

An Ounce of Prevention

Complimentary

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Gary J. Meiers, Ph. D., Jo Ann Hammond, Ph. D.,
& Associates, Ltd.

10009 – 85 Avenue, Edmonton, AB T6E 2J9



Website: drsgaryjoannmeierspsychologist.com

Phone: (780) 433-2269

Fax: (780) 431-0463

E-Mail: psychrec@gmail.com

The First Cardinal Sin of Thinking: Gotta

By Kenneth Fields, MA, NCC, LMHC

"I gotta go to work," "I gotta take care of the kids," "I gotta go to the market", "I gotta get a job." There are so many things we "gotta" do. Gotta, of course, is a somewhat slang expression for "got to" or "have to." There may be no more insidious phrase in the English language than "have to." No one likes to be forced or coerced into doing anything and "have to" is a coercive phrase. It not only suggests force, but that we have no choice in the matter. With no choice, there is no freedom, and that can make a person very angry.

Many people respond to "have to" statements with resistance, sometimes active resistance such as verbal outpourings of abusive language, and sometimes passive resistance by simply not doing what they have to do, getting ill so it can't be done or forgetting. Some people become passively aggressive and lash out in very subtle ways when put into the apparently choiceless corner of "have to."

What we often don't recognize is that we use this kind of coercive language on ourselves, in our own self talk, and then respond with resistance, anger or aggression. We might tell ourselves that we "have to paint the kitchen walls this weekend" and then find that we couldn't sleep on Friday night so we're too tired on Saturday to start painting. Or, we might tell ourselves that we have to go to work, which is an extremely common phrase, and find ourselves going to work, but in a bad attitude, thinking we'd rather be sailing or fishing or....You've certainly seen some bumper stickers which state that I'd rather be doing just about anything than what I "have to" be doing.

The use of the "have to" or "gotta" phrase within our own mind through our own internal dialogue, our own self talk, can cause us to feel lethargic, a-motivated, apathetic and even angry simply because we feel, subconsciously, as though we are being coerced and that we have no choice in the matter. The truth is, we do have a choice in the matter. Certainly, there are consequences to every choice we make. However, it is critically important to recognize that we do have choice, and in that choice, we have freedom. You can choose to go to work, or choose not to go to work. "But," you say, "If I don't go to work, I'll be fired." That could likely be the outcome, the consequence, of that choice, yes; but, at least there is a choice! There is freedom to make that choice!! Every morning upon awakening, we start making choices. We make choices all throughout the day. We are not coerced or forced into any decision or action that we do not choose. We are even free to choose how to respond to the consequences of previous choices we have made.

Because we have been intensely conditioned by our culture and our language, changing common

linguistic phrases, such as "have to" can be very odd and feel quite strange. Nevertheless, it is an excellent exercise to replace "have to" with "choose to." It is much more truthful and it empowers a person to make such self-affirming statements. For example, "I gotta go to work" is transformed to "I choose to go to work." "I have to go to the meeting tonight" is changed to "I choose to go to the meeting tonight." Any person who makes this simple linguistic change will feel differently. They will feel more confident and more self-assured. They will feel less resistance, more energy and greater sense of meaning and purpose in their life. They will feel more liberated, and more responsible. Everyone has freedom to make choices. No matter how restrained, how confined and how limited our circumstances may appear, everyone has the freedom to make a choice if even to have a negative or positive outlook on their current situation.

The Second Cardinal Sin of Thinking: The Over General

By Kenneth Fields, MA, NCC, LMHC

"I'm never going to be promoted," "I'm always going to be left out of the group," "I'm never going to have a lasting relationship," "I'm always going to be the one who gets the short end of the stick." Sound familiar? Have you ever heard anyone, or even yourself, use the words "always" and "never" in a sentence like these? If so, you are among the hundreds of millions of people who over generalize and use these very unrealistic, absolute terms. Wendell Johnson, the American semanticist, psychologist and author of *People in Quandaries: The Semantics of Personal Adjustment* is quoted as having said, in a somewhat paradoxical and humorous manner "Always and never are two words you should always remember never to use."

"So, what's wrong with using "never" and "always?" Basically, it's so often untrue, unrealistic and irrational. These two words may be the most common culprit to purely cognitive based depression. Cognitive based depression is brought about because our thinking is depressing. If we tell ourselves that we will never get a good job, we would get depressed, and with good reason. If it were true that we would "never" get a good job, who wouldn't get depressed? But, it's not true. It may not be probable that we get a good job soon, but it is possible that a good job will come at some time. By using "never" we cement the idea of never, ever, at all, getting a good job into our mind. How depressing! Even if it's untrue, the mind accepts those internal statements, subtle, subconscious and so hard to discern, as absolutely true statements. Furthermore, there is no evidence about the future so it is very unrealistic to use "never" in the context of a future event or happening, such as finding a good job, a loving relationship or whatever one might be needing or wanting. When we do use "never" in such contexts, the mind accepts it as the real situation and naturally we feel depressed. So, for those who might be

depressed, examine your self-talk and if you are using “never,” stop it!

Perhaps we have made statements such as “I’m always messing up” or “I’m always behind” or “I’m always going to be just average.” Statements like this are based on the past and then assumed into the future. As with “never,” “always” is an absolute statement without any possibility of change. Because life is change, statements such as “always” make the process of living and growing stagnant. For this reason, “always” is considered faulty and should not be used in our internal dialogue, our self-talk, or, for the most part, in conversations with others. “Always” can also bring about cognitive based depression, and anxiety. If, for example, you tell yourself “I always get nervous when speaking in front of groups” and are going to be speaking in front of a group in a few days, guess what? You’re going to get nervous. Why, because you have been telling yourself that you “always” do – why should this time be any different? If you want to stop getting nervous when speaking in front of groups, you first need to stop telling yourself that you always do!!

There are a few alternatives which can be used to replace “never” and “always.”

“The statement “I’m never going to get a good job” can be rephrased “I am currently having difficulty seeing myself in a good job” or “It may be a while before I am able to get a good job.” Or, the statement “I’m always going to find myself in an abusive relationship” can be changed to “In the past I have been in several abusive relationships, but no longer want that.” “I always get nervous when speaking in front of groups” can be changed to “I feel nervous when I’m about to speak in front of a group.” There is certainly nothing wrong in being honest with yourself about a current feeling, such as nervousness. The problem comes when ascribing a permanent all-encompassing time frame on that feeling.

The words always and never are considered irrational. That means that they are not reasonable. Yet, they are used excessively in everyday language both to others and to ourselves. Take some time to listen to others...at the coffee shop, at work, in line at the market, on television. Try and pick out these two words, always and never, and then figure out how the statement these words were used in could be rephrased to be more rational, more reasonable. Let’s say you hear someone at the market saying “I’m never going to be able to quit smoking.” How would you rephrase this statement to be more realistic – and less depressing? Then, when you have a handle on listening to others, take some time to listen to yourself. Try and catch yourself using these over generalized, absolute terms and change them to a phrase that is more realistic, more rational – and more conducive to your mental health.

Working out builds the mind's muscles

Exercise makes our bodies stronger, but can it do the same for our minds? It might, according to several lines of research in animals and humans.

In research with rats, there's evidence that exercise increases the blood supply to their brains. One group of rats got free access to a running wheel and another ran on a treadmill for an hour a day. After 30 days, both groups had a better blood supply to their brains. A group of sedentary rats showed no increase.

An increased blood supply means increased oxygen and energy supply, and that equals better performance.

In the same study, a group of rats learned to run through an obstacle course. Because that was more a learning task than a physical task, these rats developed more connections between the neurons in their brains.

Although these types of studies are only now beginning in humans, the theory is that because sports combine learning and exercise, they may both increase blood supply and enhance brain connections.

Some evidence in humans suggests that being physically fit helps people maintain their cognitive abilities as they age. Many studies have found that physically active elderly people perform better than sedentary elderly people on cognitive tasks such as reasoning, vocabulary, memory, and reaction time. Some studies have found similar differences between physically active and sedentary young people, but results varied from study to study.

Researchers caution that exercise and conditioning have a limited window of effect, we lose that effect quickly if we stop exercising.

Originally published by The American Psychological Association (2014). *Psychology Help Center*. Retrieved from: <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/workout.aspx>

Parenting Corner

Helping Children Cope with Trauma

<http://www.aftertheinjury.org/>

A web site designed for parents whose child has experienced a Pediatric injury.

Search: Brain & Relationships: Helping Children Heal

Benefits of EMDR

A series of video stores about the value and benefits of EMDR can be found by googling “scoopit” then “EMDR”

*****Net News*****

Here are some web sites you & your family may find helpful:

Search: Jon Kabat-Zinn: Coming to Our Senses

Search: Mapping Emotions On The Body: Love Makes Us Warm All Over

Search: How Your Brain Can Turn Anxiety into Calmness

Self-Help Corner:

City of Edmonton Community Resources: 211
Support Network / Distress Line: 780-482-HELP
Kids Help Line: 1-800-668-6868