

Rational Thinking

The Pillars of Irrationality

1. Leaping to a decision.

Much irrationality results from simple laziness. “Jumping to a Conclusion” without taking the time to think things through. On the other hand, we all know people who analyse to excess.

When the cost of additional analysis exceeds the expected loss that may be avoided by such analysis (or the expected gain to be achieved thereby), it is time to stop.

2. Inadequate brain cache.

A human can hold only a small number of ideas in his mind at one time..... When faced with a complex decision, a decision maker must use at least elementary principles of decision theory if he is to arrive at an optimal result. Even the simple method outlined by Benjamin Franklin — writing down pros and cons in two columns on a sheet of paper — can greatly increase the probability of reaching a rational decision. More advanced techniques can be used to advantage in complex cases.

3. Self-deception.

This well-known pillar of irrationality can be explained by reference to the principle of cognitive dissonance — the mental conflict that occurs when cherished beliefs or assumptions are contradicted by new evidence. The tension aroused by this conflict is eased by various defensive mechanisms: denial, rejection, avoidance, and so forth.

Note: The Pillars of Irrationality were suggested by a reading of Stuart Sutherland’s book *Irrationality: Why We Don’t Think Straight* (Rutgers University Press, 1995). Sutherland, a Professor of Psychology at the University of Sussex, reviews the mechanisms of irrationality in the light of recent psychological research.

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On Self-Control

By Hank Robb. Abridged and edited by Henry Steinberger.

'Self-control' is:

1. what you build up, develop, create, learn by controlling your behaviour repeatedly – regard self-control as a skill;
2. NOT a THING you have [or don't have] that lets you control your behaviour [or not].

When someone says: 'I have no self-control over my drinking,' or whatever, I can ask: 'Are you well practiced at resisting urges or opportunities to use.'

The answer is 'no'. This person is well practiced in giving in to those urges and opportunities.

Self-control over urges and opportunities is like self-control over bicycles and roller skates — you get it by practicing. The reason individuals, correctly, feel they don't have it is because they haven't been practicing that which gives it to them. In this case, the SKILL not well practiced is resisting urges and opportunities to use.

That is why those who do practice resisting urges [self-control], after a while, report that it becomes easier and easier to continue. They have been exercising and building their self-control and now have begun to show a fair bit of this skill.

In everyday language, thinking you must first have self-control before you acquire a change in your behaviour is 'putting the cart before the horse.' Self-control comes from making the change in your behaviour.

Self-control may also involve other strategies. We might add that self-control may involve learning new strategies to bridge the difficult initial learning period.

In one famous study, children were left with a candy bar and told that if they didn't eat it they would get two candy bars. The children who resisted the temptation while alone were secretly observed and found to use verbal self-reminders and distracting activities.

Children who didn't resist were later able to do so after being taught strategies for better self-control. We have a toolbox of such techniques, but they all require using them.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness: *State of being present in the here and now; being in the moment, being in your body; not being on 'autopilot.'*

Mindfulness means owning each moment- good, bad, or ugly. Being grounded is a basic step in the state of being mindful.

Mindfulness contributes to a richer, fuller life because you are noticing all the things around you (e.g., not eating an entire meal without tasting it.)

Mindfulness can help us be calmer, but not necessarily. To be mindful you have to put aside your worries about the future and regrets about the past (at least temporarily). This can be really liberating since much of what upsets us is in other time periods than the present.

Being mindful contributes to greater effectiveness in the here and now. If you get all of the worries and regrets out of your mind, it is easier to focus on the things you want to do in the present.

What things are important in mindfulness?

- ✳ Observe with all senses
- ✳ Notice without getting caught up in the activity
- ✳ Participate fully without getting pulled back into worrying
- ✳ One-mindfully (do one thing at a time)
- ✳ Be non-reactive- notice where your mind goes, then pull it back- don't be upset if your attempts at mindfulness aren't perfect
- ✳ Non-judging- notice your experiences without judging them as positive or negative
- ✳ Describe- put verbal labels on your experience

Parts of your mind: Emotional mind, Rational mind, Wise mind

Mindfulness allows you to harness the power of both emotional and rational parts together (wise mind)

Wise mind = not being blinded by emotionality and not being so rational that you ignore your feelings!

Rational and Irrational Beliefs

Maxie Maultsby and Albert Ellis list five basic principles against which an idea [or a program incorporating a set of ideas] can be judged as rational or irrational, reasonable or unreasonable.

Here is the formula:

- ✳ If I believe this thought to be true, will it help me remain sober, safe, and alive?
- ✳ Is this thought objectively true, and upon what evidence can I form this opinion?
- ✳ Is this thought producing feelings I want to have?
- ✳ Is this thought helping me reach a chosen goal?
- ✳ Is this thought likely to minimize conflict with others?'¹

The Notorious Five

'There are five irrational beliefs that many of us hold and that we can learn to unlearn them. The notorious five are:

1. **Musterbation** (shoulding, demandingness). I must succeed and obtain approval.
2. **Awfulizing**. I lapsed two weeks ago. Isn't that just awful? [No.]
3. **Low Frustration Tolerance**. I can't quit smoking; it would be too hard for me. [Cancer is even harder.]
4. **Rating and Blaming**. I'm worthless because I made a mistake, or, the world's a rotten place to live. [Know a better one?]
5. **Overgeneralizing** – Always or Never attitudes. AA is good for everybody; it worked for me; or, AA is a lousy outfit; I tried it and it didn't work for me.' ²

What are Rational Beliefs?

'Rational beliefs represent reasonable, objective, flexible, and constructive conclusions or inferences about reality that support survival, happiness, and healthy result; they:

1. Promote productivity and creativity;
2. Support positive relationships;
3. Prompt accountability without unnecessary blame and condemnation;
4. Encourage acceptance and tolerance;
5. Strengthen persistence and self-discipline;
6. Serve as a platform for conditions that propel personal growth;
7. Correlate with healthy risk-taking initiatives;
8. Link to a sense of emotional well-being and positive mental health;
9. Lead to a realistic sense of perspective;
10. Further the empowerment of others;
11. Stimulate an openness to experience and an experimental outlook;
12. Direct our efforts along ethical pathways.

What's the Concern?

Harmful irrational beliefs cloud your consciousness with distortions, misconceptions, overgeneralizations, and oversimplifications....

They limit and narrow your outlook such that you repeat mistakes. Some forms put temporary escape of tension over long-term goals and benefits. We find core irrational beliefs present in destructive...conditions such as impulsiveness, arrogance, defeatism, condemnation, depression, anxiety, hostility, insecurity, addictions, procrastination, prejudice, envy, compulsions, and obsessions.'³

1 *"From Addiction, Change, and Choice"*, by Vince Fox, Chapter 9, p. 111

2 *"When AA Doesn't Work for You, Ellis and Velten: Quoted from "Addiction, Change, and Choice"*, by Vince Fox

3 *"Smart Recovery, A Sensible Primer"*, by Dr. Bill Knaus.

Looking at Root Problems

12 Irrational Ideas That Cause and Sustain Neurosis

Rational therapy holds that certain core irrational ideas, which have been clinically observed, are at the root of most neurotic disturbance. They are:

1. The idea that it is a dire necessity for adults to be loved by significant others for almost everything they do — instead of their concentrating on their own self-respect, on winning approval for practical purposes, and on loving rather than on being loved.
2. The idea that certain acts are awful or wicked, and that people who perform such acts should be severely damned — instead of the idea that certain acts are self-defeating or antisocial, and that people who perform such acts are behaving stupidly, ignorantly, or neurotically, and would be better helped to change. People's poor behaviours do not make them rotten individuals.
3. The idea that it is horrible when things are not the way we like them to be — instead of the idea that it is too bad, that we would better try to change or control bad conditions so that they become more satisfactory, and, if that is not possible, we had better temporarily accept and gracefully lump their existence.
4. The idea that human misery is invariably externally caused and is forced on us by outside people and events — instead of the idea that neurosis is largely caused by the view that we take of unfortunate conditions.
5. The idea that if something is or may be dangerous or fearsome we should be terribly upset and endlessly obsess about it — instead of the idea that one would better frankly face it and render it non-dangerous and, when that is not possible, accept the inevitable.
6. The idea that it is easier to avoid than to face life difficulties and self-responsibilities — instead of the idea that the so-called easy way is usually much harder in the long run.
7. The idea that we absolutely need something other or stronger or greater than yourself on which to rely — instead of the idea that it is better to take the risks of thinking and acting less dependently.
8. The idea that we should be thoroughly competent, intelligent, and achieving in all possible respects — instead of the idea that we would better do rather than always need to do well and accept ourselves as a quite imperfect creature, who has general human limitations and specific fallibilities.
9. The idea that because something once strongly affected our life, it should indefinitely affect it — instead of the idea that we can learn from our past experiences but not be overly-attached to or prejudiced by them.
10. The idea that we must have certain and perfect control over things — instead of the idea that the world is full of probability and chance and that we can still enjoy life despite this.

11. The idea that human happiness can be achieved by inertia and inaction — instead of the idea that we tend to be happiest when we are vitally absorbed in creative pursuits, or when we are devoting ourselves to people or projects outside ourselves.

12. The idea that we have virtually no control over our emotions and that we cannot help feeling disturbed about things — instead of the idea that we have real control over our destructive emotions if we choose to work at changing the masturbatory hypotheses which we often employ to create them.

Fear – The Attachment to Time

All fear is (in essence) a fear of the future. We are afraid of the things that have not yet happened, but which if they did might bring us pain, suffering or some other discomfort – or stand in the way of some future contentment. And we are afraid that circumstances that are already causing us displeasure may continue in the future.

We may fear losing our jobs and the resulting drop in living standards. We may fear failure for the disapproval it might bring. We may fear having nothing to do because we might get bored. We may fear telling the truth because others may not like us for it. We fear the unknown for the dangers it may bring. We fear uncertainty, not knowing whether we will find what we are after. Here lies a sad irony.

We want to be happy and at peace with ourselves. Yet the very nature of fear makes us anxious in the present and not at peace. Many of our fears are not so strong that we would label them as fears. They may be just concerns, little niggles we have about how things may turn out. They may not even be conscious concerns – in many cases they surface only in our dreams, in conversation with a friend, or after a couple of drinks. Nevertheless they fill our minds with thoughts.

This is the voice within our heads that comments, often critically, on everything we do. It thinks, “I did that well, people will approve of me”, or “If only I had said it differently, she would not have got upset”. It is the voice that speculates on the future, “Should I make that telephone call...what if...?” It wonders what other people are thinking and how they will react.

It is the voice of fear, the voice of the ego-mind – the part of us that believes that only through what happens to us in the world around can we be at peace within. But filling our minds with worry over what people might or might not think is not the most constructive use we can make of our imagination.

This internal dialogue keeps us trapped in time – it dwells on the past or the future. As long as our attention is in the past or future, we are not experiencing things as they are, we are seeing them through the judgements of the past and our fears for the future. At times we can be so caught up in our self-talk that we do not even notice the present. We ignore what is going on around us, do not really hear what people are saying, do not appreciate how we really feel. So engrossed are we in our concerns that we never seem to pause to let things be. We have lost the present moment – lost the NOW.

This moment is all that exists. This fleeting instant is the only reality. The past is gone forever. The future is not yet born.

Your body is in the NOW. But if you’re like most people, your mind is in the past or in the future. You grieve or glory over events of long ago. You harbour resentments and guilt and shame – hangovers from the past. You think of what you should have said or might have been. You fear and fantasise over the future, you worry about every moment of wasted time. You worry about death, not having enough time to achieve your ambitions, the end of your ego. All of which cuts you off from the present like a dark screen.

If you bring the mind from miles away to the activity of the moment, if you abate the clatter in your head to focus on the physical reality surrounding your body, and the sensations from within it, you’ll

gradually experience a surprising sense of well-being. Indeed, tuning in to the NOW is one gateway to perceiving eternity. The philosopher Wittgenstein observed: "If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but timelessness, the eternal life belongs to those who live in the present". By experiencing a moment for itself, you stop time. Time is defined as the interval between two events. When you are in the NOW there is no interval, only the event alone.

The concept of the NOW has great validity when dealing with emotions and the senses. NOW is a point at which you are in touch with the ongoing process. Past and future take their bearings continuously from the present and must be related to it. Without reference to the present they become meaningless.

Family Systems

“We don’t make personal changes in a vacuum.”

The human being is a social creature. We have families, we have significant others, we have friends, colleagues, acquaintances. Once we have initiated and begun to make changes in ourselves it will have effect on the “others” in our lives. These “others” do, and will in turn, have effect on us.

Change will almost invariably create anxiety to some degree. How best to Help, how best to minimize conflict and anxiety, how best to keep together the “Good” in our relationships without allow the natural “Anxiety of Change” from pulling it apart?

This is a complex issue. This essay is intended only to bring to light a few of the factors involved and prompt further study and effort.

Note: What follows contains edited excerpts from “Chronic Anxiety and Defining A Self – An Introduction to Family System Theory”, by Michael E. Kerr, published in “The Atlantic Monthly” September 1988.

Dr. Murray Bowen, a professor of Psychiatry at Georgetown University Medical Centre, seeing that the family is not a collection of autonomous entities but rather an interlocked emotional unit unto itself developed the concept and perspective of a “Family Systems”.

One aspect that led to this conclusion of emotional interdependence and the family as a unit, was the observation that family members frequently function in “reciprocal relationships” . One example is where one member will act “strong” in the face of another’s ‘weakness”. This process was frequently played out with one member become Anxious about what he or she perceived as a problem or potential problem in another.

This anxiety then would tend to exaggerate the demeanour, appearance and attitude of the anxious one and further escalate “Problem – Anxiety- Caretaker” cycle. This then results in a greater “caretaker” role which further enhances the ‘weakness” of the other. Each person becomes an emotional prisoner of the other while giving a pseudo sense of togetherness.

Because of this and a number of other reciprocal relationship systems, it is suggested that it is important when making personal changes to Also focus attention and have strategies in place to address the family unit as well. When one person makes a “Change” in this system it will have effects on the other persons role. Those effects may be subtle or intense. This resulting change will create “stresses” in the other. If these stresses are not addressed in healthy ways the family unit may break down or the personal change may not be successful.

The Goal derived from the Family Systems Theory is to gain differentiation or individuality while maintaining togetherness. Differentiation is the evolutionary desire in each person to be an individual – to grow to be an emotionally separate person with the ability to think, feel, and act for himself. Togetherness is also an equally strong “force” to keep families emotionally connected and operating in “concert” with one another for the evolutionary advantage that provides.

It is the balance of these two major drives and the traps that are inherent that will be further addressed here... the capability to be an individual in a group.

At one end of the spectrum, are peopling that live in a feeling world. Some however may be so sensitized that they become numb. In general, people at this level are so responsive to others opinions and what others want from them that their functioning is almost totally governed by their emotional reactions to the environment.

At the other end, a person is directed by goals and principals. While sure of his beliefs and convictions, he is not dogmatic or fixed in his thinking. Capable of hearing and evaluating the viewpoints of others, he can discard old beliefs in favour of new ones, he can listen without reacting and communicate without antagonizing others. He is secure and his functioning is not affected by praise or criticism.

He can respect the identity of another without becoming critical or emotionally involved in trying to modify that person's life course. Able to assume total responsibility for himself and sure of his responsibility to others, he does not become overly responsible for others. He is realistically aware of his dependence on others and is free to enjoy relationships. He does not have a "need" for others that impairs functioning and others do not feel used by him. Tolerant and respectful of differences, he is not prone to engage in polarized debates. He is realistic in his assessment of himself and others and is not preoccupied with his place in the hierarchy. His expectations are also realistic. He tolerates Intense feelings well and does not automatically act to alleviate them.

Most people wish to be individuals but are not willing to give up togetherness to achieve more individuality. People frequently are willing only to be individuals only to the extent that the relationship system permits and approves. There is a misunderstanding that giving up togetherness does not mean giving up emotional closeness . It does mean, however, that one becomes less dependent on the support and acceptance of others.

Some degree of rejection predictably occurs when a person embarks on a path of change. The rejection, in whatever form it takes, is designed to restore the balance.

To navigate through this emotional quagmire requires a well thought-out direction and tolerance of intense feelings that might incline one to give up. These intense feelings are fed by the "fear of what might be". Here arises the Trap. When people become more anxious, the pressure for togetherness increases. During high anxiety periods human beings strive for oneness through efforts to think and act alike.

It is ironic that this pressure increases the likelihood that there will be fragmentation and further anxiety created by the desire to be an individual. So, a greater need for togetherness is experienced with a simultaneous need for greater distance and emotional insulation. The less tolerant they are and more irritated by the differences. They are less able to permit one another to be what they are. Feelings of overloaded, overwhelmed, and isolated increase...along with feelings that are accompanied by the wish to have the responsibility removed. (i.e., addictive behaviour or separation)

With these aversive possibilities people become more intent on getting others to do their way. Frustration when others resist often lead to disappointment and anger, further increasing the likelihood of giving up or withdrawing.

Efforts to get others to change can escalate problems of feeling criticized, defensiveness, and counterattacks. The flames are fanned when each blames the other. Projection of one's feelings AND

attitudes onto another may also be used to relieve anxiety by allowing one to view another as the problem. Contact is often kept brief and superficial to reduce discomfort. Dealing in this way, however, creates an emotional investment in the success of the new relationship that they easily lose perspective and recreate problems they thought they had escaped.

In addition by denying the anxiety in an attempt to manage, it may raise the anxiety in the other. So one may become more comfortable with oneself but increase the level of anxiety in the other. Such an outcome is a mixed blessing. Efforts at stress management may also include outside or group activities. These efforts are useful Adjuncts, but the problem with using a group in this way is that improvements in functioning may depend on maintaining the group relationship. Also Efforts to pursue symptom relief may overlook the cause. This process is automatic and often begins when a person feels rejected or ignored (real or imagined).

So, how to break this natural cycle?

When a family member can become more aware of his own part in whatever problems exist, becoming willing to assume responsibility for that part, and become more able to act on that basis, improvements in his functioning will not be contingent on someone else's "absorbing" his share of the family's immaturity. To diligently remove one's personal "demandingness" even when the "problem" is not yours. To recognize the desire for emotional closeness and plan and perform acts toward that goal, yet maintaining separate and individual responsibilities. To accept others for who and where they are yet support and encourage change.

Recognize this process may contain events of intense emotion and reactivity. This allows for a calm, accepting, responsible individual to have a gradual calming effect on the other. People are keenly aware or sensitive to the emotional states of others and make automatic adjustments in response.

It is a change in functioning that does not lead to the seesaw effect.

Common Self-Defeating Attitudes and Fears

1. "It would be terrible to be rejected, abandoned, or alone. I must have love and approval before I can feel good about myself."
2. "If someone criticizes me, it means there's something wrong with me."
3. "I must always please people and live up to everyone's expectations."
4. "I am basically defective and inferior to other people."
5. "Other people are to blame for my problems."
6. "The world should always meet my expectations."
7. "Other people should always meet my expectations."
8. "If I worry or feel bad about a situation, it will somehow make things better. It's not really safe to feel happy and optimistic."
9. "I'm hopeless and bound to feel depressed forever because the problems in my life are impossible to solve."
10. "I must always be perfect." There are several kinds of perfectionism that can make you unhappy.

Perfectionism Impacts

Moralistic perfectionism: "I must not forgive myself if I have fallen short of any goal or personal standard."

Performance perfectionism: "To be a worthwhile person. I must be a great success at everything I do."

Identity perfectionism: "People will never accept me as a flawed and vulnerable human being."

Emotional perfectionism: "I must always try to be happy. I must control my negative emotions and never feel anxious or depressed."

Romantic perfectionism: "People who love each other should never fight or feel angry with each other."

Relationship perfectionism: "People who love each other should never fight or feel angry with each other."

Sexual perfectionism: Men may believe "I should always have full and sustained erections. It's shameful and unmanly if I have an episode of impotence or cum too quickly." Women may believe "I should always achieve orgasm or multiple orgasms."

Appearance perfectionism: "I look ugly because I'm slightly overweight (or have heavy thighs or a facial blemish)."

Core Beliefs – 12 Irrational Ideas

Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy (REBT) holds that certain core irrational ideas, which have been clinically observed, are at the root of most emotional disturbance. They are:

1. The idea that it is a dire necessity for adults to be loved by significant others for almost everything they do — instead of concentrating on their own self-respect, on winning approval for practical purposes, and on loving rather than on being loved.
2. The idea that certain acts are awful or wicked, and that people who perform such acts should be severely damned — instead of the idea that certain acts are self-defeating or antisocial, and that people who perform such acts are behaving stupidly, ignorantly, or neurotically, and would be better helped to change. People's poor behaviours do not make them rotten individuals.
3. The idea that it is horrible when things are not the way we like them to be — instead of the idea that it is too bad, that we would better try to change or control bad conditions so that they become more satisfactory, and, if that is not possible, we had better temporarily accept and gracefully lump their existence.
4. The idea that human misery is invariably externally caused and is forced on us by outside people and events — instead of the idea that neurosis is largely caused by the view that we take of unfortunate conditions.
5. The idea that if something is or may be dangerous or fearsome we should be terribly upset and endlessly obsess about it — instead of the idea that one would better frankly face it and render it non-dangerous and, when that is not possible, accept the inevitable.
6. The idea that it is easier to avoid than to face life's difficulties and self-responsibilities — instead of the idea that the so-called easy way is usually much harder in the long run.
7. The idea that we absolutely need something other or stronger or greater than ourselves on which to rely — instead of the idea that it is better to take the risks of thinking and acting less dependently.
8. The idea that we should be thoroughly competent, intelligent, and achieving in all possible respects — instead of the idea that we would better do, rather than always need to do well and accept ourselves as quite imperfect creatures, who have general human limitations and specific fallibilities.
9. The idea that because something once strongly affected our life, it should indefinitely affect it — instead of the idea that we can learn from our past experiences but not be overly-attached to or prejudiced by them.
10. The idea that we must have certain and perfect control over things — instead of the idea that the world is full of probability and chance and that we can still enjoy life despite this.
11. The idea that human happiness can be achieved by inertia and inaction — instead of the idea that we tend to be happiest when we are vitally absorbed in creative pursuits, or when we are devoting ourselves to people or projects outside ourselves.
12. The idea that we have virtually no control over our emotions and that we cannot help feeling disturbed about things — instead of the idea that we have real control over our destructive emotions if we choose to work at changing the unhelpful core beliefs which we often employ to create them.

Cognitive Distortions

1. All or nothing – thinking

You see things in black and white categories. If a situation falls short of perfect, you see it as a total failure. When a young woman on a diet ate a spoonful of ice cream, she told herself, 'I've blown my diet completely.' This thought upset her so much that she gobbled down an entire quart of ice cream!

2. Overgeneralization

You see a single negative event, such as a romantic rejection or a career reversal as a never-ending pattern of defeat by using words such as 'always' or "never" when you think about it. A depressed salesman became terribly upset when he noticed bird dung on the windshield of his car. He told himself, 'Just my luck! Birds are always crapping on my car!'

3. Mental filter

You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively, so that your vision of all of reality becomes darkened, like the drop of ink that discolours a beaker of water. Example: You receive many positive comments about your presentation to a group of associates at work, but one of them says something mildly critical. You obsess about his reaction for days and ignore all the positive feedback.

4. Discounting the positive

You reject positive experiences by insisting they 'don't count.' If you do a good job, you may tell yourself that it wasn't good enough or that anyone could have done as well. Discounting the positive takes the joy out of life and makes you feel inadequate and unrewarded.

5. Jumping to conclusions

You interpret things negatively when there are no facts to support your conclusion. Mind reading: Without checking it out, you arbitrarily conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you. Fortune telling: You predict that things will turn out badly. Before a test you may tell yourself, 'I'm really going to blow it. What if I flunk?' If you're depressed you may tell yourself, 'I'll never get better.'

6. Magnification

You exaggerate the importance of your problems and shortcomings, or you minimize the importance of your desirable qualities. This is also called the 'binocular trick.'

7. Emotional reasoning

You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are: 'I feel terrified about going on airplanes. It must be very dangerous to fly.' Or 'I feel guilty. I must be a rotten person.' Or 'I feel angry. This proves I'm being treated unfairly.' Or 'I feel so inferior. This means I'm a second-rate person.' Or 'I feel hopeless. I must really be hopeless.'

8. "Should statements"

You tell yourself that things should be the way you hoped or expected them to be. After playing a difficult piece on the piano, a gifted pianist told herself, 'I shouldn't have made so many mistakes.' This made her feel so disgusted that she quit practicing for several days. 'Musts,' 'oughts' and 'have to's' are similar offenders.

'Should statements' that are directed against yourself lead to guilt and frustration. Should statements that are directed against other people or the world in general lead to anger and frustration: 'He shouldn't be so stubborn and argumentative' Many people try to motivate themselves with should and shouldn't, as if they were delinquents who had to be punished before they could be expected to do anything. 'I shouldn't eat that doughnut.' This usually doesn't work because all these shoulds and musts make you feel rebellious and you get the urge to do just the opposite. Dr. Albert Ellis has called this 'musterbation.' I call it the 'shouldy' approach to life.

9. Labelling

Labelling is an extreme form of all-or-nothing thinking. Instead of saying 'I made a mistake.' you attach a negative label to yourself: 'I'm a loser.' You might also label yourself 'a fool' or 'a failure' or 'a jerk.'

Labelling is quite irrational because you are not the same as what you do. Human beings exist. but 'fools,' 'losers,' and 'jerks' do not. These labels are useless abstractions that lead to anger, anxiety, frustration, and low self- esteem.

You may also label others. When someone does something that rubs you the wrong way, you may tell yourself: 'He's an S.O.B Then you feel that the problem is with that person's 'character' or 'essence' instead of with their thinking or behaviour. You see them as totally bad. This makes you feel hostile and hopeless about improving things and leaves little room for constructive communication.

10. Personalization and blame

Personalization occurs when you hold yourself personally responsible for an event that isn't entirely under your control. When a woman received a note that her child was having difficulties at school, she told herself, 'this shows what a bad mother I am,' instead of trying to pinpoint the cause of the problem so that she could be helpful to her child.

When another woman's husband beat her, she told herself, 'if only I were better in bed, he wouldn't beat me.' Personalization leads to guilt, shame, and feelings of inadequacy. Some people do the opposite. They blame other people or their circumstances for their problems, and they overlook ways that they might be contributing to the problem: 'The reason my marriage is so lousy is because my spouse is totally unreasonable.' Blame usually doesn't work very well because other people will resent being a scapegoat and they will just toss the blame right back in your lap. It's like the game of hot potato – no one wants to get stuck with it.