems you could not hold on a minute longer, never give up then, for that is just the place and time that the tide will turn."

— Harriet Beecher Stowe

SELF-SABOTAGE #5: "I HAVE TO DO IT MY WAY"

Why do smart/talented people sometimes do dumb things that cause them to self-destruct? Researchers have found some commonalities in people who have achieved a high level of success in a particular area of their lives, and who subsequently self-destructed or "crashed and burned" – failed school, got fired, got arrested, lost their families, went bankrupt, were impeached or otherwise fell from grace. It appears that the attitude of "having to do it my way" without regard for the impact on other people, or allowing feedback or advice from others, often results in damaging consequences (Feinberg, 1992; Slocum and Ragan, 2002; Gerber, 2001). Most of the problem seems to have to do with people who are over-determined to do things *their own way*. This can arise out of selfishness, rebellion, stubbornness, elitism, extreme self-reliance, isolation, impatience, compulsions, addictions, or deep seated emotional or psychological problems.

Whatever the reason, if you think you may be getting in your own way by having to do it your own way, this would be an important issue to examine in your coaching.



... to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed.

— Booker T. Washington

SELF-SABOTAGE #6: "THEY DON'T WANT ME TO"

A question you need to ask yourself often is, "Am I living the life I really want, or the life *others* want for me?" *Your failure to handle this one issue can sabotage your entire achievement process!*

Being too accommodating to others can impede your motivation and action. Moreover, it can be tempting to blame others for your own lack of movement, claiming that they will be jealous, angry, upset, or overly needy if you succeed. This deprives you of your own power and autonomy. If it is others who are to blame for your failures, then it is these same others who control your successes. This is giving away personal power to others, and it is completely self-sabotaging.

One of the greatest needs of human beings is that of *approval from others*. Fear of disapproval is one of the greatest self-sabotages. When you are blocked because of fear of what others will think, focusing on the goal of "developing my true self" becomes a compelling replacement for the fear of "others' approval." James Prochaska (1995) discusses the idea of "enlisting" or "eliciting" helping relationships. He believes that helping relationships are of *primary value* to your success. He says most people in your life *do want to help you*, but *do not know how to help you!* It is up to *you* to teach your family, friends, co-workers, and roommates how they can be most helpful. It is also helpful to find a good support person, aside from friends and family. Examples are personal coaches, counselors, support groups, sponsors, mentors, teachers, or pastors.

... and then the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.

— Anais Nin

SELF-SABOTAGE #7: "I'M AFRAID"

Fear is by far the number one saboteur of success. Fear is with us for a reason. It protects us from danger. However, many times our fears are too intense, based on reality. Most people fear the unknown. They fear change. They fear failure, success, disapproval, criticism, pain, and struggle. Fear keeps people persisting in unhappy and dysfunctional situations, because they know that changing the situation will lead to the unknown, which may be even more painful than what they are currently experiencing. Your fears may be rational or irrational. They need to be examined in the context of reality to determine how great the risk really is.

Your coach can help you assess past fears and failures and work through them. A cognitive restructuring technique is to substitute the phrase "learning experience" for "failure." Another rephrasing is Steven Scott's

(1998), who defines failure as “an *event* in which you did not achieve your desired outcome.” The danger of believing in failure is that people tend to generalize: “I failed, therefore I’m a failure.” The purpose of using the phrase “learning experience” is to help you realize that what seems like a failure is not an end to everything but part of a larger *growth process*. The concept can be similarly applied to success, since ideally successes are not ending points but milestones en route to other successes.

The fears of failure and success are blocks that, with patience and time, can be confronted and overcome. Once success has been proven with respect to small, simple tasks, your confidence increases and the fear of

failure diminishes because success has been proven. The act of undertaking the pursuit of a goal can in itself build self-esteem, whether or not the goal itself is eventually achieved. As you become more confident about your abilities, you become ready to take on larger challenges.

You know what I decided? I decided to live on the edge, not be as predictable and to step out on the edge of my life a little bit: kick it up. I’m doing that with everything. I cleaned out my closet. I changed my hair. I lost some weight. I’m moving from the center. And I’m having a good time.

— Oprah (on turning 50)

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