

You Can Let Go of Negative Self-Judgments by Ronald A. Alexander, Ph.D.

Adapted from Dr. Ronald Alexander's new book, *Wise Mind, Open Mind: Finding Purpose and Meaning in Times of Crisis, Loss, and Change* (New Harbinger Publications, 2009).

(580 Words plus Bio)

Many people cling to the myth that those who are successful inevitably feel good about themselves and are free from self-doubt and insecurities. I've worked with many clients whose résumés, personal achievements, and reputations garner the deepest respect and admiration, yet their negative self-talk is often utterly brutal. Despite their low opinion of themselves, they've managed to fashion lives that many would envy. Yet the disconnection between their inner feelings about themselves and their outer success causes them to hold back from making changes that would lead to far greater fulfillment and peace of mind. They'll remain in a stagnant situation until change is thrust upon them, and then feel overwhelmed by any crises that occur.

The Destructive Power of Negative Self-Judgments

No matter how accomplished we are, no matter how happy we may seem, we all hold on to negative self-judgments, and they hold on to us. They prevent us from discovering our power to change our lives for the better. When we switch to more positive thought patterns, crisis stops being overwhelming, and it's far easier to let go of resistance, tune in to our passions and inner resources, and move forward with confidence.

Positive thinking is indeed powerful, but don't hold yourself to unrealistic standards and expect to quickly transform what are often lifelong thinking habits. The object is to stop assigning meaning to these self-judgments, because once you start to give them weight, they begin to weigh you down. Through the practice of

mindfulness, you can learn to notice when you are tearing yourself down and begin to change your habit of self-criticism.

The Stories the Mind Spins

Often, the rational mind will string together a series of distortions. Instead of simply noticing "I am shy," the mind will generate the thought, "I'm shy, which is why I'll never find a romantic partner; my shyness makes me unattractive." Instead of observing "I am an extrovert," the mind begins to tell a disempowering story: "I'm an extrovert. My mother never liked that about me, and it seemed to embarrass my siblings. I probably made a fool of myself many times. I am too eager to connect to other people, who look down on me for being emotionally needy." You may not even be fully aware that you're embellishing your self-judgments in an unwholesome way.

Reframe Your Negative Self-Judgments

Through mindfulness practice and self-inquiry, you can render any negative self-judgments neutral and even see them in a far different light. To be "self-centered," focused on resolving inner conflicts, can be perceived as negative, but it's very important at times to direct your attention to yourself and your needs. If you feel that you are "callous," you might reframe that quality as "courageous" or "bold." If you see yourself as "weak," consider thinking of yourself as someone who is sensitive to others' feelings.

You'll never rid yourself of your unwholesome self-judgments and be completely free from the suffering they cause you. However, you can alter their quality, learn from them, and either let them go or transform them so that they no longer block you from a sense of well-being, a feeling of spaciousness, and openness

to new possibilities. Hidden gold will appear when you let go of your negative-judgments. The aspects of yourself you've been overlooking will ascend to your consciousness. Through mindfulness, you can discover these forgotten qualities that will inspire and vitalize you, and carry you through the rough waters of crisis to more placid waters.

Ronald Alexander, Ph.D. is the author of the just released book, *Wise Mind, Open Mind: Finding Purpose and Meaning in Times of Crisis, Loss, and Change*. He is the director of the OpenMind Training® Institute, practices mindfulness-based mind-body psychotherapy and leadership coaching in Santa Monica, CA, for individuals and corporate clients. He has taught personal and clinical training groups for professionals in Integral Psychotherapy, Ericksonian mind-body healing therapies, mindfulness meditation, and Buddhist psychology nationally and internationally since 1970. (www.openmindtraining.com)