



# MINDSET RESET



## NEGATIVE THOUGHTS NEUTRALIZER

*“Only you can liberate yourself from yourself”*

Consider this: the average person has 60,000-70,000 thoughts per day — and 90% of these are repetitive!\* Even if half right, it justifies this being a priority topic within this Mindset module. So, expect our exploration and activities here to be a bit more robust.

It's also why neutralizing automatic negative thought patterns is the third of our 8 Facets of Happierness. To recap, you've now accepted that self-kindness enables you to release your past baggage and avoid rehashing recent negative events. And, you can now rely on your Earned Confidence to negate future uncertainties like worry and assumptions. Together, both facets definitively enable you to remain present.

Welcome! This and every moment are the only times when life is actually happening. Research also confirms that living in the “not now” is among the greatest sources of unhappiness. You're already ahead of the game. Being intentional about staying present also enables you to experience the other facets, which represent some of the greatest joys to enrich your life.

But, before we get to experience all that Happierness, there's a heightened awareness we all must gain about being present. As much as we're able to maintain our presence and positivity, the reality is that within all of us is what we know to be our own worst enemy: Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs). These may be at the heart of our battle within.

Some say their origin is rooted in our survival instincts. Our ancestors didn't exit their caves each morning to admire the beautiful sunrise and greet the birds singing. More likely, their focus was to assess multiple threats of what could kill them. In nature vs. nurture, others point to the likes of family dysfunction, school bullies and believing our inner critic.

ANTs impact everything from how we make decisions to how we form impressions of other people. Another contributor to negative thoughts is a common cognitive distortion, called negativity bias, whereby people often focus on the negative and ignore the positive.

That said, it's time for a tough love moment. Even if you were to somehow acquire Ninja-level discipline combined with a monk-like consciousness, you'll not find it possible to catch and counteract all those ANTs. We're talking about 60,000-70,000 thoughts per day with 90% being repetitive!

So, our focus here is to set realistic expectations and explore effective techniques that are reasonable and achievable to neutralize ANTs. Sound good?

\* Laboratory of Neuro Imaging at the University of Southern California and research by Professor Fred Luskin of Stanford University.



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Just to clarify, combating ANTs is entirely distinct from the realities of life involving difficult circumstances and human emotions. This is not about our natural reaction to people getting sick, losing jobs, relationships falling apart, things breaking or any sort of mishaps.

Let's get a little more technical. A leading authority on Automatic Negative Thoughts is Dr. Daniel Amen, a double-board certified psychologist and a Distinguished Fellow of the American Psychological Association. Sounds credible enough! He describes ANTs as, "The negative thoughts that enter your head throughout the day, make you feel bad and prevent you from adopting healthy behaviors. They sabotage your healthy eating plans, diminish your desire to exercise, destroy your self-esteem, and make you feel rotten."

Our habitual negative self-talk trains the brain to see things pessimistically. Researchers believe this negativity bias – in effect – rewrites our neural networks and reinforces pathways in the brain that make it more likely we'll continue seeing our glass as half empty. Additionally, having negative thoughts can reduce activity in the area of the brain involved with self-control, judgment and planning, which can lead to poor decisions.

Part of coming to terms with your negative thinking is by accepting that they're natural and impossible to completely eliminate. But it is possible to neutralize and outweigh negative thoughts by replacing them with more adaptive, rational and positive ones to enhance your mood, health, and overall quality of life.

So, reframing these negative perceptions isn't about ignoring the bad. It's about trying to have a more balanced, realistic perspective as events occur, including by honing your Happierness reflex as much as possible to choose to make the best of every situation.

Combating ANTs presents another use for your Fiction Filter. ANTs that are passing thoughts are easier to shake off and let go. And then there are the ones that keep "eating at you." That's when you know it's worth the effort to be introspective. Let's say that you're questioning your abilities and getting down on yourself. Consider whether there's another possible way to view a situation or person and/or what facts could support an alternative explanation. A few questions to ask:

- "What is the evidence for this thought?"
- "Am I basing this on facts? Or feelings?"
- "Could I be misinterpreting the situation?"
- "How might other people view the situation differently?"
- "How might I view this situation if it happened to someone else?"

If you believe your ANT is in fact true, what would be the worst that could happen? How might you deal with things if that happened? Can you at least be more constructive, encouraging and supportive? You deserve to be spoken to in the same way you would speak to those you love.

According to Dr. Amen, the first step to finding liberation from negative thinking is to recognize that our thoughts frequently tell us things that just aren't true. These cognitive biases and distortions are sneaky. Our brains try to convince us that our negative thoughts are accurate and logical. There are also many different kinds of ANTs. Some lists identify well over 100 types. For our purposes, Dr. Amen has isolated these thought patterns into the following nine categories:

## TYPES OF AUTOMATIC NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

1. "ALL OR NOTHING" THINKING	Thoughts that are all good or all bad. Some might call this "black and white." Few things in life are absolutes.
2. "ALWAYS" THINKING	Thinking in words like always, never, no one, everyone, every time, everything. Overgeneralizing can doom you from eating right, staying healthy and to fail.
3. FOCUSING ON THE NEGATIVE	Only seeing the bad in a situation while choosing to ignore or dismiss any number of positives.
4. THINKING WITH YOUR FEELINGS	Assuming and believing negative feelings without questioning them. Here's where you might feel stupid, which can morph into believing you are stupid.
5. GUILT BEATINGS	Thinking in words like should, must, ought, or have to with excessive guilt to control your (or others) behavior.
6. LABELING	Attaching a negative label to yourself or someone else such as fat, lazy, stupid, or loser. This can become a self-fulfilling prophecy and damage your relationships.
7. FORTUNE TELLING	Predicting the worst possible outcome to a situation with little or no evidence for it, such as thinking you "know" something will happen that you really don't.
8. MIND READING	Believing that you know what another person is thinking even though they haven't told you, such as assuming they're thinking of you and doing so badly.
9. BLAME	Blaming others for your problems and taking no responsibility for your own toxic actions, thoughts, attitudes, successes and failures.



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## ACTIVITY 1: CALL-OUT YOUR INNER CRITIC (5 MINUTES)

We all talk to ourselves. So, whose voice is the other voice? We already know that many of the things we tell ourselves are untrue. Some of this may be the skew of perception itself and/or it could be these ANTs crawling through our neural pathways. You're here, which means you're ready to stop lying to yourself. Start by naming your inner critic. You can have some fun with it, such as going with Betty or Earl. Pick a name that's different from anyone you've ever known and one that's very different from the "real you."

If your reaction to this activity includes an impulse to skip it; don't. This is the first step to improve your self-awareness about ANTs and your ability to distinguish and extinguish them. Giving your inner critic a name is more than an inside joke. Its purpose is it gives you an easy reminder that some of what you say to yourself is false and that Betty and Earl can be less than trustworthy. If you stick with it, you may well find that this simple technique will be among the most beneficial of all.

> From now on, your inner critic's name is:

## ACTIVITY 2: COMPLAINT-FREE ZONE(S) (30-60++ MINUTES)

The apparent challenge with ANTs is that they often happen just under the surface of our conscious thoughts or that they are hidden in a mix of multiple thoughts or that they come and go so fleetingly.

In any case, to improve your self-awareness, you may find it easiest to begin by catching yourself in the act of something more obvious: complaining. Many of us don't realize how much and how often we tend to complain. For many, it's a habit worth breaking. It would be ideal to work your way up to doing this for a full day or more. But let's just go with a 30- to 60-minute period when you're in a casual conversation (as opposed to being more guarded in a work setting). Simply note your next 3-5 complaints at left and, when time permits, rewrite something you could have said in either a positive or neutral way.

COMPLAINT(S)	NEUTRAL/POSITIVE ALTERNATIVE
•	•
•	•
•	•
•	•
•	•



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## ACTIVITY 3: CATCHING ANTS (10-15 MIN)

At this point, you may have a pretty good idea of the sorts of ANTs you're prone to tell yourself. Now let's get specific. To make this as easy as possible, you'll see on the last page that Appendix A lists a number of common ANTs as well as alternative positive thoughts. See if you can identify 3-5 that are within the realm of possibility (or certainty) of those you recognize.

Next, using the middle column, refer to the chart above about the 9 Types of ANTs and assess which of them apply to those you listed in the first column. Then, use the right column to substitute a positive alternative to each ANT.

AUTOMATIC THOUGHT	TYPE OF ANT	NEW THOUGHT

We've established that you have every reason to be nothing less than kind to yourself. When you are feeling negative about yourself, ask yourself what advice would you give a friend who was down on themselves. Now try to apply that advice to you.

The bottom line is that negative thinking happens to all of us, but if we recognize it and challenge that thinking, we are taking a big step toward a happier life.

And, with that, you have officially completed the final activity of your WellBeing Reset mindset module – congratulations!

You're now ready to combine all your great work about perception, Earned Confidence and Winning the Battle Within to create your final personalized growth roadmap and action plan!

## ANT APPENDIX

The revised version of the automatic thoughts questionnaire (ATQ-R) (Kendall et al., 1989), which is a measure still used as a basis for automatic thinking research (Koseki et al., 2013), lists the following 30 negative thoughts as indicators. Do any of these sound familiar?

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|---|--|
| "I feel like I'm up against the world."     | "I can't get things together."           |
| "I'm no good."                              | "I hate myself."                         |
| "Why can't I ever succeed?"                 | "I'm worthless."                         |
| "No one understands me."                    | "Wish I could just disappear."           |
| "I've let people down."                     | "What's the matter with me?"             |
| "I don't think I can go on."                | "I'm a loser."                           |
| "I wish I were a better person."            | "My life is a mess."                     |
| "I'm so weak."                              | "I'm a failure."                         |
| "My life's not going the way I want it to." | "I'll never make it."                    |
| "I'm so disappointed in myself."            | "I feel so helpless."                    |
| "Nothing feels good anymore."               | "Something has to change."               |
| "I can't stand this anymore."               | "There must be something wrong with me." |
| "I can't get started."                      | "My future is bleak."                    |
| "What's wrong with me?"                     | "It's just not worth it."                |
| "I wish I were somewhere else."             | "I can't finish anything."               |

The ATQ-R questionnaire also presents a series of positive autonomic thoughts, which below are supplemented by additional research by Rick Ingram and Kathy Wisnicki (1988):

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| "I'm proud of myself."                         | "I'm warm and comfortable."                            |
| "I feel fine."                                 | "I feel confident I can do anything I set my mind to." |
| "No matter what happens, I know I'll make it." | "I feel very happy."                                   |
| "I can accomplish anything."                   | "This is super!"                                       |
| "I feel good."                                 | "I'm luckier than most people."                        |
| "I am respected by my peers."                  | "I enjoy a challenge."                                 |
| "I have a good sense of humor."                | "My social life is terrific."                          |
| "My future looks bright."                      | "There's nothing to worry about."                      |
| "I will be successful."                        | "I'm so relaxed."                                      |
| "I'm fun to be with."                          | "My life is running smoothly."                         |
| "I am in a great mood."                        | "I'm happy with the way I look."                       |
| "There are many people who care about me."     | "I take good care of myself."                          |
| "I'm proud of my accomplishments."             | "I deserve the best in life."                          |
| "I will finish what I start."                  | "Bad days are rare."                                   |
| "I have many good qualities."                  | "I have many useful qualities."                        |
| "I am comfortable with life."                  | "There is no problem that is hopeless."                |
| "I have a good way with others."               | "I won't give up."                                     |
| "I am a lucky person."                         | "I state my opinions with confidence."                 |
| "I have friends who support me."               | "My life keeps getting better."                        |
| "Life is exciting."                            | "Today I've accomplished a lot."                       |