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📖 Builder Language Cheat Sheet

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Builder Language Cheat Sheet

Words matter. The language you use to describe yourself shapes how you think, act, and show up. This cheat sheet helps you catch shame-based language and replace it with builder language.

The Core Principle

Shame language describes you as broken, fixed, or defined by your past.

Builder language describes you as capable, evolving, and defined by what you're creating.

Quick Reference: Shame → Builder

❌ Shame Language	✅ Builder Language
I'm just an addict	I'm a person in long-term recovery
I'm broken	I'm rebuilding
I'm a screw-up	I'm learning and adapting
I always fail	I've learned from setbacks and I keep going
I can't be trusted	I'm learning to trust myself again
I'm a burden	I'm building my independence

❌ Shame Language	✅ Builder Language
I'm damaged goods	I'm a work in progress
I ruin everything	I'm creating something new
I'm worthless	I have value and skills to offer
I'm stuck	I'm in transition
I'm a mess	I'm figuring it out
I don't know what I'm doing	I'm learning as I go
I'm behind everyone else	I'm on my own timeline
I'm too old/young to start	I'm starting now
I'm not smart enough	I'm resourceful and I figure things out

Expanded Translations

Identity & Self-Concept

❌ **"I'm an ex-con"**

✅ "I've been incarcerated and I'm building a new life"

✅ "I'm a cycle-breaker"

❌ **"I'm a recovering [addict/alcoholic]"** (when it's your only identifier)

✅ "I'm in recovery and I'm also [builder/entrepreneur/parent/creator]"

❌ **"I'm a dropout"**

✅ "I took a non-traditional path"

✅ "I'm building skills outside the classroom"

❌ **"I'm damaged from trauma"**

✅ "I've survived trauma and I'm healing while I build"

✅ "My past made me resilient"

❌ **"I'm nobody"**

✅ "I'm someone who's just getting started"

✅ "I'm someone building something that matters"

Capability & Skills

❌ **"I can't do this"**

✅ "I haven't figured this out *yet*"

✅ "I'm learning how to do this"

❌ **"I'm bad with money"**

✅ "I'm learning financial skills"

✅ "I'm building better money habits"

❌ **"I have no skills"**

✅ "I have survival skills, and I'm learning business skills"

✅ "I'm resourceful as hell - I just haven't applied it to business yet"

❌ **"I don't know anything about business"**

✅ "I'm new to business, but I'm a fast learner"

✅ "I'm building my business knowledge step by step"

❌ **"I'm not creative"**

✅ "I solve problems in practical ways"

✅ "I'm discovering my creative strengths"

Progress & Setbacks

❌ **"I failed again"**

✅ "I learned what doesn't work"

✅ "That was a test - now I adjust and try again"

❌ **"I quit everything"**

✅ "I've walked away from things that weren't right, and I'm learning to commit to things that are"

❌ **"I relapsed"**

✅ "I had a slip, and I'm back on track"

✅ "I'm human, and I'm still committed to my recovery"

❌ **"I wasted so much time"**

✅ "I'm starting from where I am"

✅ "Every experience taught me something"

❌ **"I'm so far behind"**

✅ "I'm exactly where I need to be to start"

✅ "I'm on my own timeline"

Action & Agency

❌ **"I need someone to save me"**

✅ "I'm building my own way out"

✅ "I'm seeking support while I build"

❌ **"I have no choice"**

✅ "My options are limited right now, but I'm creating new ones"

✅ "I'm making the best choice I can with what I have"

❌ **"I'll try"**

✅ "I'll do it" or "I'll figure it out"

✅ "I'm committed to this"

❌ **"I hope it works out"**

✅ "I'm making this work"

✅ "I'm testing and adjusting until it works"

❌ **"I'm just surviving"**

✅ "I'm surviving *and* building"

✅ "I'm in survival mode right now, but I'm working toward thriving"

Builder Phrases to Practice

Daily Affirmations

- "I am a builder"

- "I'm resourceful and resilient"

- "I figure things out"

- "I get back up"

- "I'm creating something that matters"

- "I'm exactly where I need to be"

- "I'm breaking cycles"

- "I'm building legacy"

In Conversation

When introducing yourself:

- "I'm building [business/project]"

- "I'm a cycle-breaker working on [goal]"

- "I'm an entrepreneur in the making"

When someone asks about your past:

- "I've had a non-traditional journey, and now I'm building [X]"

- "I've been through some things, and it made me who I am today"

- "My past taught me resilience - now I'm applying that to business"

When you're struggling:

- "This is hard, *and* I'm figuring it out" (not "but")

- "I haven't solved this yet"

- "I'm in the messy middle"

- "I'm building the plane while I fly it"

When you succeed:

- "I made this happen"

- "I figured it out"

- "This is what I built"

- "I'm proud of this"

Language Traps to Watch For

1. Self-Deprecating Humor

Trap: "Haha, I'm such a disaster"

Reframe: Humor is great, but watch how often you make yourself the joke

2. Minimizing Your Wins

Trap: "It's not a big deal" / "Anyone could do this"

Reframe: "I worked hard for this" / "I'm proud of this step"

3. Apologizing for Existing

Trap: "Sorry to bother you" / "Sorry for taking up space"

Reframe: "Thanks for your time" / "I appreciate your help"

4. Letting Others Define You

Trap: Accepting labels others put on you

Reframe: "That's not how I see myself" / "I'm more than that label"

5. Catastrophizing

Trap: "This always happens to me" / "Nothing ever works out"

Reframe: "This is one setback" / "I've figured things out before, I'll figure this out too"

The "AND" vs. "BUT" Principle

"But" erases everything before it:

❌ "I want to start a business, *but* I don't have money"

"And" holds complexity:

✅ "I want to start a business, *and* I'm figuring out how to start with no money"

✅ "This is hard, *and* I'm doing it anyway"

✅ "I'm scared, *and* I'm taking action"

Practice Exercise

Week 1: Catch Yourself

Notice when shame language comes up. Just notice - no judgment.

Week 2: Pause & Reframe

When you catch shame language, pause and say the builder version out loud.

Week 3: Default to Builder

Start using builder language as your first choice, not the reframe.

Week 4: Teach Others

Share builder language with someone else. Teaching it makes it stick.

Your Personal Language Inventory

Shame words I use most often:

1.

2.

3.

Builder words I'm claiming:

1.

2.

3.

One phrase I'm committing to say daily:

Remember

You don't have to believe the builder language at first. **Say it anyway.**

Your brain is learning a new language. Give it time.

The words you use today shape the person you become tomorrow.

You're not broken. You're a builder.