

SELF SABOTAGE

HOW TO
BANISH
SELF
DESTRUCTIVE
BEHAVIORS



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“I have never been contained except I made the prison.”

– Mary Evans

Self-sabotage, while seemingly easy to define, can be made up of a complex set of actions. If you've ever found yourself interfering with the positive parts of your own life, you've experienced this intricate set of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. But don't worry... you can unlearn these habits today!

This book defines self-sabotage and explains how you may be defeating yourself and keeping yourself from reaching your goals. In case you're still not sure whether you engage in these behaviors, the impact of self-sabotage on your life is also discussed.

But best of all, this book details easy steps to help you banish self-destructive behaviors for good! By using these strategies, you can live the more satisfied and successful life you so richly deserve.

SELF-SABOTAGE DEFINED

Self-sabotage involves engaging in behaviors that lead to results you don't want. Maybe you've heard the old expression, "shooting yourself in the foot." If so, then you understand the concept of self-defeating behaviors.

When you do something that ultimately hurts or thwarts you in some way, you engage in self-sabotage. By performing these destructive actions, you bring negative experiences and situations into your life.

However, self-sabotage is complicated because there's usually some element of temporary relief, short-term payoff, or avoidance of something negative initially in the process.

Unfortunately, these brief episodes of positive feelings only serve to reinforce the idea that there are benefits from engaging in the problematic behavior.

To further muddle the picture, you'll eventually begin to feel the negative longer-term results of your questionable behavioral choices. So even though there's an early payoff, you'll ultimately get stung when you engage in self-defeating actions. Although self-sabotage is quite common, your efforts to avoid performing these types of troublesome behaviors will be worth your while.

The process of self-sabotage usually begins in your thoughts and feelings. Then, you make a choice based on those ideas and emotions.

Here's an example of self-sabotage:

You've been going to the gym for several months, but then you went on holiday, skipped going to the gym for a few weeks, and gained 15 pounds.

You're embarrassed and you don't want anyone to see you like this, so you choose to stop going to the gym entirely. That way, no one will see you've gained weight, and definitely nobody will see you in your now ill-fitting workout clothes.

The immediate consequence of your choice is that you don't have to risk being stared at by the others at the gym. You won't have to even momentarily experience the humiliation you feel about your weight, particularly in front of people you perceive as thin and dedicated to their health.

You feel a bit relieved. You think, "I'm so glad I don't have to deal with the whole health club thing." However, the ultimate result of your decision not to go to the gym is that you hold on to the extra 15 pounds or put on even more weight. Is this what you were hoping for?

Obviously, those results are opposite what you wanted when you joined the gym. The decision to skip exercising and avoid your feelings of discomfort only compounded your challenges in losing weight. This decision exemplifies self-sabotage; not only do you not get what you want, but you get more of what you don't want!

"Self-sabotage is when we say we want something and then go about making sure it doesn't happen."

– Alyce P. Cornyn-Selby

HOW SELF-SABOTAGE IMPACTS YOUR LIFE

As you might surmise, self-sabotage can drastically affect your life. Self-defeating behaviors will most likely bring unfortunate circumstances your way.

Check out these important points about how self-sabotage reduces your quality of life and results in unplanned consequences:

1. Self-sabotage becomes easier over time. When you choose to practice self-sabotage, your choices become easier to repeat. You

may fall into a habit of doing whatever is necessary to avoid initial uncomfortable feelings, thoughts, and situations.

2. Self-defeating behaviors cause unintended consequences. Unfortunately, there are long-term results of your choices and behaviors that you might not expect and therefore are unprepared for. Like in the example above, often the long-term effects are the exact opposite of what you originally wanted.
3. Any positive results of self-sabotage are short-term. Remember that any seeming benefits you experience due to self-defeating decisions aren't long-lived. Some examples of short-term positive results are:
 - You get out of giving a short speech to the supervisors at work so you won't feel anxious. Although this may seem like a great benefit, you lose your opportunity to practice speaking in front of others, which could reduce your anxiety next time. Instead, now you have reinforced the idea that you are too scared to speak to a group.
 - You initially feel better about not being chosen to complete a big project at work: no stress! Plus, you won't have to do as much work as your co-workers at the moment. The long-term consequences of this can be diverse, but one of the biggest effects is that you have less opportunity to practice working under pressure. Therefore, you don't get better at it.

- You choose to stay with your abusive partner; therefore you don't have to pack up and find a place to live. Clearly, the long-term results of this choice can be dire, regardless of how much stress it may alleviate in the short-term.
 - You won't have to sweat it out in an uncomfortable job interview since you didn't apply for the position. What? You're okay with only applying for jobs that you know you can get? You don't want to advance your career? The long-term results of this choice can lead to lower income over your lifetime, reduced self-esteem, and less job satisfaction.
 - You keep hanging out with familiar people even though they aren't very positive. After all, it's easier than making new friends. This one can affect everything in your life. We become like the people we spend the most time around, so if you want to be happy with your life, affiliate with happy people!
4. Regular self-sabotage drastically alters your life. The scariest aspect of self-sabotage is that if you make it a habit, in several years' time (or less!), you may find yourself not living the life you truly want. In fact, you'll likely experience great difficulty accomplishing the goals that you've set for yourself. Essentially, you'll stop believing in yourself.

Self-sabotage occurs over all periods of time, from minutes to years. Although you might experience a brief period of feeling better after an incident of self-defeating behavior, as time goes by, you're bound to experience unpleasant consequences.

“The haft of the arrow had been feathered with one of the eagle's own Lures. We often give our enemies the means of our own destruction.”

– Aesop

DO YOU SELF-SABOTAGE?

The nature of self-defeating behaviors is that they tend to be pervasive in the lives of people who engage in them.

If you self-sabotage sometimes, you probably self-sabotage much of the time. This becomes your primary way of thinking, choosing, and relating. Self-sabotage comes in many forms.

These examples show how you might be practicing self-sabotage:

1. Drinking too much alcohol at social events. If you drink a bit more when you're going to be around new people, you may help yourself relax a bit and be a better conversationalist. However, don't be surprised if you occasionally make a fool of yourself instead.
 - A function of drinking too much is a reduction in your good judgment. Isn't that the last thing you want if you're hoping to meet new people and make new friends?
2. Saying “yes” when you'd like to say “no.” Agreeing to do extra tasks when you have no real desire (or time) to do them is a classic way to self-sabotage.

- In fact, if you end up not getting something done when you agreed to do it, your friends and family will be disappointed, annoyed, or even angry with you. Most likely, these were not the results you were looking for when you said “yes” to the task!
3. Insisting on your own way. Many of us do this out of a desire to seem knowledgeable and capable. But how do you suppose people feel about you if you refuse to cooperate and, instead, must have things your way? Do they respect you or see you as a person of knowledge and wisdom?
 - If your goal is to be respected and taken seriously, you’re self-sabotaging if you insist on having your own way all the time.
 4. Reacting instead of responding. Acting out your feelings isn’t always best. Sometimes, you need to take a step back and evaluate the situation before you take action.
 - For example, perhaps you feel anxious, so you avoid doing something, even though you know that you ought to follow through. Or perhaps you feel angry about something a colleague said. Self-defeating behavior in this case might include lashing out at them, which would just cause further friction in your relationship.
 5. Believing and behaving as if you’re always right. Deep down, if you feel you “must” be right and others must be wrong, you probably

lack true confidence. Otherwise, you wouldn't care what others thought.

- When you behave this way, you destroy your relationships with others. And that's most likely very contrary to your true goal.
6. Refusing to take care of your body. How can you work hard, enjoy the love of others, and live a healthy, fulfilling life if you don't take steps to take care of yourself? Regular exercise is required for all. Ignoring that fact is a refusal on your part to do all that you can for yourself and your body, which is indisputably self-defeating.
 7. Maintaining an unhealthy diet. Consistently eating poorly isn't healthy, whether you're skipping your fruits and vegetables or taking in too many calories.
 - Probably the most common self-defeating behavior in the U.S. is knowingly overeating and consuming high fat, low-nutrition foods. It's self-sabotage in its purest form.
 8. Avoiding things you don't want to do. Whether the object of your avoidance makes you anxious or you think it requires too much work, refusing to participate in some things can sabotage your efforts to have a fulfilling and successful life.

9. Taking a passive stance to avoid a fight. Perhaps there are times when your feelings matter but instead, you just keep your thoughts and emotions to yourself so you don't rock the boat. Later, though, you end up in a swamp of difficulties because of initially holding in your honest responses.

10. Procrastinating. Even though you tell yourself you want to do something, you just keep putting it off. Before you know it, you've missed the deadline or you're still in the same position you didn't want to be in.

The short-term payoff may be more time for other things initially, but the long-term results always include increased stress.

11. Not finishing what you've started. Whether it's that painting you started that's been in your closet for years, the scrapbook from your last vacation, or the bookshelves you were making out in the garage, perhaps you have a habit of not finishing things. Eventually, you become frustrated from all your unfinished projects.

12. Being indecisive. Perhaps you just let time go by without making a decision about something important in your life.

You believe you're escaping the stress of making the decision when, in fact, you're letting a wonderful opportunity go by. This is how

people miss their opportunities to marry someone they love or get that new job they've been dreaming about.

13. Avoiding getting a handle on your finances. You've convinced yourself your finances are out of your control. This way, you don't have to make any efforts to correct them. You simply blame it on your boss or the economy. This self-sabotage costs you money and a more secure lifestyle.
14. Taking a pessimistic approach to life. When you consistently focus on the negative aspects of your existence, you vastly limit your choices in life. A negative perspective means you simply won't see certain options. You'll be stuck in a never-ending cycle of pessimism.
15. Non-suicidal self-injury. In its most extreme form, self-sabotage can be physically unhealthy and even dangerous. Non-suicidal self-injury, NSSI, is a newer term for self-injurious behaviors, like cutting yourself, sticking pins in your skin, or burning yourself intentionally with matches or lighters.
 - Although those who engage in NSSI have reasons, such as stress or depression, these behaviors usually have the unintended consequences of embarrassment, avoidance of others, and social isolation.

The range of human self-destructive behaviors is wide and deep. There are a multitude of methods you might be engaging in, including self-defeating thinking, choices, and actions. Contemplate your own thoughts and decisions to determine if you're taking part in any self-sabotaging behaviors.

“Sometimes we self-sabotage just when things seem to be going smoothly. Perhaps this is a way to express our fear about whether it is okay for us to have a better life. We are bound to feel anxious as we leave behind old notions of our unworthiness. The challenge is not to be fearless, but to develop strategies of acknowledging our fears and finding out how we can allay them.”

— **Maureen Brady**

CHANGING YOUR LIFE STRATEGY: BANISHING SELF-SABOTAGE

Although letting go of your self-sabotaging behaviors isn't always easy, you can succeed if you make it a priority. Thankfully, there's a full range of strategies you can employ to help yourself avoid self-sabotaging behaviors.

To start your journey of eliminating self-destructive behaviors, commit to follow these steps:

1. Acknowledge that you engage in self-sabotage. Just like the first step in Alcoholics Anonymous, it's important to admit to yourself that you have a challenge before you can do anything to change it.
2. Write out how you self-sabotage. This exercise will feel like you're cleaning out the clutter of a closet, only it's your mind and emotions you're sorting through instead. Keep thinking and writing until you've listed all the ways you engage in self-defeating behaviors.

- Next, put down specific incidents where you recognize that your thoughts, choices, or behaviors were self-defeating. Go back for at least the last year or two.
3. Claim full responsibility for your thoughts and actions. Now is the time to step up and do whatever is necessary to let go of the self-defeating thinking and behaving. Own it.
 4. Plan your responses to challenging situations. Write them down! For each of your episodes of self-sabotage you wrote down in Step 2, record how you'll respond in a similar situation from today forward. Be specific.
 - For example:

“I will not avoid going out with friends just because someone I've never met will be there. Instead, I'll go with them and make an effort to talk to the new person. It's okay if I feel some anxiety! I won't allow my tense feelings to push me toward a decision that will ultimately prevent me from making new friends, which is important to me.”
 5. Share your plans with a close friend or family member. Let someone know what you're working on. This part is important: ask them to confront you whenever they see you engaging in any self-sabotaging behavior. If you choose someone you trust, you'll believe them when they tell you you're self-sabotaging.

- If your friend comes to you to share that you're about to self-sabotage, carefully consider the information. Then thank them for telling you and ask them to continue to follow through with letting you know in the future about such behaviors.
6. Tell yourself you're worth the effort. Those who fall into repeated patterns of self-sabotage have low self-esteem and simply don't feel worthy of experiencing the lives they want. This is no secret.

Repeat to yourself that you're worth the time and effort to change your self-defeating thinking and behavior.

7. Get out of the rut: start believing in yourself. Rather than put yourself down, give yourself some props for making it this far and for recognizing your self-defeating ways.

Keep reminding yourself that you're letting go of the old style of living where you lacked confidence and determination. Make a decision to believe in yourself again.

8. Make a vow to yourself and a close friend. Commit to working to decrease and eventually stop engaging in self-sabotage. Say it out loud, to yourself and to your friend. If it helps you, feel free to say it to yourself in front of your bathroom mirror.
9. Use thought-stopping techniques to end unhelpful thinking. Negative thoughts can lead to self-sabotage. Whenever unproductive

thinking begins, imagine a big red light in your mind, blocking out the negative ideas. Then, imagine a green light while choosing to replace the negative cognition with a positive one.

- For example, let's say you're trying to eat healthier. As soon as you begin thinking about eating doughnuts, visualize a big red light. Then, think about eating an apple instead. Visualize a green light as you get the apple and bite into its crunchy sweetness.

10. Give yourself positive reinforcement. Making changes can be challenging. Using the example in Step 4, remind yourself during your evening with new friends that you made the right choice to get to know more people. Give yourself a mental pat on the back. You're going for your goals. Good for you!

11. Acknowledge your new, positive feelings and experiences. Staying with the example in Step 4, maybe you met three new people or made a real friend. Perhaps you laughed all evening and really had a great time. You might have even gained some confidence regarding socializing with new people.

- As you begin to make different choices, you'll notice a pronounced drop in the number of your self-sabotaging actions. Bask in the positive emotions you feel about making healthier choices.

12. Educate yourself. Read a variety of self-improvement books about feelings to be better informed about what goes on inside of you.

Engaging in self-study enriches your life in many ways and will help you re-focus your efforts on what you truly want.

Here are some examples:

- Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy by David Burns.
- The Book of Awakening: Having the Life You Want by Being Present to the Life You Have by Mark Nepo.
- Change Your Thoughts - Change Your Life: Living the Wisdom of the Tao by Dr. Wayne W. Dyer

Don't limit yourself to these, though!

There are abundant options in the self-help section of your local bookstore and more are written all the time.

If you find some that appeal to you more than the titles above, read them instead. This is all about self discovery, and that starts with tuning in to what you really want!

13. Keep your eyes open. Vigilantly monitor your thoughts and emotions. Notice when those self-destructive ideas creep into your mind. Stay in touch with your feelings. This way, you'll have greater awareness and can evaluate emotions and thoughts before they become behaviors.

14. Give yourself permission to think outside the box. Be willing to let new and foreign ideas into your head. Allow yourself to engage in new ways of thinking.

15. Consider professional help. If you don't feel like you're able to decrease your self-sabotaging behaviors, consider seeking professional assistance. Therapists, social workers, life coaches, and mental health counselors will help you confront your unhealthy thoughts and behaviors and develop effective ways of dealing with them.

- Many people seek professional assistance at some point in their lives and doing so can benefit just about anyone.

16. Persevere. Although there may be times when you feel overwhelmed by your ability to self-sabotage and contemplate giving up, if you persevere, your life will get better. Look back over these steps often. Re-read what you wrote about the ways you self-sabotage and how you'll overcome it.

- As you practice these steps, you'll discover new ways to approach your challenges. You'll find that you possess greater strength and courage. One day, you'll look back and notice that you've come farther than you ever imagined possible. That day is worth all of the challenges between here and there.

17. Renew your commitment to yourself as often as needed. When making a commitment, all of us occasionally veer off-track. When

you notice this, make a new commitment to yourself to continue in your endeavors to banish self-sabotage.

To do away with self-defeat for good, place these 17 steps on your refrigerator or by your bedside table where you'll see them every day. Review them often. Once or twice a day is a good place to start. Take time to think about what you're doing in your efforts to end your self-sabotage.

Keep your wish to banish self-destructive acts in the forefront of your mind. Your awareness is critical to your recovery.

"My definition of a mistake is when you don't follow your rules. And if you don't have rules, then everything you do is a mistake. And self-sabotage occurs when you keep repeating the same mistakes over and over and over again."

– Van K. Tharp

SUMMARY

Self-sabotage involves a complicated set of circumstances that ultimately short-circuits your ability to meet your goals.

Repeated episodes of self-defeating behaviors will have devastating effects. And the ways you might be self-sabotaging are diverse. Most of us engage in this in some form, and for many of us, it pervades our lives.

However, today we've begun the path toward banishing self-destructive behaviors. Free yourself from self-sabotage to achieve your goals and live the life you've planned for yourself!

“People who bite the hand that feeds them
usually lick the boot that kicks them.”

– Eric Hoffer

About Leddy Glenn-Ludwig, M.A., M.A.

Being dyslexic is no longer shameful! More than 10% of the population has an invisible disability, we shouldn't feel alone, yet we do. We have a tribe of others who have grown up not knowing just how smart they are. Leddy was diagnosed with dyslexia in second grade, which started her journey as a student with disabilities. This came with educational supports and taunting from classmates. Leddy decided to hide her dyslexia diagnosis, which left her feeling overwhelmed, ashamed, and insecure about who she was. She was not being honest with herself about her strengths. After earning two Master's Degrees and working for over 20 years with individuals and groups to explore their abilities, Leddy decided to stop hiding. Leddy teaches others to find their strengths and supports that work for them to reach their goals and then exceed them. Leddy can teach you how to overcome your insecurities and struggles, and to learn how to be proud of the person you are. She will guide you to silencing your inner critic and give you tools to find your passions, strengths, and courage. She will show you that you can succeed at reaching your goals and living the life of your dreams. Leddy is a lifelong learner who is a trained special education teacher, wife, and parent. When Leddy has free time, you can find her relaxing with friends and family as well as snuggling with her cat and dog.

