

WIPE THE SHOULD OFF YOUR SHOES

Go on twitter and you'll find no shortage of articles giving advice on what you SHOULD do to be productive and dominate the universe during the quarantine. Heck, you're currently reading a self-help article of sorts. While it would be awesome to be the best version of yourself right now, it would be a lot better for your accomplishments to come from feelings of desire rather than inadvertently creating feelings of guilt or excessive pressure because of the way you talk to yourself.

It's simple semantics, but the words we use in our own heads can elicit very different emotions or feelings. Our self-talk can also impact whether or not we enjoy an activity and persist when things get challenging. For example, when you last thought about exercising, what words did you use? "I HAVE to exercise this morning" creates the sense of pressure and is extrinsically motivating. "I SHOULD exercise" is also a form of external motivation that makes a person feel guilty if they don't do it. These feelings of pressure and guilt tend to make a behavior less enjoyable and, when these emotions no longer exist, people often stop engaging in the behavior.

Have to= pressure

Should = guilt

Want to = desire

Get to = gratitude

On the other end of the spectrum is intrinsic motivation. When we WANT to do something because we find it enjoyable or we identify with it, the behavior is more likely to stick. Some people also lean into the idea that they GET to exercise and feel fortunate for the opportunity. This can be internally motivating if being grateful is important to them. When people are internally motivated, they are more likely to persist when challenged and put more effort into the behavior, thus increasing the chances they will be successful.

There's nothing wrong with external motivation, we all need it sometimes to get things started or to help us conquer challenges. It's also reality that there are things we *have* to do whether or not we *want* to. However, given everything that's happening right now, I suggest we throw out the word "should" from everyone's dictionary. No one needs to layer feelings of guilt on top of the fear and stress they may be feeling because of the circumstances of the world. No one needs to feel bad because they enjoy a little extra downtime or because they don't have to work as hard as usual. All of our situations are different. We all react differently, physically and emotionally, to changes, challenges, and disruptions. While research can provide guidance into different behaviors and thinking patterns that are helpful, no one's brain is wired the same and there's no one-size-fits-all solution.

Should I spend 10 hours a week watching webinars and reading new articles or should I spend that time with my kids? Should I exercise for an hour in the morning or should I lay in bed and relax because once my day starts it doesn't stop? Should I clean the kitchen at the end of the day or should I reply to the emails I should have responded to earlier? We all have a lot of should to deal with daily, but what you "should" do doesn't exist in a vacuum. There are things you HAVE to do (eat), things you WANT to do (Netflix and chill), and then there's reality, which is a balance of doing what's necessary and making choices about what's important to you. If you're reading this, you're fortunate in that you probably do have choices you get to make. What I believe is the less "shoulds" you tell yourself, the clearer your mind and emotions, allowing you to make decisions that are best for you. Making such decisions will give you a greater sense of control, which in turn will decrease your stress, increase your productivity, and make life a little more enjoyable.

If you're so inclined, before you go to bed tonight make a list of all the things you are thinking of doing tomorrow. Put them each in either a "have to" column or a "want to" column. Circle the ones you are grateful that you GET to do. Star the ones you know you can and will do. Underline the really important things. There's no judgement. There's no should. You make the choice. So go wipe the should off your shoes, maybe put on some real pants, and do what's important to you now. Or don't. Whatever.

Make it Great!
Aimee