



# **MENTAL FITNESS**

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**A 12-WEEK GUIDE TO  
BECOME MENTALLY FIT**

By Steve Wize, LCSW

## The Seven Deadly Phrases

### ***Deadly Phrase #1: "I Can't"***

#### ***The Law of Carrots***

When you say, "I can't", you most likely won't. Even worse than that, though, you probably won't even try. "I can't" is self-limiting, self-defeating, and self-fulfilling. But don't take my word for it; let's do a little thought experiment.

What are three options you could have for dinner tonight?

Most clients will answer this question with something like, "I don't know...Chicken, pizza, spaghetti..." I then ask, "Were you planning on eating carrots tonight?" Most shake their heads, *no*, or say, "Probably not." Then I follow up with, "More specifically, what are the chances of you eating carrots tonight?"

If you're anything like most clients I work with, or a participant in the Standard American Diet (SAD), it's unlikely that you were planning to eat carrots tonight. If you were planning to, however, that's awesome! Still, please pretend that you weren't and stick with me for a minute. Also, if you don't like carrots, please pretend that you are at least willing to try them.

I then follow up with: "So what would you say are the odds of you eating carrots tonight? 1%? 5%? 10%?"

"Sounds about right," they usually answer.

"Well, what if I encouraged you to eat more carrots? What if I texted you all day, raving about the health benefits of carrots? They have fiber. They have vitamin A *and* vitamin C. They add color to your skin. They improve your vision and dental health – all true, by the way! Is it possible that you may be more likely to eat carrots?"

"Sure," they almost always agree.

Now, I realize this may seem like a silly example. It's hard to imagine anyone texting someone every hour to promote the health benefits of carrots. Still, I continue:

"What if you went a step further and consciously decided to think about carrots more often? What if anytime you had a free minute to think, you visualized carrots? Would you be more likely to

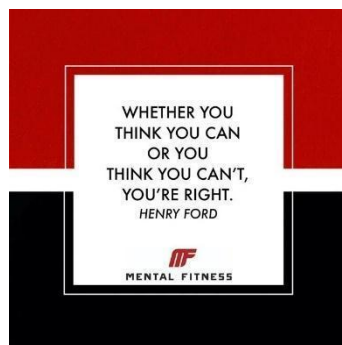
notice them at the grocery store? Could you raise the odds of having carrots for dinner any night? Could you raise the odds to 50%? How about 70%? You could raise the odds to 99% if you made it your mission to eat carrots tonight.

Perhaps your odds have just changed after reading that last paragraph.

Believe it or not, I've had clients come back to me the following session saying, "Hey Steve, guess what I bought at the grocery store last week!?"

Whenever I hear this, as exciting as it is to me that my client is eating healthier, it's even more exciting for me to see that they're starting to connect their thoughts and experiences in life. This is powerful stuff, and it happens in our lives all the time.

When you say, "I can't," you essentially block all energy from flowing toward that pursuit. When you say, "I can," however, it opens your mind to allow your energy to flow toward that focus.



This saying exemplifies "I can" thinking. It proves the expression that "Where attention goes, energy flows."

### ***Takeaways***

- The opposite of focusing on what you **can't** do is concentrating on what you **can** do.

### ***Deadly Phrase #2: "I Need"***

In America, we are conditioned to believe there are many things we *need* for our happiness. This conditioning starts at a very young age and is reinforced throughout our lives. Examples include:

- I need my parent's approval
- I need to make a lot of money
- I need a relationship to be happy

- I need to be married
- I need a particular body image to love myself
- I need medication to make it through the day

When you say, “I need,” you are putting that person, thing, or event on a pedestal. This means you’re holding someone or something in such high regard that it becomes an exaggerated degree. When this happens, you give up your emotional power and control to that person, thing, or outcome. This can cause you to feel powerless and out of control.

This misconception is perpetuated by American society, and its toxicity permeates and poisons our spirits.

On a related note, my favorite quote of all time came from a fortune cookie from a Chinese restaurant across from my office at work. It’s beautiful in its simplicity and truth.

***“If you’re happy, you’re successful.”***

Think about it: Would you rather make \$20,000 a year and be the happiest you’ve ever been or make \$200,000 a year and be miserable?

Okay, honestly, yes. I would rather make \$200,000 and be happy, but why is this such a hard question for so many of us? It’s because of how conditioned we’ve been to associate money with happiness – that we *need* money for our happiness.

The goal of this section, however, is not solely to discuss or debate the role of money and its relation to happiness. It’s bigger and farther reaching than just money. *The goal of this section is to free you from need – to help you find your joy, worthiness, and peace from within yourself.*

Granted, finding peace from within isn’t an easy task. Our society has us convinced we *need* stuff. We’re bombarded with these messages daily – television commercials, billboards, online ads, and so on. It’s a lot of counter-conditioning to find our feelings from within ourselves. Unless you want to be a prisoner to always needing more, it’s the only way to go.

Breaking from this neediness or dependency is what Buddhists refer to as “detachment.” Detachment does not mean becoming emotionally numb to the world. It does mean, however, not to overvalue anything physical or temporary that could change – like the results of a sports event.

***Praise and blame come and go like the wind; your goal is to be the tree amongst it all.***

*Happiness comes from within you!* Stop seeking happiness and approval from others and things outside yourself; you will find peace and happiness within yourself.

### ***Takeaways***

- All that you need is already within you.
- Love yourself. You're worth it!

### ***Deadly Phrase #3: "Makes Me"***

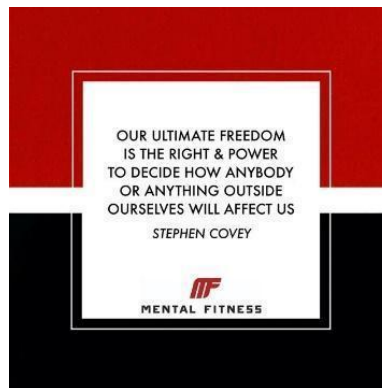
When you say something or someone "makes you," really all you're doing is making excuses and blaming. It's a drain and a waste of time. It's deadly for your Mental Fitness.

Responsibility is an interesting word. I often think of it in two parts: "response" and "ability." It reminds me that one can respond by their choosing. We can't always choose the hand we're dealt, but we can control how we play it.

So, remember, saying someone or something "makes me" is *making* an excuse. Similar to the idea of "need," when someone "makes you" upset, "makes you" frustrated, etc., you are putting that person or situation on a pedestal and giving them all of your control and power.

***It's time to get off your "but!"***

No more making excuses. I should, but...I want to, but...I will, but...etc. The fact is no one else is going to do the work for you. Take ownership of your life, stop blaming others, and stop waiting. You're in the driver's seat now! Don't delay, do it today!



### **Takeaways**

- Nothing can “make you” feel any way unless you let it.
- Take ownership of your circumstances, and let the transformation begin!

### **Deadly Phrase #4: “Should/Shouldn’t”**

“Should/shouldn’t” is a deadly phrase because it’s a form of resistance that keeps us from practicing acceptance. “Should” statements keep us stuck. Whether it’s not learning from our mistakes or clinging to old, outdated beliefs by saying how someone or something *should* or *shouldn’t* be, it’s us clinging to a perception that isn’t true anymore.

For me, the best way to practice acceptance is with the saying, “Blessed are the flexible, for they are *never bent out of shape*.”

If you continually think, “My boss should treat me better,” and yet they continually treat you poorly, you’ll remain stuck. You can focus on trying to change your boss (lovingly, good luck with that!) or change your attitude or behavior towards them. The first option, changing your boss, is entirely out of your control.

The other option, changing you, is 100% within your ability. The choice is yours. Accept and transform in your response or your thinking, or resist and have it persist until you wake up and accept it.

***You can't always control what happens to you, but you can control how you respond to it.***

**Pro-Tip:**

Sometimes, this acceptance comes with adding the word "AND" to your thinking instead of "should." The world of feelings is not mutually exclusive. They are nuanced and layered, and that's okay! Practicing acceptance honors and recognizes the mixed complexity of people, feelings, and events and allows it to be what it is.

It's this type of thinking that allows us to experience peace within ourselves as opposed to resistance.

In addition to the "blessed are the flexible," there's another saying I love by Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung:

***"What you resist, persists."***

But the quote doesn't just end there. The full line is, *"What you resist, persists. What you accept, transforms you."* And if you want to get more technical than that, an even better way to say it is, *"What you resist, persists. What you accept allows the opportunity to begin to transform."*

Resistance means inflexibility to change, grow, and adapt. This is the opposite of what it is to "learn," and therefore, deadly to one's Mental Fitness.

Often in life, our problems aren't our problems. Our problem is that we think we *shouldn't* have that problem. Like a good yoga class, one of the goals of Mental Fitness is to improve your mental flexibility.

**Take-Aways**

- The opposite of resisting is accepting, embracing, and transforming.
- What you resist, persists. What you accept transforms you.





## **Deadly Phrase #5: "I Always/I Never"**

Always and never phrases are forms of three of the worst types of thought traps for your Mental Fitness: All-or-nothing thinking, overgeneralizing, or catastrophizing. They are self-limiting, self-defeating, and self-fulfilling.

*All-or-nothing thinking* is one of the quickest ways to stay stuck. It's a form of perfectionism. And as the saying goes, perfect is the enemy of good. People with all-or-nothing thinking either give up easily – as soon as it doesn't go perfectly, they quit – or worse, they don't even start.

*Overgeneralizing* is assuming that because something went one way one time, it will always happen that way every time.

*Catastrophizing* is similar, but it also involves always assuming the worst.

So, how can we avoid or dispute this deadly phrase of always/never and its self-limiting consequences? The answer is simple, yet not easy. The answer is that we must increase our belief in ourselves, our abilities, and our potential.

I believe there are generally two traits that separate those who believe in themselves and are successful from those who are not.

1. Successful people, if they encounter a failure or setback, do not define themselves as a failure. Rather, they regard the event as a learning experience and let it amplify their commitment to their goals.
2. They believe that their abilities are dynamic, not static. They have a growth mindset, not a fixed mindset. They believe that just because their goal may not be something they're not presently skilled at or haven't done before, that doesn't mean that they could not learn that skill or change their abilities with focus and effort.



## ***The biggest predictor of one's success in anything is to believe in oneself.***

That being the case, why do we often limit ourselves and set ourselves up for failure? If one says things like, "I'll always be single. I'll never find love," will that person succeed in finding a new, fulfilling relationship? Probably not. But if you can take anything from the example above, let it be this: if one's self-talk is that of belief in oneself, the odds of success directly correspond to that talk as well.

As kids, we often believe that we can become whatever we want to be. But throughout life, outside forces interfere, and we let them begin to rent space in our heads. Don't let them! Get them out of there! Negative thoughts like always/never renting space in your head only weigh you down! No one else can define your potential for you. It's up to you to decide.

In conclusion, the words *never* and *always* are the only ones of the Seven Deadly Phrases that I do not recommend eliminating from your mental vocabulary. Instead, we can turn them around entirely and use them in a positive way.

### ***Takeaways***

If there's one secret to success in life, it's the following:

- Always believe in yourself.
- Never give up!

### ***Deadly Phrase #6: "Have To"***

When you say, "have to," you're creating burdens in life.

I get pretty stressed out when I think of everything I have to do. I *have to* pay my mortgage, student loans, utilities, and credit cards. And I *have to* pay them on time, so my credit score isn't affected.

I *have to* take my dogs out early in the morning, periodically throughout the evening, and late at night. And in Pittsburgh, some cold and snowy winters do not always make picking up poop an enjoyable experience! Especially when Sierra and Hamilton want to dilly-dally, but I *have to* get to work.

And it seems like there's *always* some sort of event coming up that I *have to* attend – a wedding, birthday, or holiday and I *have to* spend money because I *need to* get a gift for the occasion.

And I *have to* write progress notes for all my sessions as a therapist in private practice. Which seems like a *never-ending* job, and I'm *always* behind. I *can't* ever keep up, and I *should* have just done them before bed last night! Ugh! Why does this all have to *happen to me* right now!?

Let's be honest. It's pretty easy to let your thinking go downhill in a hurry. To try to avoid this downward spiral, I try my best to protect against it. Whenever I catch myself thinking about all of the things I *have to* do, I take a mental retreat, and I *get to my get to*. Let me explain.

***When you find yourself saying you "have to," get to your "get to."***

Yes, I have to pay bills, but I *get to* pay bills to have services like roadway maintenance, garbage pick-up, community concerts, etc. And I *get to* be a contributing citizen, and I can feel proud of that.

Yes, I have to pay my mortgage, but that's because I *get to* be fortunate enough to be a homeowner. And yes, I have to pay my student loans, but I wouldn't be where I am today without that investment in myself. And yes, I have to pay student loans. However, I *get to* be fortunate enough to have higher education available to me, which not all people do.

And yes, I have to take my dogs out early in the morning when it's freezing, but I *get to* give our dogs a good life, and they also give us a better life. I *get to* let the whole crew out early in the morning!

And yes, wedding, birthday, and holiday gifts can be expensive. However, I *get to* support my friends in their marriages and on their birthdays and to celebrate the holidays with my family, who means the world to me!

And lastly, yes, every time I see a client, I have to make a progress note. Still, I *get to* have a job where I wake up each morning looking forward to going to work and helping others find joy and live more purposeful, meaningful lives.

It takes some mental discipline to turn "have to" moments into "get to" moments, but the feeling I get from this mental reframing is worth the effort. My wife and I love to keep each other accountable in this exercise. If we catch each other getting stuck in a cycle of "have to," we smile and kindly remind each other that we "get to!"

Earlier, I said one of my favorite quotes was, "If you're happy, you're successful." I'd like to add to that just a bit...

***"If you're grateful, you're happy, and if you're happy, you're successful."***

When I can get to my “get to,” I realize that much of my stress in life is self-created, and my burdens are really things that I am quite grateful to have.

Think about how that little shift can make a difference in your life. When we say “have to,” it fills our hearts with obligation, resistance, and resentment. When we say we “get to,” it fills our hearts with gratitude and appreciation.

### **Takeaways**

In short, the moral of this story is:

- When you say you “have to,” get to your “get to!”

### **Deadly Phrase #7: “To Me”**

“Life happens to me.” When you claim that life happens *to you*, you perpetuate being a victim. It’s blaming. It’s passive. It’s negatively self-fulfilling.

If you choose to look at the world through the lens of *what’s wrong with my life*, you will find it or create it. However, the same can be said of the opposite. If you choose to look at the world through the lens of *what’s good in your life*, you will find it or create it. The choice is yours.

Life doesn’t happen to you; it happens *for you*. This includes both happy events and adversity – all of life’s experiences, not just positive ones. Don’t get me wrong; I know this is much easier said than done. It takes a lot of Mental Fitness to train your brain to look at life events with this lens. Still, the power of thinking this way is undeniable.

### **Takeaways**

It’s amazing what can be accomplished with just this simple shift:

- Life does not happen to you. It happens for you to build your character and spirit.



## You are the Gatekeeper of Your Thoughts

But what if you've already allowed negative thinking to take hold in your mind? Is it too late to change? Well, just like correcting one's diet, it's never too late to change. At the same time, it doesn't happen overnight either.

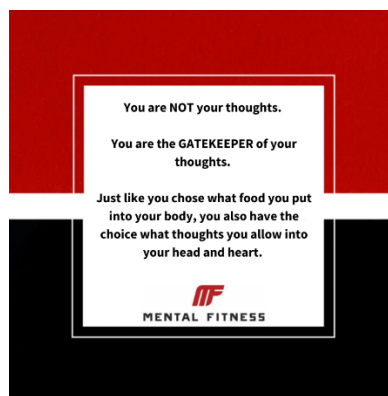
Think of it like this: if you have a nagging neighbor who keeps knocking at your door and coming over uninvited – and you keep letting that neighbor inside – what's that neighbor likely to keep doing? They are going to continue to keep coming over.

But what happens one day if you decide not to answer the door? It's unlikely that the neighbor will immediately stop coming over. However, with time and persistence on your part, they will likely stop. Eventually, they'll get the point and keep walking down the road, passing by your house like a cloud in the sky.

In mastering one's Mental Fitness, we first must realize that our mind is not an open floodgate. Said another way...

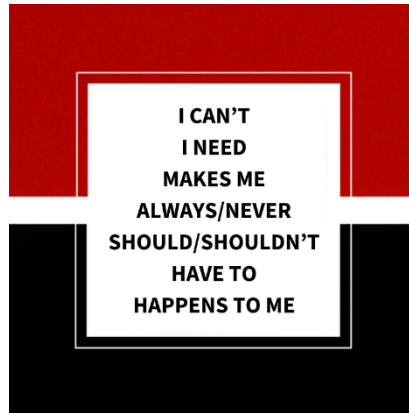
***You are NOT your thoughts. You ARE the gatekeeper of your thoughts.***

If you want to change your circumstances, it starts with recognizing and changing your mindset. Learning to master this skill is the first step in achieving one's full potential!



## Knowing and Doing

So, that's it! Those are the Seven Deadly Phrases: I can't, I need, makes me, should/shouldn't, always/never, have to, and to me.



- **“I can’t”** can be overcome by focusing on what you “can do.”
- **“I need”** can be disputed by finding your feelings of happiness and worthiness from within.
- **“Should”** and **“shouldn’t”** can be eliminated by practicing acceptance and focusing on one’s transformation.
- **“Always”** and **“never”** can be turned around by believing in oneself.
- **“Have to”** can be changed to “get to.”
- And **“to me”** can be reframed to “for me.”

This mental detoxing may not happen overnight, but give it a month. I promise you that you’ll be amazed by the results.

It’s no longer a “knowing problem.” It’s a “doing challenge!”

## **Week 2 Assignment: The Seven Deadly Phrases**

For the following exercises, we will consider examples of your personal Seven Deadly Phrases. In the spaces below, let’s explore what keeps us from reaching our fullest potential.

### **1. I Can’t**

1. Write down something you believe you *cannot* do.
2. Then, dispute your statement by rewriting a positive affirmation you *can* do.

- Finally, *scratch out the negative statement*. The “scratching out” is a physical practice teaching our mental thoughts that they are canceled out.

**Example:**

<b>Negative</b> :	<i>I can't swim a mile.</i>
<b>Positive:</b>	<i>I can swim. I can swim a few laps. I can practice swimming more laps. I can now work to achieve my goals.</i>

**Your Turn:**

<b>Negative</b>	
<b>Positive</b>	

**2. I Need**

- Write down something you believe you *need* to be happy (*food, water, and shelter do not count*).
- Then, dispute your statement by rewriting a positive affirmation you *need* from within.
- Finally, *scratch out the negative statement*. The “scratching out” is a physical practice teaching our mental thoughts that they are canceled out.

**Example:**

<b>Negative</b> :	<i>I need the approval of others to feel worthy.</i>
<b>Positive:</b>	<i>My worthiness comes from within and is not dependent on someone else's opinion of me.</i>

**Your Turn:**

<b>Negative</b>	
<b>Positive</b>	



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**3. Makes Me**

1. Write down something you believe **makes you** upset.
2. Then, reframe your thoughts to take ownership of your emotions. Use *I feel/ I will* rather than *makes me*.
3. Finally, *scratch out the negative statement*. The “scratching out” is a physical practice teaching our mental thoughts that they are canceled out.

**Example:**

<b>Negative</b> :	<i>My boss makes me so frustrated.</i>
<b>Positive:</b>	<i>I feel frustrated when interacting with my boss, but I will take ownership of this emotion and use it to guide me back to focusing on what I can control.</i>

**Your Turn:**

<b>Negative</b>	
<b>Positive</b>	

**4. Always/Never**

1. Write down something you believe will **always be** a certain way or will **never** change.
2. Then, reframe your thoughts and think of small ways to change your perspective.
3. Finally, *scratch out the negative belief*. The “scratching out” is a physical practice teaching our mental thoughts that they are canceled out.

**Example:**

<b>Negative</b> :	<i>I will always be single, and I will never find love in my life.</i>
<b>Positive:</b>	<i>I will always believe in myself and seek continual self-improvement. I will never give up on my dreams and goals.</i>

**Your Turn:**

<b>Negative</b>	
<b>Positive</b>	

**5. Should/Shouldn't**

1. Write down something you believe should or shouldn't be a certain way.
2. Then, being brutally honest, write how it is, along with the statement, "and I accept this." After, list one way you can begin to change your reaction – your thoughts or behaviors in response to this person or situation.
3. Finally, *scratch out the negative belief*. The "scratching out" is a physical practice teaching our mental thoughts that they are canceled out.

**Example:**

<b>Negative</b> :	<del>My teacher shouldn't have given me that grade.</del>
<b>Positive:</b>	<i>I accept that my teacher's opinion of my work does not have to determine my opinion of my work. Not every teacher will be my favorite (and vice versa), and I accept that as part of the bigger-picture learning process.</i>

**Your Turn:**

<b>Negative</b>	
<b>Positive</b>	

**6. Have To**

1. Write down something you believe you **have to** do.
2. Then, reframe your thoughts and change I **have to** into I **choose/get** to.

3. Finally, *scratch out the negative statement*. The “scratching out” is a physical practice teaching our mental thoughts that they are canceled out.

**Example:**

<b>Negative</b> :	<i>I have to get up early and feed and let the dog out when it's cold out.</i>
<b>Positive:</b>	<i>I get to let the dog out because I have a wonderful pet who loves me, and who greets me with joy and enthusiasm every time I get home.</i>

**Your Turn:**

<b>Negative</b>	
<b>Positive</b>	

**7. Happens to Me**

1. Write down something you believe ***happens to you***.
2. Then, reframe your thoughts and change what ***happens to me*** into what you learned from the experience. How did it build your wisdom and character?
3. Finally, *scratch out the negative statement*. The “scratching out” is a physical practice teaching our mental thoughts that they are canceled out.

**Example:**

<b>Negative</b> :	<i>I got let go from my job. I have to feed and let the dog out even when it's cold out.</i>
<b>Positive:</b>	<i>You can't change what happens to you, but you can change the way in which you react to it. I will continue to believe in myself and look at the ways in which this event happened for me to build character and resiliency in me.</i>

**Your Turn:**

<b>Negative</b>	

Positive	

***Just like a nutritional cleanse starts with targeting junk food and replacing it, our Mental Fitness cleanse also targets toxic beliefs and practices, replacing them.***

## **Week 2 Activity Challenge**

For this week's Activity Challenge, your goal is to go for a 10 to 15-minute walk and simply notice your thoughts as you go. Please do not do this with a friend or with any electronic distractions.

As you walk, notice whatever thoughts come to mind and do your best not to judge or control them.

The goal of this activity is for you to begin becoming the gatekeeper of your thoughts. By first raising greater awareness of our thoughts, only then can we best control what we allow into our hearts and identities, and also what we block out as toxic or self-limiting.

To go over the other 11 Mental Fitness modalities - join the Mental Fitness Movement and get your copy of The Mental Fitness Workbook and Personal Journal today using the link below!!!

**[Get Mentally Fit Today!](#)**