



## **HOW TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE WITH A *SINGLE WORD***

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### **The Power Of Transformational Language**

If there is one thing I have learned from my thirty-plus years as a psychologist, it is that words have an exceptional power to heal and change lives. I saw my first therapy client in 1968, then went on to a career in which I did approximately 20,000 sessions as a therapist and also trained several thousand counselors, therapists and coaches. During that time I saw many seeming miracles that came from changing a word, a phrase or a single thought.

### **Why Do Words Have Such Power?**

William James, the founder of the field of psychology in the United States, said that the most important discovery of his time was that you could change the quality of your life by changing the quality of your thoughts. Since he lived in the great century from 1800-1900 when telephones, steam engines, and other useful gadgets were invented, he was paying a high compliment to this principle.

Thousands of years ago the Buddha said it this way: Everything we are arises with our thoughts. Here is one reason this idea is so powerful and useful: You don't need any outside help to change your thoughts. You can change a word or a thought instantly, and you can do it any time you want. Knowing these simple truths gives you a tremendous power that comes completely from within.

Many thoughts come into your mind completely unbidden. That is one way your mind works; it just pumps out thought after thought without your doing anything at all, much as your heart beats without having to remind it every second. You don't have direct control over what thoughts pop into your mind unbidden, but you always have complete control over what thoughts you consciously insert into your

thought stream. That is why the principle “as you think, so you are” has such extraordinary power.

For example, you might find yourself thinking spontaneously and unconsciously a thought you don’t want to think anymore. Your mind might be pumping out thoughts like “I’m afraid of public speaking” and “People will laugh at me if I make a mistake speaking in public.” Suddenly you decide to empower yourself by changing the direction of the thought stream. You ~~un~~-consciously insert a new word or two: “I now *enjoy* speaking in public.” The old negative thoughts might continue to pop up from time to time, but you have now made a fundamental alteration in the program that’s been running your mind—with one single thought! After some practice inserting positive thoughts about public speaking into your thought stream, you find that you are speaking in public with more ease and fun.

### **A Personal Example**

I had a lot of unpleasant dental experiences when I was a child. The dentist I went to was an angry, red-faced man who seemed to hate his job. I lived in a tiny town in the swamplands of central Florida, so there were few if any other choices. As a young adult I still dreaded going to the dentist, even though I lived in California, and developed a reputation at the dentist’s office ~~in~~for canceling appointments. As I was catching on to the power of thoughts to change lives, I decided to try an experiment on myself. The thought that had been running my experience was “I hate going to the dentist.” I changed the key word and began to cycle the following thought through my mind consciously: “I enjoy going to the dentist.” Not long afterwards a remarkable thing happened. One of the other doctoral students in the Stanford Counseling Psychology program told me about the dentist she went to. She said he was incredibly gentle and kind, and for the first time in her life she was actually enjoying going to the dentist. His name was Dr. Stout (and if he’s still practicing in Palo Alto I send him many thanks and highest recommendations.) I made an appointment with him and emerged an hour later with sparkling, clean teeth and a ~~un~~-completely different feeling about dentists. Somehow by changing a thought I’d attracted a new quality of dentist into my life, resulting in a new perspective on my experience.

### **An Experiment For You In The Transformational Power Of A Single Word**

To feel the power of what we’re discussing, try an experiment that thousands of people in my seminars have benefited from. This is

just an experiment, so don't worry about whether in real life you have positive or negative feelings about dentists.

#### Your Instructions

Think the following thought several times in your mind: I *have* to go to the dentist. Repeat it a few times, accenting the word *have*.

Linguists say that the word *have* in this context implies a sense of burden. Psycholinguists tell us that when we use *have* in this context, we disempower ourselves by implying that we're merely the victims of what we do. Whether or not you agree with these experts, go ahead and experiment with changing the key thought in the following way:

Begin repeating the original sentence, "I *have* to go to the dentist," in your mind, then quietly change the sentence to "I *plan* to go to the dentist." Repeat the new sentence a number of times, noticing whether you feel a subtle difference in your mind and body. "Plan" is a more positive thought than "have," and it carries less of a sense of burden.

Now, make another change to the sentence. Begin by repeating the original thought, "I *have* to go to the dentist." This time, change the thought to "I *choose* to go to the dentist." Think it over and over, accenting the word *choose*. Notice differences in your mind and body as you claim this more empowering thought.

Now go to a very positive thought about the same subject. Try out the following sentence in your mind: "I *appreciate* the benefits of dentistry." Say it a few times quietly in your mind.

See if you notice the subtle difference in your mind and body when you contrast "I *have* to go to the dentist" with "I *appreciate* the benefits of dentistry."

#### Going Forward

You can apply what you've learned to any thought of your own selection. Take a moment now to think of a negative or limiting thought you've noticed in your life. Here are some that people have mentioned:

- I'm afraid of public speaking.
- I can't ever find the time to exercise.
- I can't seem to lose weight.
- I don't like parties.
- It's hard to meet interesting men/women.

Pick a negative or limiting thought from your own life and express it in one sentence. Say it quietly in your mind a few times, noticing how it feels in your mind and body.

Now choose a positive, empowering thought about the same issue. For example, if you've been saying "I'm afraid of public speaking," make up a sentence like "I enjoy speaking in public." If that feels like too much of a jump, you could say, "I'd like to learn how to enjoy speaking in public." The exact sentence you use is up to you, just as long as it has a positive quality.

Now, quietly in your mind, repeat your negative, limiting thought several times. Then, just as quietly, replace it with your positive, empowering one. Repeat the new thought over and over, letting it become more and more subtle and effortless.

Going forward over the next days and weeks, do your best to spot as many negative or limiting thoughts as you possibly can. When you identify them, introduce a new positive affirmation into your thought stream. Just drop in this empowering way of thinking effortlessly, as if it's always been there.

Gradually, with time and practice, your thoughts naturally begin to gravitate in a more empowering and positive direction. In the beginning, though, all you need to remember is to take it one thought at a time. Change one, and before you know it, you'll see positive results in the outer circumstances of your life.