

The Power of



REFRAMING

by
Curtis J. Washington

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For my mom, who
never, ever stopped
believing in me even
in times when I
stopped believing in
myself.

The Power of Reframing

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Introduction

Self-critical thoughts can be overwhelming. They can consume your day and make it difficult to focus on anything else. These types of negative thoughts can even harm you in multiple ways.

Self-criticism can be an ongoing dialogue inside your head. Most of the thoughts focus on flaws, whether actual or perceived. Sometimes the thoughts start after a critical comment from another person. Sometimes self-critical thoughts can be sparked by taking on a challenge that is new or unfamiliar.

In rare cases, self-criticism can be useful. It may increase humbleness and provide a way to evaluate mistakes. However, most of the time, self-criticism creates unnecessary pain and suffering.

Self-critical thoughts can increase the risk of depression, anxiety, stress, and other mental health issues. They also weaken

your self-esteem and confidence which in turn can make you leery to do anything challenging at all no matter what potential benefits lie just beyond it. However, you can learn to reframe these negative thoughts in your head and overcome them.

“It's easy to become very self-critical when you're an actor. Then you get critiqued by the critics. Whether you agree with them or not, people are passing judgment on you.”

- Keanu Reeves

Understanding Self-Criticism

Now most self-criticism can be separated into two categories: comparative and internalized criticism. Comparative criticism is when you compare yourself to others. On the other hand, internalized criticism is when you feel like you can't live up to your own standards.

Both comparative and internalized self-criticism can be dangerous.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THESE TWO TYPES OF CRITICISM:

1. Comparative criticism makes you constantly compare and contrast your life with friends, family members, coworkers, and others. It can even affect your relationships.

- You might view others as superior or better than you with this type of criticism.
 - You're also likely to think that others are judging you and assume you don't measure up.
2. Internalized criticism makes you feel that you'll never be perfect or achieve the things you desire. It can even make you think that success isn't enough.
- And this obsession with being perfect can be overwhelming with this type of self-criticism.

“Much protective self-criticism stems from growing up around people who wouldn't or couldn't love you, and it's likely they still can't or won't. In general, however, the more you let go of the tedious delusion of your own unattractiveness, the easier it will be for others to connect with you...”

- Martha Beck

Now that you've learned more about the different types of self-critical thoughts, you can begin to effectively address the issues.

"I'm Not Enough"

One of the most common self-critical thoughts is that you're not enough. This thought can stem from both comparative and internalized criticism.

How can you change the "I'm not enough" thoughts?

UNDERSTAND WHERE THESE
NEGATIVE THOUGHTS COME
FROM AND HOW TO REFRAME
THEM:

1. Why do you feel like you're not enough? The first step is to get to the root of this thought.
 - Examine your feelings and consider your past.
 - Why do you feel you're never enough, and where do these feelings come from?

- In many cases, the roots of this self-critical thought can be found in the past. Dysfunctional families, difficult childhoods, traumas, and illnesses can make you feel less worthy.
2. Remember it's an internal message. Even if others are praising you and complimenting your life, you may still feel like you're not enough. This happens because it's an internal thought that is hard to shed.
 3. Start to heal the past. Therapists share that not feeling like you're enough may require healing the past.
 - If you're having difficulty letting go of this self-criticism, counseling or therapy may help you get past these thoughts.
 - Try journaling, meditation, or other contemplative activities to release

the things that are holding you back.

4. Say, "I am good enough." Each time this negative thought comes up, rephrase it to a thought that uplifts you and makes you feel like you *are* good enough, instead.
 - Remember that you're unique, with your own special combination of talents and characteristics, and worthy of love and happiness.
 - Remind yourself that you're enough. You're smart enough, strong enough, and good enough to do anything. You're capable of great things and can accomplish what you desire.

Once you realize that your past may be controlling your present, it becomes easier to reframe this self-critical thought.

"I'll Never Improve"

When you're stuck and haven't reached a goal, it's common to have the self-critical thought that you'll never improve.

You may think you'll never get better and never get past a certain point.

This "I'll never improve" thought can hold you back. It can make you give up on your dreams and make you walk away from potential opportunities.

It's important to reframe this self-critical thought before it makes life more difficult.

TRY THESE IDEAS:

1. Understand the learning process.
You might think you'll never get bet-

ter at something while you're still learning it.

- For example, when you're learning a new skill, language, or subject in school, it can be tempting to give up before finishing. The process can be hard and time-consuming.
 - However, it's important not to stop before giving it all of your effort and giving it time. Continuing your learning process will give you proof that you do, indeed, learn and get better.
2. Remember you're not alone. It can be tempting to have moments of self-pity mixed with self-criticism and believe you're the only person who struggles with something.
- Keep in mind that some things, such as learning a new language or a math class, can be hard for many people.

- Reach out to friends and family members for help, and you'll see you're not the first person to struggle. It's a normal human feeling that everyone experiences at some point.
3. Give it time. It's important to give yourself enough time to strengthen your skills in the area or topic you're working on, and not judge the process.
 - Pay attention to the little details and take notice of your progress.
 - Remind yourself how far you've come from last week, last month, or even last year.
 4. Say, "I'm learning and getting better." Reframe the self-critical talk by reminding yourself that you're always learning.

- Another way to fight the self-criticism is to say, “I’m good enough now.”
- You can also say, “I’m getting better all the time.”
- Saying these new phrases will help you feel more optimistic about what you’re struggling to learn and also boost your self-esteem.

You can also get rid of this self-critical thought by putting less pressure on yourself. You’re more likely to be critical of yourself when you expect too much, too fast, even if that expectation is unrealistic. Give yourself a break! Be patient with yourself and always be grateful for the opportunity to be able to be learning something new!

"Everyone Is Better Than Me"

Thinking that everyone is better than you is a common struggle, shared by many others. Most people experience it at one point or another.

However, if you think about it, you'll realize that it would be impossible for you to be the best at everything! There will always be others who seem to be more talented, successful, or educated in their own fields.

The key is to remember that you, too, have unique talents and special skills that matter!

USE THESE STRATEGIES TO
HANDLE THIS SELF-CRITICISM:

1. Understand the root of the thought.
Often, this self-critical thought comes from past experiences or childhood.
 - You may have grown up hearing your parents or someone else compare you to others. They may have said that you're not as smart or well-behaved as another child.
 - You believed it then and you still believe it. Because, unfortunately negative thoughts like this can carry over from childhood to adulthood.

2. Learn to love yourself. Instead of beating yourself up over every mistake, learn to accept your faults.
 - Practice forgiveness of yourself and others.
 - Learn to let go of mistakes once you've learned the lesson. It's important not to hang on to negative ideas or experiences.

3. Reframe the self-critical thought. Instead of saying everyone is better than you, say things like, “I’m better than I was yesterday,” “I’m learning all the time,” and “I’m becoming more talented with each day.”
 - Remind yourself of the unique qualities you possess.
 - When we get caught up in comparing ourselves to others, it’s easy to forget everything great about yourself. All the great things that you’ve learned and wonderful skills you’ve acquired.

Avoid letting this self-critical thought stop you from trying new things. It’s crucial to remember you have talent!

Reframe Other Self- Critical Thoughts

You may have many different types of self-critical thoughts affecting your confidence. Remember, you are your own unique combination of characteristics, shaped by past and present experiences.

This unique identity and history affects the type of self-critical thoughts that are in your head.

HERE ARE SOME COMMON
SELF-CRITICISMS AND SOME
SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO RE-
FRAME THEM:

1. "I shouldn't have done this." This thought appears after a mistake or other issue.
 - Reframe it by saying, "I learned from this."
 - Focus on the positive aspects of the mistake. Find the silver lining that is hiding inside.

2. "I can't do anything right." This thought can also appear after mistakes. It can also show up after failures or not being able to reach goals.
 - Reframe it by saying, "I do many things well."
 - Accept the mistake or failure, learn what you can from it, and move forward. Remind yourself of all the things you do well and are proud of accomplishing.

3. “I’m never going to be happy.” During difficult moments, it can be a struggle to see beyond the sorrow.
 - Reframe it by saying, “I can be happy, even in difficult circumstances.”
 - Remember that you’ve been happy in the past and can return to this feeling again.

4. “I’m always a mess.” Again, this self-critical thought frequently shows up after a failure or other shortcoming.
 - Reframe it by saying, “I am in control.”
 - You can also say, “I am put together.” The key is to recognize the negativity and address it with positive thoughts.
 - Avoid focusing on failures or comparing yourself to others. You may not see the struggles they

face and won't know how many messes are really in their lives.

- Instead, think about the things you do well and control.
5. "I'm always alone." Relationship struggles and other issues can make you feel isolated and lonely.
- Reframe it by saying, "I am surrounded by people who love me."
 - Keep in mind that, even if you're single, there are always others around you, and many of those people love you. These could be coworkers or friends or even siblings - you simply have to reach out for help.

Self-critical thoughts can come in many forms, but each one can be changed.

More Tips for Dealing With Self- Criticism

It's important to remember that the thoughts in your head are just stories. They may not be an accurate reflection of you or your life.

So your internal dialogue can sometimes be very deceptive.

It can make you feel alone, discouraged, and unhappy. In addition, it can affect how you view the world and relate to others.

1. Remember these stories might not be the real truth. The stories in your mind are all shaped by how you perceived certain situations and human perception is tricky. One reason for this is because the way we perceive

the world is colored by our past, present, and current emotions.

2. Be mindful of your thoughts and emotions. Ask yourself, “What is going on in my head right now? Is it positive or negative? Why?” Pay attention to your thoughts and how they affect you. Listen to the mind, but avoid letting self-critical thoughts take over.
3. Remember to reframe self-critical thoughts. This powerful technique turns things around in your head and boosts your self-esteem. Reframing can also be the key to letting go of the negativity!

Self-critical thoughts can be changed. You have the power and ability to do this. It may take practice, but you can accomplish it.

Remember that you’re the one who is in control of your thoughts. You can alter them.

Learn to reframe your negative self-talk, so it stops influencing your decisions, emotions, and how you feel about yourself.

Once you've practiced reframing and changing the negative statements in your head, it will get easier to do, and your self-esteem will grow.