

The Power of Affirmations: How to Make Them Work for You

Affirmations (meaning a statement said with confidence about a perceived truth) have helped thousands of people make significant changes in their lives. But they don't always work for everyone. Why can one person have great success using this tool while another see's no results at all?

An affirmation can work as it has the ability to program your mind into believing the stated concept. This is because the mind doesn't know the difference between what is real or fantasy. When you watch a movie and you start to laugh or cry your mind is empathizing with the characters on the screen even though it is only Hollywood magic. There are both positive and negative types of affirmations. I'm sure many of us can remember as a child being told by a teacher, parent or coach that we didn't have the ability to do something, or we were fat, clumsy, etc. These unwholesome statements can stay with us in the conscious or unconscious mind, which we then reinforce throughout our lives.

For example, the fear of failure, according to Heinz Kohut, the grandfather of psychology of the self, is often intimately connected to a childhood fear of being abandoned either physically or emotionally. When we fear failure, we tend to overestimate the risk we're taking and imagine the worst possible scenario—the emotional equivalent of our primary caretakers deserting us. What we picture is so dreadful that we convince ourselves that we shouldn't even try to change. We avoid opportunities for success, and then, when we fail, the unwholesome affirmation we unwittingly re-confirm is “Success just isn't written in my stars” or “It's just not in my karma!”

If an unwholesome belief is deeply rooted in our unconscious mind then it has the ability to override a positive affirmation even if we aren't aware of it. This is why for many people affirmations don't seem to work as their afflicted thought patterns are so strong that it knocks out the effect of the positive statement. So how can we add more muscle to an affirmation so it has the power to triumph over our negative thinking? Here are some suggestions on how to make them work for you.

5 Steps to Make Affirmations More Effective & Powerful

Step 1: Make a list of what you've always thought of as your negative qualities. Include any criticisms others have made of you that you've been holding onto; whether it's something your siblings, parents and peers used to say about you when you were a child, or what your boss told you in your last annual review. Don't judge if they're accurate and remember we all have flaws. This is one of the beauties of being human. Simply make a note of them and look for a common theme, such as “I'm unworthy.” This will be a great place to start making a shift in your life. When you write out the recurring belief notice if you holding on to it anywhere in your body? For example, do you feel tightness or dread in your heart or stomach? In my book, *Wise Mind, Open Mind* I discuss in detail on how to let go of negative self-judgments but for now ask yourself if this unwholesome concept is helpful or productive in your life and if not, what would be.

Step 2: Now write out an affirmation on the positive aspect of your self-judgment. You may want to use a thesaurus to find more powerful words to beef up your statement. For example instead of saying, “I’m worthy.” You could say, “I’m remarkable and cherished.” After you have written your affirmation then ask a close friend to read it to see if they have any suggestions to make it stronger.

Step 3: Speak the affirmation out loud for about five minutes three times a day – morning, mid day and evening. An ideal time to do this is when you’re putting your make up or shaving so that you can look at yourself in the mirror as you repeat the positive statement. Another option that helps to reinforce the new belief and would be easy to do at work is to write out the affirmation several times in a notebook. Notice over time as you write it if your style of writing changes. This could be a clue as to how your mind perceives the new concept. I call this exercise using the mindfulness journal to forward the agenda of the positive affirmation.

Step 4: Anchor the affirmation in your body as you are repeating it by placing your hand on the area that felt uncomfortable when you wrote out the negative belief in Step One. Also “breathe” into the affirmation while you are saying or writing it. As you reprogram your mind you want to move from the concept of the affirmation to a real, positive embodiment of the quality you seek.

Step 5: Get a friend or coach to repeat your affirmation to you. As they are saying for example, “You are remarkable and cherished” identify this statement as ‘good mothering’ or ‘good fathering’ messages. If you don’t have someone who you feel comfortable asking then use your reflection in the mirror as the person who is reinforcing the healthy message.

Affirmations can be a powerful tool to help you change your mood, state of mind, and manifest the change you desire in your life. But they work best if you can first identify the unwholesome belief that is opposing them. If these suggestions are still not helping then I recommend seeing a professional therapist to help you uncover what is buried deep in your unconscious and/or start a mindfulness meditation practice. Mindfulness meditation is a very effective method to help you uncover your unconscious thought patterns and allows you to categorize them identifying what is wholesome, negative and afflicted. Mindfulness is not about change rather it’s about the power and ability to accept first what is then to transmute towards what is possible. Try it and see how your life can improve!