

Change learned behavior and increase energy by changing thoughts

By Eric Peper, PhD

Are you full of pep and energy, ready to do more? Or do you feel drained and exhausted? After giving at the office, is there nothing left to give at home? Do you feel as if you are on a treadmill that will never stop, that more things feel draining than energizing?

Feeling chronically drained is often a precursor for illness; conversely, feeling energized enhances productivity and encourages health. An important aspect of staying healthy is that one's daily activities are filled more with activities that contribute to our energy than with tasks and activities that drain our energy. Similarly, Dr. John Gottman has discovered that marriages prosper when there are many more positive appreciations communicated by each partner than negative critiques.

Energy is the subjective sense of feeling alive and vibrant. An energy gain is an activity, task, or thought that makes you feel better and slightly more alive — those things we *want to* or *choose to do*. An energy drain is the opposite feeling of being less alive and almost depressed — those things we *have to* or *must do*, often something that we do not want to do.

In almost all cases, it is not that we have to, should, or must do — it is a choice. Remember, even though you may say, I have to study, it is a choice. You can choose not to study and choose to drop out of school. Similarly, when you say, I have to do the dishes, it is still a choice. You can choose to do the dishes or let the dirty dishes pile up and just use paper plates.

Energy drains and gains are always unique to the individual; namely, what is a drain for one can be a gain for another. Energy drains can be doing the dishes and feeling resentful that your partner or children are not doing them, or in anticipating seeing a person whom you do not really want to see. An energy gain can be meeting a friend and talking or going for a walk in the woods, or finishing a work project.

When patients with cancer start exploring what they truly would like to do and start acting on their unfulfilled dreams, a few experience that their health improves, as documented by Dr. Lawrence LeShan in his remarkable book, "Cancer as a Turning Point." So often, our lives are filled with things that we **should**

do versus **want to do**. In some cases, the lives we created are not the ones we wanted but the result of self-doubt and worry, I did do this, my family and friends won't like me, or I am not sure I will be successful, so I will do something that is safe. Just ask yourself the question when you woke up this morning and most mornings this week, "How do you feel?" Did you feel happy and looking forward to the day?

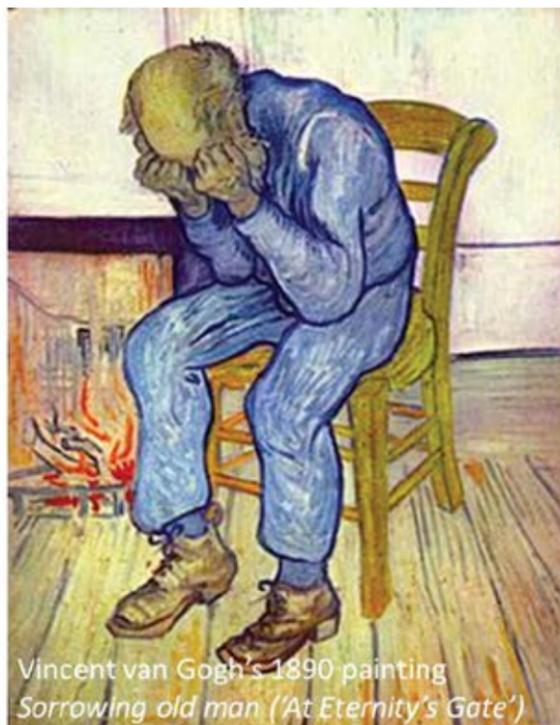
these obstacles such as trading tasks with others — I will cook if you clean the bathroom; setting time limits; giving yourself a positive reward after finishing the task — a cup of tea, a text or phone message to a close friend, or watching a video in the evening.

– Develop new ways how you can increase energy gains, such as doing exer-

self, "I have to do, should do, or must do _____." Keep repeating the phrase for a minute.

Then change your internal phrase, and instead say one of the following phrases, "I choose to do," "I look forward to doing," or "I choose not to do _____." Keep repeating the phrase for a minute.

Now compare how you felt. Almost everyone feels slightly less energy and more depressed



Vincent van Gogh's 1890 painting 'Sorrowing old man (At Eternity's Gate)'



<https://rocketnews1.files.wordpress.com/2016/02/hope.jpg>

Explore strategies to decrease the drains and increase the energy gains. Use the following exercise to increase your energy:

- For one week monitor your energy drains and energy gains. Monitor events, activities, thoughts, or emotions that increase or decrease energy at home and at work. For example, some drains can include cleaning bathroom, cooking another meal, or talking to a family member on the phone, while gains can be taking a walk, talking to a friend or completing a work task. Be very honest — just note the events that change your energy level.
- After the week, look over your notes and identify at least one activity that drains your energy and one activity that increases your energy
 - Develop a strategy to decrease one of the energy drains. Be very specific how, where, when, with whom, and which situations decreasing the tasks that drain your energy. As you think about it, anticipate obstacles that may interfere with reducing your drains and develop new ways to overcome

or completing a task.

- Each day, implement the behavior to reduce to one less energy drain and increase one energy gain, and observe what happens.

Initially it may seem impossible, but many students and clients report that the practice made them aware, and increased their energy so that they had more control over their lives than they had thought. It also encouraged them to explore the question of what was it that they really wanted to do? So often, we have energy drains because of convention, habit and fear — which make us feel powerless and suppresses our immune system, thereby increasing the risk of illness. In observing the energy drains and energy gains, it may give the person a choice. Sometimes, the choice is not changing the tasks, but how we think about it. Many of the things we do are not MUSTs; they are choices. I do the work at my job because I choose to benefits of earning money.

How your internal language impacts your energy*

Sit and think of something that you feel you have to do, should do, or must do. Something you slightly dread such as cleaning the dishes, doing a math assignment. While sitting, say to your-

when thinking, "I have to do," "should do", or must do." When the phrase is shifted to, "I choose to," "I look forward to doing," or "I choose not to do it," they feel lighter, more expanded and more optimistic. When university students practiced this change of language during the week, they found that it was easier to start and complete their homework tasks.

Watch your thoughts; they become words.

Watch your words; they become actions.

Watch your actions; they become habits.

Watch your habits; they become character.

Watch your character; it becomes your destiny.

– Frank Outlaw

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*Adapted from: Gorter, R. & Peper, E. (2011). *Fighting Cancer-A Nontoxic Approach to Treatment*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 107-200.