

Positive Perceptions Improve Quality of Life

Source - Sonja Haller, *The Arizona Republic*

If the word “affirmation” feels too woo-woo, recalling an overwrought Stuart Smalley from Saturday Night Live chanting, “I’m good enough, I’m smart enough, and doggone it, people like me!” then call it what athletes and ambitious executives do; positive self talk.

Either way, this worded form of mental focus can help people find direction, energy and calm. Affirmations work, proponents say, by shifting perceptions of a situation. Once a perception is shifted, people report lessened anxiety, anger and hopelessness, and more peace, optimism, and joy.

Affirmation advocates are fond of twisting the you-are-what-you-eat adage to you are what you tell yourself. So do you tell yourself; I’m never going to get ahead at work? Or I’m not going to make it through the hectic holidays without a breakdown? Or does your version of self talk sound more like: I am creating opportunities for financial and professional success every day? And I give thanks for my abundant energy and joy through the holidays?

The best part of using affirmations is that they work whether the user believe what they say at the start or not, Cathy Stuart, a Scottsdale professional and personal coach. She helps tailor affirmations for clients and advised reluctant people to say them for three days. In the beginning, the affirmations may help suffering clients “put a Band-Aid on a very open wound,” Stuart said. But she’s also seen them put people on the path to overcoming their overspending habits or their fear of asking for a raise.

“We’re so busy these days and our vision can get really cloudy.” Stuart said. “I believe affirmations help us to find our inner vision.”

Connie Holloway, 53, of Scottsdale, said she began using affirmations 20 years ago by writing simple sayings like, “I live an abundant life” and posting them on mirrors, vehicles dashboards and around her workstation.

Co-workers may have chided her, but Holloway said she continues to use affirmations to shape her life in ways big and small. Most recently, the mortgage broker said she used affirmations after growing frustrated with the length of healing time after multiple dental surgeries. She was angry, she had visions of tossing all her teeth from her head and possessed a generally woe-is-me attitude.

But then she stopped the negative self-chatter and replaced it with affirmations such as: “I have the greatest dentist I could ever, ever ask for. I am grateful for what he’s doing for me. This is exactly the work that I wanted done.”

Holloway began to feel better, physically and emotionally. “When I was focused on the pain, that’s all I felt. When I focused on the end result being fabulous, it absolutely did help with the healing. My whole day changed for the better.”

Positive self-talk proponents say affirmations have the power to create wealth, romance and professional success, but they suggest starting with smaller everyday situations to see and test success.

Do's and Don'ts of Affirmations

Do

- Make the affirmations in the present tense. Don't say, "I will" because that puts the positive feeling in the future.
- Repeat an affirmation throughout the day to replace negative thoughts.
- Include your full name in the affirmation to give it more power.
- Keep affirmations short.
- Use these common beginnings: I am, I choose, I have, I can.
- Use only those words that feel appropriate and comfortable.

Don't

- Express an affirmation in the negative. Focus on what you want, as in "I feel safe." Not, "I am not scared."
- Use an affirmation to get someone to do something they don't want to do. You should only use an affirmation to influence yourself.
- Put unnecessary restrictions on your affirmation, such as having to write it or say it 100 times a day. Use as often as needed.
- Give up too soon. Use an affirmation for at least 30 days. But keep in mind, affirmations are a tool of change and may need to be used with other tools to affect long-lasting change.
- Use affirmations to contradict or try to change your feelings. Accept all your feelings, but use affirmations to create a new view.

Situation

The holiday rush has turned into the holiday crush as shopping, company parties and visiting relatives crowd the days.

Affirmations

I am at peace now and accept all new changes in my life as positive.

Or

I cherish my family and friends and I am able to thank them for the gifts that they are.

Or

I am gentle, compassionate and forgiving of myself, and accept the support I need and deserve this holiday season.

Situation

You are feeling full, and really should be cutting down on calories and sugar but one more helping of desert is so tempting.

Affirmation

I am celebrating the holidays with new, healthy traditions I've created for myself.

Or

I now eat all the right food for optimum health and energy.

Situation

You are going to ask for a raise, have a worthy record, but need an extra boost in confidence.

Affirmations

I am rewarded for all the work I do.

Or

I have the confidence to ask for what I want.

Or

I welcome more money in my life.

Situation

You are stuck in traffic and growing more agitated.

Affirmation

I am at peace with exactly where I am now.

Or

I am grateful that I am safe right here. (In the event there was an accident.)

Sources: Scottsdale professional and personal coach Cathy Stuart; *Creative Visualization* by Shakti Gawain; and other resources.