

POWER YOUR LIFE WITH AFFIRMATIONS

By Leonard Szymczak, MSW, LCSW

Descarte once said, “It’s not enough to have a good mind. The main thing is to use it well.” It has been speculated that every 24 hours our mind has over 50,000 thoughts—quite a lot of thinking for one day. Often this inner conversation or “self-talk” takes place outside our conscious awareness. It is as if we have a mental tape recorder that reinforces our thoughts, beliefs, and feelings, which in turn directs our behavior.

Imagine being born with an empty tape recorder. Over time, your senses chronicle life experiences onto mental cassettes. Initially, your parents started your inner library by etching their thoughts and beliefs onto a soundtrack. If you constantly heard messages that were positive and reaffirming, then your internal tape recorder would replay positive tapes like the sound of music. If, however, your parents were overly critical, then your cassettes may sound like heavy metal blaring harsh messages about being stupid or not being good enough. Thousands of messages, both valuing and devaluing, become internalized and replay themselves continually. If, for example, you learned that life was a struggle, you will unconsciously replay that message making it a self-fulfilling prophecy.

What you eventually come to believe about yourself is the recorded messages that you carry throughout life. People with low self-esteem continually play dissonant messages thereby making it hard to hear melodious tones. If you were told that you were an incompetent fool, that thought would remain with you unless you made a conscious decision to erase or replace the tape. Since your self-talk influences how you feel and act, it is essential to identify and rid yourself of any “stinking” thinking.

By introducing positive affirmations, you can eliminate old destructive tapes. In Stuart Wilde’s book, *Affirmations*, he wrote, “Thought coupled with action creates your destiny.” By recording affirming messages onto your mental soundtrack, you consciously restore power over your life. Affirmations can relate to self-esteem, financial prosperity, relationships, personal success or any other area you wish to change. The following steps will help you create a new soundtrack for your mental tape recorder.

- **INSPECT YOUR THOUGHTS.** To gain control over your thoughts, you must first hear what you’re saying to yourself. If you tend to be critical of others, you most likely will do the same internally. Keeping a journal will help you identify themes and patterns that continually play in your mind. Pay particular attention to messages that are self-defeating. They may be about money (I never have enough), about relationships (I can never trust anyone) or about jobs (No one appreciates what I do). Adopting an accepting, nonjudgmental attitude will help you recognize any downloaded critical messages. Identifying them undermines their power. As John-Roger and Peter McWilliam’s wrote in their book, *You Can’t Afford the Luxury of a Negative Thought*, “Noticing these signals is not negative thinking. Doing something corrective about them is positive action.”
- **REJECT THE THOUGHTS YOU NO LONGER WANT.** Mark Twain once said, “I am an old man who has had many worries, most of which have never happened to me.” He obviously

had to combat his own worrisome tapes. Since toxic critical thoughts corrode self-esteem every time they are replayed, it is important to reject debilitating messages whether they be loud and bombastic or quiet yet lethal. It is easier to eliminate these thoughts by focusing on your goal. Rather than saying, “I want to give up negative thinking,” tell yourself, “I now enjoy the positive aspects of my life.” If your negative soundtrack becomes overwhelming, visualize yourself mentally pushing the stop button on the tape recorder and silencing the messages.

- **SELECT AFFIRMING THOUGHTS AND BELIEFS.** Decide, as if you were choosing music, which thoughts or beliefs you want to play. New affirmations could convey motivation; “I am highly successful.” They could relate to your financial future, “I am becoming prosperous and wealthy.” They could refer to your health; “I exercise regularly and eat nutritious food.” Select the tapes that best convey how you want to think, feel, look, and act. One of the earliest popular affirmations was developed in the 1920’s by a Frenchman, Emile Coué, “Everyday in every way I am getting better and better.” When you frame your affirmations, remember to state them clearly as a positive in the present tense (“I am” rather than “I will”). You can now build a tape library that you can draw from, particularly when you need uplifting.
- **PROJECT NEW THOUGHTS.** Mae West once said, “Speak up for yourself, or you’ll end up a rug.” Reinforce your new tapes by affirming them in your mind, visualizing the thoughts being accomplished and acting in ways that affirm them. If an affirmation such as “I am healthy” feels false, change it so that it seems more possible, “Every day I am becoming healthier.” Reinforce positive self-talk with consistency and repetition. Saying affirmations once is not enough. Repeating them throughout the day, even when you don’t feel like it, will establish a habit with an impact.
- **EXPECT POSITIVE RESULTS.** There is a greater likelihood that positive events will occur if you expect them to occur. Expect the negative and the negative will surely come. This concept was labeled the Pygmalion effect and was demonstrated in numerous studies. If teachers were told that a group of students were gifted, and in fact they were not, the teachers treated them as if they were special and amazingly, the students performed much better in tests. Therefore, put your energy into expecting positive outcomes from your new affirming thoughts.
- **ACCEPT THE VICTORIES.** As you replay your cassettes, look for the differences in your thoughts, feelings and beliefs. You may notice that you feel better and more motivated. Big victories consist of many smaller ones. Unless you accept small victories, you’ll never achieve anything great. These victories become stepping stones toward your continuing success. Marcus Aurelius once said, “Our life is what our thoughts make it.” Drawing upon a library of positive self-affirming tapes will create a deep and lasting impact on your life.

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