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Should Statements & Anxiety

If you're a subscriber to my newsletter / frequent visitor to my website, you'll no doubt recall me saying some time ago, situations and/or persons you encounter can at times be a source of duress. These situations or even memories of them after they've occurred (even after considerable time has past) can cause you worry and frustration leading to anxiety, which in turn may develop into a panic attack.

Here's the process in a nutshell:

When situations arise that upset you (whether it be a specific situation or individual), you are likely "making should statements."

You may recall from previous installments the definition of **should statements** are: "Concentrating on what you think "should" or ought to be rather than the actual situation you are faced with, or having **rigid rules** which you think should always apply no matter what the circumstances are."

I refer to the resulting process of becoming anxious or depressed when "should" rules have been violated as Negative Reflection. I chose this name because what happens is that we begin to really focus on how negative a situation was and make it worse (in our minds).

This process of making it worse actually has a name – it's another Cognitive Distortion called **Magnification**.

You may recall that Magnification refers to inappropriately exaggerating the way people or situations truly are. There is one subtype of magnification: *Catastrophizing* - Focusing on the worst possible outcome, however unlikely, or thinking that a situation is unbearable or impossible when it is really just uncomfortable.

Fortunately you no longer need to suffer because: 1. I have completed a Cost Benefit Analysis on the process of Negative Reflection. 2. I have developed a technique for working through these situations.

First, the Cost Benefit Analysis.

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You'll likely recall that a Cost Benefit Analysis involves writing down the pros and cons of this belief (in other words, the advantages and disadvantages) and then rating them as a approximate percentage.

So let's generate some right now.

Negative Reflection Cost Benefit Analysis

Advantages	Disadvantages
1. Might be helpful to develop a future strategy if I encounter the same situation. 2. I can reflect on correctness of actions (whether I could have done something differently).	1. Feel bad 2. Less productive 3. Not in the "moment" 4. Negative view of things in general 5. More inclined to act more negatively towards others 6. Overall "Being" is compromised 7. It clearly compromises my goal of autonomy

70% Disadvantages vs. 30% Advantages

Utilizing a new strategy

New Strategy: Questioning Technique. It can be used whenever someone or something bothers you – before or after Negative Reflection occurs. There's a caveat: the technique requires you to be honest with yourself.

The steps are below.

Ask yourself:

1. Did you cause or contribute to the existence of the negative event?
2. If yes, what could you have done differently? If no, might there have been a better way to handle the situation, now that you have the benefit of hindsight?
3. Regardless of whether you've answered yes or no above, analyze your thinking and locate your "Should" rules that are driving your frustration about the event. Then replace these should rules with more realistic statements.
4. Finally, what are the general lesson(s) or take-home-ideas that you can use for future reference?

If applicable, the idea(s) / lesson(s) generated from step #2, will serve as a lesson that can be integrated into future conduct, if similar enough situations arise.

The idea(s) / lesson(s) generated from step #4 will form part of your life lessons which can be used for future reference at any time.

The idea is that if something or someone bothers you, there is a lesson or take-home-message to get, regardless of who's to blame. This does not necessarily assume any responsibility on your part for causing the event; rather, the idea is that a lesson, or take-home-idea, can be taken from every life experience and thus every experience is valuable.

The above technique works to convert a negative encounter into a positive one because:

1. Cost benefit analysis illustrates how counterproductive negative reflection is.
2. You now have a clear alternative strategy that actually allows you to gain advantages of the negative reflection without having any disadvantages.
3. You can move forward and truly live the life you wish to live without being inhibited by negative reflection.

Some Tips:

- If you've followed the above steps and negative reflection reoccurs for the same event, remind yourself: A. that it is already resolved, B. what the lesson(s) were, and C. the outcome of the Cost benefit analysis on negative reflection vis-à-vis your goal of autonomy, (i.e. it is completely contrary and impedes your goals of autonomy in life.)
- Perhaps a future event might seem to generate the same lesson; however, it serves to strengthen/reinforce the lesson or "take-home-message" which will serve you moving forward.
- A continual theme of lessons will be that people are individuals and "should" rules cannot be applied unanimously. (This is due to the fact that "Should" beliefs are a cognitive distortion. Once corrected, the distortion of course is gone and your bad feelings about the event can be gone at the same time.
- Diversity / contrast exist, and will always exist. There is nothing you can do about it. Doing CBT on the "should" rules can develop a more useful perspective. Utilizing the Questioning Technique allows you to turn a negative event into a

positive one, feel better, be more productive and move forward to lead the life you really want to lead.

When you perform exercises above you are utilizing two specific fundamentals – which are critical: setting the agenda to make an ongoing commitment throughout the day to keep working on your thoughts and 2. being resilient.

A real great way to dramatically facilitate and supplement the above exercises along with setting the agenda for changing your thought processes and being resilient is by having someone coach you, particularly someone who has experience with anxiety, panic attacks, and agoraphobia.

Let my newsletter serve to teach you various strategies to help rid yourself of anxiety, panic attacks, and agoraphobia.

For more tips on recovery from panic attacks, agoraphobia, and anxiety, please sign up for our free newsletter by simply visiting www.PanicAttackRecovery.com and providing your email address in the sign-up box. Subscribers can opt out of our newsletter at any time.

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