

Thought Habits Become Language Patterns

Listen to the words with which you choose to speak to yourself. Some of the words contribute to our distress. Our language communicates the amount of control we believe that we have with a person, place, or thing. Experts tell us that the less control we feel, the more distress we experience. Read the lists of phrases below. Put a check mark by the “Words of Distress” that you have used in the last 24 hours. Notice the feelings these words create. Read the list of “Words of Control” where each phrase has been reworded. Again, pay attention to the feelings that result from the words we choose.

Words of Distress	Feeling	Words of Control	Feeling
___ I can't...	Defeated	I can...	Confident
___ I am trying...	Unaccomplished	I will...	Sure
___ I have to...	Obligated	I choose to...	Decisive
___ When you...	Helpless	When I...	Assured
___ I always...	Burdened	Up until now...	Considered
___ It's useless...	Helplessness	There's always a chance...	Realistic
___ I should have...	Remorse	I'll be glad to...	Pleased
___ Why didn't they...	Dejected	They still could...	Persistent
___ It's only fair that...	Cheated	We'll do it together..	Encouraging
___ Why am I always the one who?...	Encumbered	I'll be the one who..	Secure
___ If only...	Wishful	It's going to work...	Convinced
___ I was forced to...	Uncooperative	I'm eager to...	Enthusiastic
___ I could have done more...	Unsuccessful	Let's try to...	Optimistic
___ It'll never work..	Pessimistic	It'll work when...	Decided
___ I regret that...	Sorry	I'm determined...	Driven

Your own examples:

_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Language that is rooted more in reality opens the opportunity for more control and less distress. Two psychologists named Salvatore Maddi and Suzanne Kobasa studied people who were less affected by stress. They concluded from their research that the way in which individuals respond to stress was the key to health. The results of testing showed that healthier people scored higher levels of commitment, challenge, and control. Practice using “Words of Control” to reduce the effects of distress.

“My basic rule is that if a hardship is not life or limb threatening, then it is just a hardship — so get on with it.”

*Wil Steger
Leader of the International
Arctic Polar Expedition*