

You Adopted Your Mental Saboteurs to Help You Survive

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This information is a continuation of my column from two weeks ago. You can easily access that article by doing a search on the Savannah Business Journal website or by going to my website (address below). Click on “Dennis’ Blog” or “Article Archives.” On either page, scroll down to “Are Mental Saboteurs Holding You Back?”

For your convenience, however, I provide a very brief summary here.

Saboteurs are a universal phenomenon. We all have them. The questions for you are “Which ones control your thinking?” and “How extensively do they control your behaviors?”

We all have the universal saboteur, The Judge. The Judge is critical of you, of other people, and of situations. Nine other “accomplice saboteurs” include The Stickler, The Pleaser, the Hyper-Achiever, The Victim, The Hyper-Rational, The Hyper-Vigilant, The Restless, The Controller, and The Avoider.

These saboteurs prefer to operate outside our conscious awareness. According to Shirzad Chamine, “The Saboteurs are a set of automatic and habitual mind patterns, each with its own voice, beliefs, and assumptions that work against your best interest....We often don’t even know that they exist.”

That quote, along with most of the information in this article, is taken from Chamine’s book *Positive Intelligence: Why Only 20% of Teams and Individuals Achieve Their True Potential*.

Chamine offers two main ways in which you can minimize the effects of the Saboteurs. The first is to recognize that The Judge and its accomplice saboteurs are not “you,” they are separate from “you,” and they lie to you constantly, seeking to make you believe they are your friends and protectors.

Chamine offers a simple, free “Saboteur Assessment” on his website. Working through the elements allows you to discover which of the ten mental Saboteurs causes the greatest harm to your success and happiness. Identifying these for yourself is very important, because the most dangerous enemy is an invisible one. You can learn to expose and diminish the power of your particular Saboteurs.

You birthed, or at least adopted, each Saboteur to help survive the emotional (and sometimes physical) minefield of childhood. Chamine provides an extensive paragraph describing typical emotional drama children face. One of my favorites is the “kids at school who were taller, smarter, faster, or funnier than you, and the ones who didn’t seem to like you.”

You would think that as we mature, we might drop these emotional aids in favor of more mature perspectives that are better suited for our less vulnerable adult years. Unfortunately, the Saboteurs don’t voluntarily let go of their power over us. They hang on in our heads. They worked so well in our youth that they became habits. However, their perspectives undermine our preferred adult lives

The first step in overcoming your Saboteurs is to identify and name them. If you don’t, the Saboteurs function, manipulating your thinking and creating setbacks without your full awareness.

These Saboteurs want you to believe that the way they cause you to see yourself, your colleagues, and the situations you face is the truth. They are habitual perspectives, ones you maintain as unintentional carryovers from your youth. They torture and punish you. Yet they function sufficiently “behind the scenes” that their damage to your thought and actions cannot easily be isolated.

Further, because they’ve controlled your thoughts and actions for so long, you have presumed that they ARE you. They want to keep it that way. However, you can identify each Saboteur and recognize when it is influencing your thinking. Instead of saying, “That’s the way I see it,” Chamine suggests you say, “That’s the way my Judge sees it.” In fact, he suggests you create your own personal name for your Judge and your other dominant Saboteurs, so you can call them out easily.

By assigning an identity to your dominant Saboteurs and labeling their critical thoughts as separate from you, you restrict their authority over you. It's as if you make them "sit down and shut up" at will!

The second way you can minimize the effect of your Saboteurs is to consciously and intentionally adopt a very independent thought process for evaluating your situations and considering your actions. Chamine calls this "strengthening your Sage, the deeper and wiser part of you." Your Sage has the "perspective on any challenge you are facing that it is already a gift and opportunity or could be actively turned into one." That's a very liberating thought!

Wow--that's exciting! Can you imagine turning ANY situation you face into a genuine opportunity for progress? Please look for more information in my followup article in the Savannah Business Journal in two weeks! If you can't wait and desire to learn more immediately, visit Shirzad Chamine's website, www.positiveintelligence.com.

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