



Book Stop Self-Sabotage

Get Out of Your Own Way to Earn More Money, Improve Your Relationships, and Find the Success You Deserve

Pat Pearson
McGraw-Hill, 2008

Recommendation

Never has the saying “You are your own worst enemy” taken on more meaning than in this analysis of self-sabotage. Clinical psychotherapist Pat Pearson takes a close look at how people prevent themselves from achieving abundant success and happiness. She explains that individuals set “Deserve Levels” for every aspect of their lives. If they try to exceed these self-imposed limits, they become conflicted and often undermine their success with various self-sabotage strategies. Ultimately, if you don’t believe at your very core that you deserve something, you won’t allow yourself to have it. You’ll lose weight just to gain it back, fail to develop an intimate relationship or get fired from your dream job. If you feel you are constantly falling short of getting what you want, *BooksInShort* recommends this book to you. Its systematic advice, self-tests, transforming exercises, concrete action recommendations, self-affirming strategies and real-life examples will help you smash your “internal glass ceiling.”

Take-Aways

- People sabotage themselves when they are conflicted about their goals or feel unworthy of success.
- Your “Deserve Levels” are self-imposed limits that reflect your unconscious and conscious feelings of worth.
- You create Deserve Levels for every aspect of your life, based on your “beliefs, self-esteem, self-confidence and permission from your past.”
- Elevating your Deserve Levels requires awareness, understanding and a desire to change.
- Five “sabotage strategies” can keep you from reaching your goals.
- They are “throwing [success] away, settling for less, resignation, fatal flaw and denial.”
- By changing your ingrained reactions and beliefs, you can achieve new, positive results.
- Create a positive inner dialogue and express your unresolved emotions.
- Avoid “Drama Triangles” in your relationships by participating equally, asking others to reciprocate, stating firmly and clearly what you don’t want to do, and setting boundaries.
- Learn to feel deserving of all life has to offer by loving and nurturing yourself.

Summary

You Deserve It!

Everyone self-sabotages. Some people continually form unhealthy relationships. Still others underperform at work and create problems. Although people don’t deliberately engage in these behaviors, they are thwarting themselves nonetheless. If you are stuck in a self-sabotaging pattern, you can take steps to break free. Start by understanding why you keep yourself from getting what you want most. Become aware of your “Deserve Levels,” which dictate what you think you are worthy of in life. You set them in every area of your existence, including your casual and intimate relationships, your career and your health. Four factors determine your Deserve Levels:

1. **“Beliefs”** – You developed your belief system during childhood. It is a compilation of your experiences and the messages you received from your family, friends, teachers and religious leaders, and from everything you read or watched. You form separate beliefs for the various aspects of your life, including faith,

- career, family, success, health, and so on. Some of your beliefs work to your advantage, but others hold you back and restrict your Deserve Levels. Avoid thoughts like “I have so much that I shouldn’t want more,” “Everyone else deserves it but not me” or “I haven’t earned it.”
2. **“Self-esteem”** – People often consider the words “self-esteem” and “self-confidence” to be interchangeable, but they are actually two different concepts. Self-esteem is “unconditional acknowledgment for your own worth and lovability.” Your self-esteem benefits when you receive love just for being you, a special and unique individual.
 3. **“Self-confidence”** – Self-confidence is “conditional acknowledgment for your performance.” You gain self-confidence when people you love and respect admire you for something you have done, such as play the piano well or hit a home run. You can have high self-esteem and low self-confidence – or vice versa – simultaneously. Either inequity will negatively affect your Deserve Levels.
 4. **“Permission from your past”** – During your childhood, your family members and role models either granted or withheld their “permission for [your] success” through the messages they communicated and the way they behaved. Maybe your mother cautioned you against wanting too much, or your father encouraged you to succeed in one area but discouraged your growth in others. By age five, you had a firmly embedded “permission system” that continues to dictate your adult behavior. Challenge such ingrained thinking and develop an “adult permission system” that will allow you to surpass your self-imposed limits. For example, Brittany is an entrepreneur who found that she could never make more than \$60,000 per year, even though other professionals in her field brought in much more. During therapy, she realized that she was unconsciously afraid to earn more than her father did. When she became aware of this obstacle, she called her father and confirmed that earning more than he did would not affect his love for her. Obtaining his permission enabled her to earn \$150,000 the following year.

“All of us struggle with some wound that separates us from all that we can be, do or have.”

Self-sabotage occurs when you unconsciously enforce your Deserve Levels and thus limit your growth. Remove the roadblocks that keep you from your desired path by recognizing that you are worthy of success. Through awareness, understanding and a desire to change, you can elevate your Deserve Levels and increase your chances for happiness.

“Fear: The Fatal Attraction”

Fear plays a leading role in self-sabotage. When something bad happens to you, you fear that it will happen again. However, the more you worry about it, the more you “make [it] real.” For example, Chris is an actor who dreaded rejection. Whenever he received a callback for an audition, he would become so apprehensive he would drink too much the night before. As a result, his audition performance would be subpar, and he would experience the rejection he feared. Do not give in to your fear. Avoid negative language like “I can’t” or “I’m not good enough.” Instead, use positive phrases, such as “I choose,” “I’m worth it” and “I can handle this.”

“Sabotage Strategies”

Five sabotage strategies prohibit you from getting what you want in your personal and professional life:

1. **“Throwing it away”** – Why are 78% of National Football League (NFL) stars broke, divorced or out of work within two years of retiring from professional football? Most fall victim to the “postachievement” tendency to throw success away. They made more money and attained more notoriety than they expected, and that made them “uncomfortable.” In response, they unconsciously sabotaged themselves. Examples of this “I can get it, but I can’t keep it” sabotage strategy abound. Take Oprah Winfrey’s struggle to remain thin. Every time she loses weight, she puts it back on again. In 1992, when she accepted a Daytime Emmy, she weighed more than 230 pounds. Her very public struggle illustrates people’s instinct to destroy success they don’t believe they deserve. If you don’t feel you are truly worthy of something, you will destroy it once you get it.
2. **“Settling for less”** – In this sabotage strategy, people stop themselves just before they reach their goals. This behavior can be difficult to pinpoint because settling for less can disguise itself as selflessness. However, if you don’t believe you deserve to have everything life offers, you’ll always give up just inches before you reach the finish line. For example, in 1988, Senator Gary Hart was leading the race for the U.S. presidential nomination when a scandal ruined his chances. Hart had goaded the press to “put a tail on” him because he was so sure they could not get photographic evidence of his alleged womanizing. A photographer who did follow Hart took a picture of him on a boat with beautiful blond model Donna Rice on his lap. When the photo hit the media, his chances of being elected president disappeared. Hart’s inner turmoil caused him to sabotage his chance for success. Chronically falling short of your goals is an indicator that you might be a victim of this “preachievement” sabotage strategy.
3. **“Resignation”** – People who use the resignation strategy drop out of the race before the starter pistol goes off. This type of sabotage occurs when your self-talk is so negative and defeating that you give up before you even try. A classic example is failing to initiate a conversation with an attractive stranger because you assume that all relationships end in heartache. However, your Deserve Levels will remain low if you don’t learn how to ask for what you want. When you make a request, assume you will receive a positive response. If you don’t get one, continue asking until you get the desired answer. Be precise and specific in your request. Instead of saying, “Let’s get together sometime,” ask, “Would you like to get together this Friday?” Learning to free yourself from unnecessary guilt is another crucial skill. If you cause someone pain, feeling guilty is appropriate. However, most people feel guilty for problems that are not their fault. Learn to differentiate between the two. Absolve yourself of undeserved guilt.
4. **“The fatal flaw”** – Sometimes people’s lives may seem to be on track, but then they suddenly derail in spite of outward appearances. These individuals may be sabotaging themselves by failing to combat a fatal flaw. Fatal flaws take many forms, such as “perfectionism, procrastination and narcissism.” Perfectionists strive for unattainable goals and feel stress and anxiety as a result. They may become inflexible and even lose the joy of accomplishment. Procrastinators have mastered the art of doing anything and everything except what they need to do to help themselves. And narcissists often allow their deep desire for admiration to guide them toward destructive behaviors. In a famous example, former president Bill Clinton’s narcissism and perfectionism led to his secret affair with Monica Lewinsky. His feelings of self-importance and his need for admiration deluded him into thinking that the rules didn’t apply to him. Yet when his affair was discovered, it shed an unflattering light on his “hidden life.” Other types of fatal flaws include addictions and uncontrolled anger. Examining your behavior for these and other fatal flaws is a crucial first step in stopping this form of sabotage.
5. **“Denial”** – Everyone is in denial about something, be it health, weight, relationships or work. People use denial to avoid thinking about unpleasant matters in their lives or to dodge unwanted emotions. Minimizing issues, rationalizing poor choices or behaviors, blaming others to avoid assuming responsibility or doing nothing are all forms of denial. Denial enables people to evade their problems instead of dealing with them. For instance, actress Winona Ryder was arrested in a high-end store in Beverly Hills for shoplifting more than \$5,000 in merchandise. The press soon revealed that for three years, Ryder had been battling an addiction to painkillers. Such addictions cause people to neglect “personal responsibility” and deny the reality and extent of their problems.

“Deserve Breakthroughs,” “Self-Talk” and “Self-Release”

Self-sabotage is a response to “unconscious conditions set in motion by your beliefs from your past.” When you understand that you can change your ingrained reactions and belief system, you can achieve new, positive results. You will begin to think, “I deserve better.”

“When we face our own fears and practice the techniques of change, we can stop sabotaging our hopes and dreams.”

People constantly engage in ongoing dialogues with themselves, mostly on an unconscious level. Your positive and negative self-talk affects how you feel. Your unconscious mind does not distinguish between “fantasy or fact,” so if you are repeatedly telling yourself negative statements, your unconscious mind will eventually believe them – even if they are untrue. Examples of sabotaging self-talk include thoughts like, “I’ll never get that promotion,” “He would never be interested in me” or “I just can’t lose weight.” By changing your inner dialogue, you can change your reality. Begin by recognizing negative self-talk and forcing yourself to stop. Replace it with positive thoughts.

“Your history is written deeply into your psyche.”

Follow these four steps to create “Deserve Affirmations”:

1. Use the words “I choose,” not “I am.”
2. Truly believe your affirmation as you say it.
3. “Feel good when you say it.”
4. Ensure that your statement has a “positive focus.”

“Far from being a sign of weakness, asking for and receiving support from others is part of being a deserving, strong and self-sufficient person.”

Positive self-talk will set good things in motion, but you must follow it up by addressing your “unresolved feelings.” Many people grow up in families and cultures that expect them to repress negative feelings such as fear, anger, disappointment or sadness. However, suppressed feelings can cause anxiety, depression and even physical symptoms such as fatigue, ulcers or backaches. If you can learn how to express your feelings effectively through self-release, you’ll become emotionally healthy.

“The Drama Triangle”

Good communication builds strong relationships. Unfortunately, the Drama Triangle entangles many people in the roles of “rescuer, victim or persecutor.” Rescuers give too much and sacrifice their own needs in the process. Victims want other people to fix them and take responsibility for their problems. Persecutors are fed-up rescuers. Avoid the Drama Triangle by taking these steps:

- Be an equal partner in your relationships. Don’t expect others to do all the work.
- Ask people to reciprocate.
- Be firm and clear about things you don’t want to do.
- Establish your boundaries and stick to them.

“Life is meant to be full and abundant. There’s enough sunlight, air, hope and love for everyone.”

Finally, learn to love yourself. As simple as this may seem, it is very difficult for people who are used to self-criticism and self-sabotage. Forgive yourself for your mistakes and shortcomings, and give yourself the same love and respect you so willingly give to others.

About the Author

Pat Pearson, M.S.S.W., is a clinical psychotherapist with more than two decades of experience. She is also a motivational speaker and the author of *You Deserve the Best*, *Reclaiming the Fire in Your Heart* and *Party with a Purpose*.
