

# Overcoming Negative Thinking

Have you ever had doubts? Have you ever taken them to the next step and berated yourself for something you did or did not do? Is your thinking loaded with such negative thoughts that you suck the air out of a room with your words or even your mere presence? Do you find yourself expecting the worst? Do you often find yourself obsessing about your past mistakes as justification for not taking another risk? Do you have difficulty celebrating your accomplishments? Do you turn to substances or behaviours to deal with your view of yourself and the world?

In her book *Negaholics: How to Overcome Negativity and Turn Your Life Around*, Cherie Carter-Scott, Ph.D., A Ballantine Wellspring Book published by The Random House Publishing Group, New York, 1989, a negaholic is defined as "one who is victimized by inner forces that are waging a war of self-negation with attitudes, thoughts, words or behaviours", 15.

The four categories of negaholics are:

1. Attitudinal Negaholics who are successful people who appear to have it all. They are perfectionists who feel that they are never good enough.
2. Behavioural Negaholics who procrastinate, repeat negative patterns and who never measure up. They are the candidates for isms – alcohol, overeating, work, drugs, gambling and anything that is obsessive.
3. Mental Negaholics beat themselves up focusing on the past, present or future with criticism, judgements and mental abuse. These people constantly criticise, compare, find fault and invalidate any successes.
4. Verbal Negaholics talked negatively about anything believing that their view of the world is accurate. These people constantly complain, talk always about disaster and are all doom and gloom.

So, can you see yourself in any of these categories? If you do, I hope you are not at the extreme. So how do you deal with any of these forms of negativism?

First of all and most important is awareness. You must know that you are being negative and catch yourself to break your patterns of behaviours or thinking. Without awareness, any techniques to change are useless. So, what can you do?

1. Look at your attitudes fearlessly and honestly and determine if your negativity is getting you what you want like love, friendships and other successes you measure as what you want. Make an adjustment to meet your needs.

2. When you find yourself thinking in a downward loop or speaking in negative terms, sit down and make a list to justify or challenge your beliefs and words. Look at the evidence to support or disprove your negativity.

3. Ask a partner or close friend to honestly give you feedback about yourself. Be prepared to hear some things you may not want to but trust that the comments you get are sincere and given out of love. Take them to heart and ask how you can address your problem.

4. If you are prone to verbally be the dark cloud in any conversation, hold your tongue and watch that any comment you make is a positive statement. Instead of pontificating about what is absolutely right, try talking about your opinion but without the lecture.

5. If you are the walking self-fulfilling prophecy of not achieving things and beating yourself up for it, make lists, ask what matters most, prioritize your actions for success. If you have too much to do, get rid of it by delegating. Topload yourself for success but not biting off more than you can chew.

6. If your negativity is displaying in behaviours listed above, get help. There is Alcoholics Anonymous,

Narcotics Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, and other Anonymous groups to address behaviours that need positive help.

7. Forgive yourself. Don't focus on the past and look to a new and changed future where you are aware and able to look for the good in yourself, others and the world.

8. When you catch yourself in your negativity, call a friend to break the cycle and get perspective. If you need a jolt to get you to catch yourself, breathe deeply three times, go for a walk, scream into a pillow, throw cold water on your face or whatever it takes to get you to stop the cycle you are in.

9. Call your provincial lawyers assistance program to get help. Go to a place that understands lawyers and their culture.

10. An old standby book that has helped many people for years is Norman Vincent Peale's classic tome – *The Power of Positive Thinking*, Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1980.

Lawyers are presented with problems and negative situations every day. I used to say when I practiced matrimonial litigation that the best way to prepare a file was to look at the worst and hope for the best. That works as long as you don't get stuck in the worst part of preparation.

Negativity is insidious. You will probably not know when you are in the middle of it. Use the resources listed above. Resolve to change and you will. Without awareness, you will always be stuck.

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