

Be Intentional to Outsmart Your Mental Saboteurs

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Do you catch yourself saying, “Oh, why did I just do that?” or “Why am I so stupid?” Perhaps you have one or more mental Saboteurs who subtly divert your behaviors.

Two recent articles have presented the work of Shirzad Chamine to thousands of readers. His book is entitled *Positive Intelligence: Why Only 20% of Teams and Individuals Achieve Their True Potential (and How You Can Achieve Yours)*.

You can find those two articles by going onto my website (see the address below) and clicking on the “Article Archives” page. Scroll down to find “Are Mental Saboteurs Holding You Back?” and “You Adopted Your Mental Saboteurs to Help You Survive.”

I hope you will share those articles and this one with a work colleague or a family member. When you do, ask that person to share experiences with you. Explore together how each of you can diminish the effect of your Saboteurs and more effectively achieve the results you prefer.

Chamine offers two powerful ways to willfully overcome the power of these Saboteurs. Briefly, the first technique is to call your Saboteur by name, recognize it is NOT you (despite its efforts to convince you otherwise), and escort that Saboteur out of the situation you currently face. This disempowers the Saboteur so you can concentrate on taking the actions that affirm the real “you” and will lead to the outcome you desire.

Chamine’s second technique suggests that you intentionally engage your Sage, the term he offers to describe the conscious, insightful, wise portion of your brain. He contends (and I agree with him) that your curiosity, compassion, creativity, joy, peace, and grounded decisiveness, even during a great crisis, are far more powerful than your Saboteurs.

Let me give you the specifics. Please be VERY INTENTIONAL as you focus on addressing these five elements. After all, you have a lifetime of habits to overcome in learning these techniques. You won’t reliably subdue your Saboteurs with only a few feeble efforts at these previously underused capabilities. My experience suggests a couple of months of conscious experimentation are required.

EMPATHIZE. Your Judge will want to condemn you and your circumstances, so intentionally and initially seek empathy for yourself. You may think it’s not fair that you must deal with this situation. You may feel abused by your spouse, boss, coworker, or customer. Let that twinge of anger or disappointment trigger your empathy capability.

Chamine suggests you envision yourself as a small child. At his suggestion, as a visual reminder, I’ve placed on my desk a picture of a helpless but lovable “me” at age two. A similar little boy or girl still exists inside of you. Let your adult persona quietly affirm and protect that naive youngster.

Now do the same for the other person involved. Just recognize that a frustrated, scared, hurt, or sad little boy or girl is facing you. If you are intentional with this, you’ll be amazed at your patience.

EXPLORE. Often, you think you understand the situation you face. That’s rarely because of clarity, however. It’s usually driven by your desire to move quickly to the next activity in your life.

Chamine suggests you adopt the curious inquiry of a fascinated anthropologist. Don’t accept what appears obvious. Search closely to determine “What else could this mean? What else can I learn?”

This step ensures you aren’t bamboozled into addressing a wrong issue, which often happens when you let the Saboteurs rule! If you start chasing down the wrong path, watch your Saboteurs come rushing in to prove just how much of a friend they are to you!

INNOVATE. This is where creativity counts. Come up with as many different possible responses as possible. Intentionally avoiding evaluation is critical in this step (otherwise, Saboteurs sneak in!). If you find this step difficult to do alone, engage a colleague or a coach to keep the options flowing.

Chamine suggests you use the “Yes, and” technique. Identify any advantages that come to mind immediately (“Yes!”), then continue to generate the next idea (“and!”). You’ll find that there are always at least five different options for how to respond to any situation.

NAVIGATE. Don’t leave your imagination-filled world yet! Consider some future time--days, weeks, or years out into the future. Imagine an outcome you’d like to create, one that is consistent with your values and inspired dreams. Let the picture of that desired outcome arouse your emotions.

Now look back from that future state and ask yourself, “Which option is most likely to carry me in the direction of my desired outcome?” From that future vantage point, what possibility will you wish you had chosen? Clarify your plan in your mind so that your Saboteurs don’t talk you out of it.

ACTIVATE. Now put all your mental and emotional energy into executing the optimal choice you’ve selected. Continue to intentionally keep the Saboteurs isolated and away from this process so that you can proceed purely, without the procrastination, drama, and interference they’ll surely bring.

Knowing your Saboteurs as you do, predict how your Judge and its accomplices are likely to whisper in your ear or shout distractions. By considering these possibilities intentionally in advance, you can preempt the attack and discredit their lies.

Can you see how different this process is from what you’ve allowed to happen in the past? Please consciously and willfully practice this thorough approach for several months. It will take multiple trial-and-error approaches for this process to feel more natural and “normal” to you. Stick with it. Be intentional in excluding your Saboteurs from your efforts. You can replace those automatic and persistent mind patterns with new habits that will more effectively serve you and those you serve.

If you’ve not yet taken the two online assessments, please log onto www.positiveintelligence.com. The assessments are free, and the follow-up report contains all the main points that Chamine describes in his book. The man must be hugely generous!

I so very much want this to work for you. If you have any problems or questions, please contact me!

Dennis Hooper is an executive coach in Atlanta, serving leaders who are building future leaders and intentionally collaborative cultures. His website is www.buildingfutureleaders.com/article-archives. You may contact Dennis at dennis@buildingfutureleaders.com or leave a message at 770-286-2250.