STOP Self-Defeating Behaviors In 5 Steps

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Introduction

People say that you have what it takes, that you got the brains, the looks, the skill and all the ingredients you need to be successful at what you do. We are, in the end a sum of all our experiences and when we grow, certain behaviors develop. We react to each situation in a unique way because we are unique individuals, so when we often feel that we have free will, the truth is that, we sometimes get trapped by the way we react to certain situations, we are trapped by are automatic reaction to certain stimuli. When these reactions are overwhelmingly negative, we call them **self-defeating behaviors** or SDB.

SDB is defined as "Those that engage in a cycle of failures in attempts to fulfill something they want. It can be a need for intimacy, affiliation, control, or acceptance which results in mental health difficulties which can include depression, social isolation, and anxiety."[1] Without trying to sound too academic SDB is about setting yourself up for failure with or without your own knowledge. You might ask yourself "Why do I do this? Is there something wrong with me?" Well to keep things short and sweet, you were wired that way; something in your past has caused you to react to certain situations the way you do. You need to rewire yourself to get rid of all this negative behavior.

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[1] http://cmhc.utexas.edu/clearinghouse/files/TI080.pdf, Understanding and Overcoming Harmful Patterns (TI 082)
By Chris Brownson & Bryan Hartzler

Here are 5 steps which can help you rid yourself of these unfavorable characteristics. Stop asking yourself "Why am I like this?" Instead, ask yourself "How can I change? What can I do to move forward and create a new and positive aura and vibe? What is it about me that am causing this? Is there something wrong with me?"

The funny thing is you might not even realize that you have this type of personal trait. That's why it is important to follow the steps even if you feel that you don't this unfavorable characteristic, because you just might and it could be holding you back in your career, your family life, your love life, and in many of your interpersonal relationships. The thing about self-defeating behaviors is that at the start they might not be a huge problem, but tend to take on a life of their own and cause unpleasant damages to yourself and to your relationships with other because this trait feeds on itself to create a vicious cycle.

So take a look at this article as a guide to discovering more about SDB and in ways of identifying if you have it. Then take a look at a five step process in which you can address the problem and finally get rid of it. But remember this, it is a process and what took years to make and manifest will not disappear overnight.

But before we delve into that we need to take a look at the background of SDB and where they originate from.

More about Self-Defeating Behaviors:

On a broad level, self-defeating behaviors exist at some level in everyone and at some point in time impact us. The first concept we need to understand is that of a core need. A core need is something so fundamental that being denied with it can cause psychological harm and emotional distress. Things as basic as intimacy, affiliation, control, and love are core needs and on some level we all need some of this.

The problem starts when a person thinks that he is being denied with all these or if a person has already been denied with it. This creates a certain frustration which manifests itself as self-defeating behaviors, these patterns in a downward spiral which results in a greater sense of frustration. These core needs might not be the same across all people but they do have one thing in common, it is an unfulfilled need that can be one contributing factor which is fueling the self-defeating behavior that is being exhibited by you or any other individual.

Examples of self-defeating behaviors include the toxic self; a belief that said person is toxic and inherently unworthy to have friends. A toxic self will poison any relationship that person has with other people, which means that this person cannot have a stable and healthy relationship. This can cause the person to withdraw from various social circles and also has problems with intimate relationships. Such behavior will only reinforce the perception that they are toxic as people shy away from them. This is one of the main characteristics of self-defeating behavior, the ability of the behavior to feed on itself and become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Origins of Self-Defeating Behaviors

People with self-defeating Behaviors often have a feeling of loss of control. This loss of control is something that we need to stop. Some of the origins as discussed above are the toxic self, where you're critical look at yourself and what makes you think that any relationship that you have will be toxic and not work out. This might create a negative self-image which results in behavior that might actually create a toxic environment where you become what you feared you were.

The other potential cause is the feel of weak social connections. Most problems in relationships and social interactions are due to weak social connections. This problem grows as failed relationships continue to reinforce the view that you have as it creates behaviors such as withdrawal which will just reinforce the feeling of having a weak relationship.

Whatever the origins are, SDB is a cause for significant concern. By its very nature your problem will increase because of the negative feedback loop that SDB creates. What this article will discuss is five ways that you can break out of this cycle and examine yourself and find out how you can take control back. We have the ability to take control of our lives, and we can start with these five steps:

Self-defeating behavior can be combated when you have the rights tools, the right drive and most of all the right kind of support from the community around you.

1. Identifying the Self-Defeating Behavior

You need to identify within yourself what your self-defeating behavior is. Sometimes it can be obvious and many people have called you out on that particular issue. Other times it is insidious and takes a long introspection for you to understand what the problem is.

So, you might ask yourself what are examples of self-defeating behaviors. Well, they are varied and can range greatly. Common examples are the generalization of the negative; where negative past experiences are generalized to the point that you feel that any new experience will also be negative.

For example, when you were young your parents never let you decide. When you bought clothes they picked them, when you went to school they picked your subjects, and when you started dating they chose your partners. You realized that you had no freedom of choice anymore. When you got older the problem continued every failure you had was automatically blamed on the parents. Since you generalized that every situation you encountered was not your choice it would be hard for you to take ownership. That means that you always blame someone else for your own shortcomings. This is an example of a self-defeating behavior because in the end you cannot always blame others. When others do not respond well to this then that is when the feelings of isolation begin.

Here are some steps you can take to help identify the SDB.

1. Write down what you think your SDB is, if you think you don't have any then note that.
2. After doing so, write down any negative behaviors you perceive or that people have brought up.
3. Take a long look at the list,
4. Note if there is there anything in that list that looks like a self perpetuating problem, like low self-esteem, inability to connect to people, being in toxic relationships, and ever succeeding at work despite having all the advantages?

Those are signs that you have SDB. You also have to admit to yourself that you could have a problem because SDB is a problem and one that gets progressively worse. In order to break the cycle of escalation you need to recognize it as a problem. These are easier said than done but remember that the first step is always to the problem identification.

This is the foundation of the discovery process. Without knowing what the problem is you cannot move forward. Just like any scientific approach to a problem you need to start by defining the problem and proceeding from there. In Self-defeating Behavior this is doubly important because once you recognize that you have an issue with yourself and you know what the specific behaviors related to it are then you are already half way in your change process.

Let us use an analogy, when looking at the disease one of the hardest part of finding a cure is identifying the disease. When an individual is exhibiting has symptoms, the doctors really have to do some guess work to narrow

down the suspects and then use various blood tests to see who the real culprit is, and only then can they actually start to treat the patient. Think of the Self-defeating Behavior in the same way, you really not sure what it is, you will start seeing symptoms and you need to start narrowing down what the cause is. Self-defeating Behavior is just one of the many problems that the person is suffering but you need to make sure that it truly is Self-defeating Behavior so that you can take the appropriate steps.

A few things that can help you identify if you have self-defeating behavior and more details about it, is keeping a journal. A journal helps you put things to writing and allows you to see the relationships between events. For example, you may have noticed that you start pushing away people emotionally when they start getting close. This may not be obvious to you but on a journal, you can see the times and create a correlation. This would greatly help in identifying the Self-defeating Behavior.

Now that you know what the problem is, you have to understand what the consequences of the behavior are. The biggest problem people have is that they don't realize what the consequences of their actions are. For example, when I decide not to report to work, it creates a cascade of consequences that I may not have realized or anticipated.

So, you have to work on recognizing the self-defeating behavior. When the self-defeating behavior happens can you recognize it and do realize what the consequences are. You need to recognize the consequences of the negative behavior. In your mind you might feel people just don't like you or you blame other people for your problems. You need to recognize that what you are doing is a self-defeating behavior. Continuing with the example

above you need to recognize you blaming other people. If for example, I am always late and I say it is because no one woke me up and get angry about it, then I need to recognize it is that behavior that is causing people to dislike me or avoid me.

Consider a time when you didn't have this self-defeating behavior, can you remember? Do you remember how you felt and how is it different from today? Most importantly do you realize what happens when you act that way? Do you know how people around you feel, especially those that are close to you and love you? These are the questions that you need to internalize and think about.

2. Facing The Consequences

The first step was to know that you had a problem; we explored the different strategies that you could apply to help you recognize whether or not you had self-defeating behavior. The second step is to recognize that your actions have effects on other people besides yourself. Think of it this way, your self-defeating behavior is a tool that you are using to get something you need, an unfulfilled need. This tool at one point in time might have been successful but at some point in time it became self-defeating. So the second step in recognizing this and knowing that every action that you do has consequences.

One of the hardest things anyone can do is take responsibility for the consequences of your actions. It seems that we are almost hardwired to put blame on other people. Understanding the consequences of our actions helps us overcome our self-defeating behavior.

A good exercise to help internalize this is a "what if" scenario. What if that was me, how would I feel? Internalizing other people's feelings is an excellent way to grow emotionally. It also helps you understand the consequences of your actions and how they affect your friends and your loved ones. Imagine that you push away someone you are getting close to emotionally because that is your self-defeating behavior, how would that person feel. Now internalize that and imagine how you would feel if you were in his shoes.

So what the person needs to do is recognize the situations and factors that cause this particular trait. You need to understand what the consequences of your actions will be and how will it affect you and those people who are around you. It is important that the person or you, has the ability to monitor oneself and provide himself with more positive and self-enhancing behaviors.

3. You Need To Understand The Origin of it All

What are the origins of this behavior? These behaviors do not just spontaneously come into existence. You need to reexamine and take a good look at yourself for you to be able to identify where this particular trait come from. In this particular case, your parents were very controlling and almost always made your choices for you. They took away your ownership of your decisions which meant that you felt that you were not responsible for the consequences of your actions. So what happens? You start blaming other people and as you do this you fall into a pattern of blaming those around you. The origin of which was a problem with your relationship with your parents.

What you need to do is think back to the first time you exhibited the SDB and remember the events that you were going through during that time? What kind of problems were you experiencing? What big event proceeded the first time you did the SDB? A good way to do this is by guided imagery,

one of your friends or partners can ask you about your feelings at that time. The kind of questions I would ask includes:

"How did you feel during that time, please describe what color your emotions would be?"

"Tell me what you remember about that day from when you woke up until you went to sleep."

These kinds of questions will help jog back your memory to help you remember the underlying situation during that time. Remember to keep all that information in a journal so that you can easily remember it. You need to identify the problem and try to remember what your situation was during that time. This will help you determine and understand if any those had any impact to the unfavorable trait that you currently have.

Sometimes people misjudge the origin because they expect it to stem from a super traumatic incident in their life. However, it is quite possible that the origins can be quite mundane. It means that you need to carefully plot the history of your self-defeating behavior. As an example, it could be that the source of your SDB was a rejection from a woman way back in junior high. How can such a mundane thing that almost all of us have gone through cause self-defeating behavior? This is because not all people are the same, some people are more sensitive than others and some people take rejection differently from others.

Dealing with origins will not leave any stone unturned. As suggested earlier, create a diagram tracing back the instances where you have encountered this self-defeating behavior and try to map it around events which had happened during that time. You can also do the opposite of that

and start mapping important events and determine if you had manifested any self-defeating behavior during that time. Once you have created a chart with the entire information, find a friend or family member that you are comfortable with and find out if there are any correlations. When you see any correlations consider if they are the sources of your self-defeating behavior.

Once you know the source, you can now go through the next step and understand your unfulfilled needs. If you know the source of your behavior then you will most likely be able to identify and fully understand what your unfulfilled needs are.

4. Understanding Your Unfulfilled Needs

You have to figure out what your unfulfilled needs are. This is a little bit trickier because your wants and your needs are two different things. It would be very helpful if you take in depth look into yourself and figure out what you truly desire. In the example that we are following, what do you think the person needs? His problems are that he blames others and thinks that he has no control over his life. What the person needs to understand is what his unfulfilled needs are? In this case it would seem that the person lacks self-confidence and his unfulfilled need is trust from others that he respects and believe in, which in this case are his parents.

The self-defeating behavior at one point in time helped you fulfill a certain need you had. The need can be something that reaches back into your childhood or could be a recent need but understanding what they are is the next key step into solving your SDB. Trying to fulfill the needs are important but you must recognize that there are healthier and more self-affirming ways to achieve this.

At this point you should add the concept of "self" to your vocabulary. This self must be structured or restructured by changing our beliefs and beliefs systems. These beliefs and needs are generally a response to something that happened to you in your life. This could include anything including the treatment you received from people around you. Understanding these

needs and changing the underlying beliefs behind them will help you find a different approach to fulfilling what you truly desire.

How do you fulfill your unfulfilled needs? Well, the thing is, it is easier than it sounds. People are stuck in the past because they think the only way to respond to situations is the way they always have. Their belief systems and their sense of self are low, meaning that they see themselves negatively. So, how does this have to do with fulfilling your needs? You may feel lonely, need for emotional attachment, or even for approval from your father or mother. These are all legitimate needs of the self and you cannot just go on ignoring them.

For example, when you want attention from your parents you might do some self-defeating behaviors such as drinking or doing drugs to attract their attention. The more that they ignore you the more that you try to gain their attention which sets up a vicious cycle. There are healthier ways to attain the attention, instead of doing the positive you can reach out to them by showing them areas that you have excelled in. Or joining hobbies that they are interested in and allowing you to spend time with them. However, there are some parents that you just can't please and in this case you need to have a strong sense of self to understand that you don't have to have their approval.

Once you identify the need, you now have the potential to fulfill it. This would rid you of the underlying root problem because you have attained everything that you ever wanted. Once you attain the need this will further strengthen in your journey of success and ridding yourself of SDB.

5. Overcoming your Self-Defeating Behavior

It is never easy to overcome self-defeating behaviors, its very nature means that it feeds on itself and reinforces itself to be stronger and stronger. The original behavior we had was a learning moment and at that specific time was helpful for us in overcoming the problem. However, the problem is that you get overwhelming emotions that threaten to blossom into SDB. We than tend to avoid anything that can elicit a strong emotional reaction and when this happens we get what is termed a "generalization of learning". Where lots of bad things happen to us we tend to generalize that anything strong will end up hurting us.

Earlier we outlined a plan that helps us identify and address the underlying problems behind self-defeating behavior. When we generalize this is the first step in creating irrational reactions to strong emotions that generate the self-defeating behavior. We react the same way because it worked before and now that the problem is different we try to apply the same solution. However, in this particular case we are trying to apply a square peg into a circular hole.

If we let the problem grow without addressing it we allow the problem to automatically self sabotage ourselves. This happens at a subconscious level so most of the time we don't even realize we are doing it. This is why the first step is always identifying the issue. The thing is this may cause us to react strongly to a situation that does not merit such a strong reaction.

Our loved ones and friends often do not know how to deal with this and can cause significant rifts in the relationships. This causes even more alienation and this is when the vicious cycle starts up.

The actions of someone with self-defeating behavior will push away those that love them. These people not understanding the situation will often just not deal with a person. This can cause feelings of pain and betrayal in the person with self-defeating behavior which results in increased isolation and loneliness. This is when people start to get angry with them resulting in the toxic person syndrome mentioned earlier. They feel that they are just trouble and toxic and when they encounter someone their actions cause the person to back away affirming the feeling that they are toxic.

The Big Change

The best part about this is that you are reading this, that you realize that there is a need for change and that you need to reach out for help. Help begin with realizing that you have a problem. Help begins by reaching out to those around you who can help you break this vicious cycle that you are going through.

Imagine your life to be a play and you are the main actor. You always feel that someone is pulling the strings or writing the stories for you. Most of the time you feel that this is quite negative, to the point where you feel the fates have lined up to ruin your life. The thing is that the only person who can defeat this self-defeating behavior is you. People say you won't change because you were always like that, that the way you act is inherent in your personality and that you are not a good person. This is just not true. You can take control of the plot in your life and rewrite it into anything you want.

Case Study 1:

The past is the past; you have to power to write the unwritten future. After identifying what the problem is you can identify the triggers. It is all about reactions. For example, there was a person doing corporate work who had it all, he had the looks, personality, and smarts to succeed and he was on the fast track to success. But there was something terribly wrong; the person had Self Defeating Behavior. He often easily lost his temper when speaking to people who didn't understand as quickly as he did. This was mainly due to the way he was dealt with when he was just a subordinate, they often didn't respect him as he was the only minority in the office.

So when the person lost his temper for his boss, all his chances of promotion were thrown out the window. How could he have stopped this and how can he stop this going forward. Well as we discussed earlier we need to identify the problem. The problem is that the person has triggers which cause him to lose his temper. The core reason behind this was that the person was insecure; he felt that he went to a more prestigious college and was smarter than his boss and he deserved to get paid better. The problem was that this made him angry. He felt entitlement when he in fact didn't deserve it.

The first step that is needed is identifying the problematic behaviors; by keeping a journal you can quickly see patterns. For example in this case you use the journal to identify every time you lose your temper. This means

that you can now see what the trigger was, in this particular case the trigger was annoyance, when the manager tells him to do something that he knows is wrong he loses his temper. The key is to now use a positive approach to the problem, by reengineering your reactions you become stronger and are able to overcome your vicious cycle.

The next step is to replace your bad habits, meaning that instead of getting angry you should laugh, or in this case learning to accept that you will not always have the kind of boss that you would want. That instead of feeling angry you should feel challenged. Just remember that you need to keep moving forward and that even when old habits rear their ugly head.

Case Study 2:

There is always that person in school that seems to have a hard time relating to everyone else. They seem to be socially awkward and do not know how to deal with most people in a normal environment. Let call this person Albert, and he was a student at a prominent University, he got good grades and participated in several extracurricular activities but the Albert had a really hard time relating other people. When he would befriend them they often did not understand him and pushed him away.

Albert was very clingy, he often got jealous when people did not give him all their time and ended up driving them away. Albert was at a loss, why did he push away what he wanted the most, friends? So he thought about it and identified the problem, the problem was that he was too clingy, he felt lonely and wanted and was afraid to lose anyone that he finally got close to.

What was the origin of this? When he was a child he lived a very sheltered childhood, his parents wouldn't allow him to go out much and he often ended up staying home alone by himself. So whenever he was given the opportunity to play he would be very clingy and the people inevitably pushed him away. He thought that there must be something terribly wrong with him which resulted in him trying even harder to have friends and getting rejected making him more and more desperate.

However, once he discovered what his unfulfilled need was, (companionship) he realized that he needed to adjust the triggers that made him so clingy. Albert tried new behaviors and attempt to socialize without being too clingy and found that he was able to make friends. As he slowly made friends he realized that he didn't need to be clingy and the bad behavior was slowly replaced by much healthier behavior.

Case Study 3:

John is a student at one of the State Schools in the East Coast and moved to L.A. in his third semester in College. Though quite a well-known and well-liked guy in the East Coast he encountered many problems when trying to socialize with people from L.A.

John is really insecure about what people think about him, he even has a hard time relating to his current roommate who characterizes John as someone who is quite shy. John doesn't try to talk to anyone in his dorm, even his roommate. He spends most of his time on his computer or watching TV. The people in his dorm being generally a friendly bunch often engage him in small talk. John though wanting to engage in a conversation suddenly becomes nervous and come off rude due to his abrupt responses to questions. The result is quite opposite to what she wants to happen, his classmates start to distance themselves from John as they feel John is not interested in socializing with them. So over the course of the 4th semester they no longer interacted with John.

John started exhibiting SBD about 5 months after moving to LA. He started arriving to class late or just in time in order to avoid having to socialize with the rest of the students. John now spends most of his time just reading and playing with his computer.

So John wanted to take a big long look at the origin of why he is having a problem adjusting socially to LA. Though relatively well adjusted he did

remember having a hard time reading back in 2nd grade, which resulted in hi having to take extra time with a tutor. During the reading time John was tormented by two bullies who mocked his slow and stilting ability to read.

John was very angry at first but as time went by the anger turned inward. John started expecting to fail and because of that expectation started to fail in class. Towards the end of the year during a regular check up by the optometrist it was discovered that there was a problem with John's eyes that was easily correctable by a pair of glasses. After getting the glasses John stopped having problems with reading as it turns out that was the root cause of the problems.

Suddenly John started excelling in reading and in academics in general. People's perception of him changed from that of negative to a quite positive outlook. The problem was that John's self esteem had not improved along with the other aspects of his life. John still felt insecure and did not accept compliments from others. As John continued to excel he never felt that he was good enough and he always felt he did not deserve any of the praise that he was given. Even though John was excelling academically he had very few friends and people noticed that he would often berate himself if he got less than perfect scores on exams.

In college John got an 87% on a Biology Exam, the thing was that he had expected a much higher grade but had not seen that there were more questions on the back. While not quite the best in class this was still a very respectable score. John was so upset that when he got home he did not speak to anyone, even his roommate. This had two effects; it gave the

roommate a negative impression of John and also deprived John of anyone to speak with.

Luckily the school that John went to provided social and psychological counseling and John decided to avail of it. The main thing that the therapist did for John was allow him to challenge his main core belief. His belief that he was inadequate and did not have what it takes to succeed. John being a bright guy decided that he would try his best to apply this advice. John actively started trying to be more social and went out of his way to talk and meet people.

John started reacting differently to problems; he started seeking out people instead of shutting things in. However John still had problems when it came to dating girls. Insecurity starts kicking in whenever he is around people that he might feel uncomfortable with. When one of the cute girls in class start taking an interest in John his first reaction is to push the person away. However, he remembered what the therapist said; you need to challenge your core belief. As time went by John was better able to address the people and eventually even got a girlfriend. Though this didn't mean that suddenly John was an outgoing socialite it did start the road to transformation.

John continues to suffer from self-defeating behavior. The difference now was that he was able to identify what it is and how to start improving and fixing your problems. John represents a remarkable people out there who need help with this. People might need a therapist like John did but not having one around cannot stop you from having an excellent results.

Following the 5 step process should help you on your journey towards self improvement.

Moving Forward

These steps are a process, a systematic and scientific approach to dealing with self-defeating behaviors. Quite often people think that will power alone will be able to affect change. They think that if they try hard enough if they have wills of steel that they can overcome this problem.

Overcoming self-defeating behaviors is not easy; it's a journey that may take years. Remember that you did not develop this self-defeating behavior overnight. Which probably means that you will not be rid of them overnight either, so the key to success is patience, resilience, and passion? Just remember that when you fall, you pick yourself right up again. None of this is easy, but it doesn't have to be as hard as it is. Just follow the steps outlined in this article and keep trying. Also understand this is not the stop all and end all of advice regarding self-defeating behaviors, there are many sources on the net and through your health care professionals where you can seek help to overcome your self-defeating behaviors.

People who self-sabotage or have self-defeating attitudes are not bad people. We should never let the past haunt us, we have the power to change the present and affect our future. So follow the steps to defeating the self-defeating behaviors, and don't forget that the past doesn't control you. End your self-defeating ways and live a happy life as it just takes a few small steps for people.