

Are Mental Saboteurs Holding You Back?

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Do you habitually find fault with yourself, others, and circumstances? Are you sometimes your most demanding critic? Do you often feel judgmental, disappointed, or angry when you encounter poor service, unfulfilled promises, or an unexpected turn of events?

Mental saboteurs may have convinced you through their lies that they are your friends and working on your behalf. Yet they predispose you to exaggerate the negative, keeping you from manifesting your potential. These intruders “are a set of automatic and habitual mind patterns, each with its own voice, beliefs, and assumptions that work against your best interests.”

Such is the perspective of Shirzad Chamine, a lecturer in Stanford’s business school and Chairman of the Coach Training Institute, the world’s largest organization for training coaches. Chamine is also the author of the best-selling book *Positive Intelligence: Why Only 20% of Teams and Individuals Achieve Their True Potential AND HOW YOU CAN ACHIEVE YOURS*.

You may recognize the characteristics described above in other people easier than you do in yourself. Do your entire team a favor and study Chamine’s book together. You’ll find many ways to improve your individual and collective effectiveness.

I’ll share information in my next article about how to overcome these saboteurs. This week, however, let’s simply identify all ten of them.

The universal saboteur is **The Judge**. We all had authoritative adults teach us early in life what’s right and wrong, good or bad, acceptable or not. “No” is a necessary restriction to help us avoid injury as a child. As we develop into adulthood, however, these criteria generate much of our anxiety, stress, anger, disappointment, shame, and guilt. The self-justifying lie of **The Judge** is that without its demands, you’d turn into a lazy slouch with unacceptably low standards.

The Judge usually functions with at least one “accomplice saboteur.” Chamine identifies nine of these. You likely developed one or more as a way of coping with the emotional demands of childhood. Think about which ones may be characteristic of your pattern of thought and behavior.

The Stickler manifests in a striving for perfection, order, and organization. When you feel that what you’ve just accomplished isn’t quite good enough, it may be **The Stickler** pushing you to try harder next time. Its self-justifying lie is that perfectionism is always good and the cost to achieve it is small compared to its benefit.

The Pleaser compels you to constantly help, rescue, or flatter others, gaining their acceptance and affection. Others can become overly dependent on you, and you can become resentful as you frequently overlook your own needs. The self-justifying lie of **The Pleaser** is that serving others is an appropriate and good thing to do, denying that you are indirectly seeking affection or appreciation.

The Hyper-Achiever seeks self-respect and self-validation through accomplishing tasks. You may lose touch with emotional and relational needs as you seek external success based on performance. The self-justifying lie of **The Hyper-Achiever** is that your self-acceptance is conditional on the quality and quantity of performance and its acceptability to outside authority figures.

The Victim focuses on internal feelings, especially painful ones. You gain attention and compassion from others through emotional, temperamental laments. The self-justifying lie of **The Victim** is that without assuming the abused or martyr persona, you’ll not gain favor and support from others.

The Hyper-Rational individual focuses on cause-and-effect relationships to the exclusion of emotional connection with others. **The Hyper-Rational** can be perceived as cold, distant, and intellectually arrogant. Its lie is that logic--the rational mind--is the most helpful and important form of intelligence that any of us can possess.

The Hyper-Vigilant is constantly looking for anything that might go wrong. The intense and continuous anxiety wears you and others down. The self-justifying lie of **The Hyper-Vigilant** is that the surrounding dangers are significant and only through constant awareness and preemptive action can they be minimized.

The Restless individual constantly seeks greater excitement and is perpetually busy, though rarely peaceful or satisfied. Distractions interrupt focus on activities and people that really matter. **The Restless** lie is that you are living life fully; the lie ignores the fact that continually focusing attention on something new never allows complete satisfaction with the current activity.

The Controller “runs on anxiety-based need to take charge, control situations, and bend people’s actions to one’s own will.” The belief is that if you’re not in control, somebody else, probably less capable, will be. **The Controller** obtains short-term results, but generates resentment in others and prevents them from exercising and developing their own capabilities. Its lie is that only through exercising explicit guidance can you obtain the best results from people around you.

The Avoider focuses on the positive and the pleasant to the extreme, sidestepping difficult, unpleasant tasks and encounters. Common effects are procrastination and conflict avoidance. The self-justifying lie of **The Avoider** is that you are maintaining a positive outlook, not ignoring problems.

Saboteurs are a universal phenomenon. We all have them. The question is which of the nine accomplice saboteurs link with your **Judge**, and how strongly they distort your thoughts and actions. They are alive and well, inhabiting your underlying perspectives and beliefs.

The first step in reducing their influence is to recognize their existence. To determine which saboteurs exist in you, go to www.positiveintelligence.com and click on “Assessments.” Then click on “Take the Saboteur Assessment.”

In my next article, I’ll share how Chamine explains the birth of these saboteurs and how you can significantly reduce their influence on your thinking and behaviors.

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