

Self-Love

Diet

Stop *Shoulding*

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# You *Should* / You *Shouldn’t*

*Shoulds* come in a variety of terms: there’s *got to*, *ought to*, *supposed to*, *have to*, *need to*, *must,* and *must not*—any word or phrase that make you feel wrong or oppressed—but for ease and clarity, I’m going to use the words *should and shouldn’t* to encompass all these terms.



In the left-hand column, identify what you *should* or *should not:* be, do, or havein relation to your health/body/weight; family/friends/colleagues; career; finances; religion/spirituality; where you live/how you live … basically your life in general.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| I *should* / I *shouldn’t* |  |
|  |  |



## The Tyranny of *Shoulds*

### How do *shoulds* make you feel?

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| --- |
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### When I do what I *should* do, I feel:

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### When I don’t do what I *should* do, I feel:

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### How might all this *shoulding* affect those around you?

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| --- |
|  |

# Here’s What’s Going On

*Good* or *bad, right* or *wrong* are at the core of *shoulds*. We believe we’re good when we do what we *should* and bad when we don’t. So, to keep ourselves *in line* and to ensure that we do, be, and have the *right* things, we make ourselves feel wrong and, therefore, bad when we don’t abide by *shoulds* (just take a look at the negative emotions you identified in the previous exercises ☹). But here’s the rub:

WE ARE MEANT TO FEEL GOOD—AND WE *ARE* GOOD!

And since our brains are programmed to avoid pain and seek pleasure, which means to freely choose what we want and don’t want, we:

* instinctively resist *shoulds* because their very function is designed to rob us of our free choice (resistance feels bad) and
* build resentment toward ourselves and the people who impose *shoulds* upon us (resentment feels bad)

So, let’s break free from the shackles of *shoulds*and enjoy the liberation that comes from consciously choosing what’s best for us—FREE of guilt and shame.



Go back to the ***I Should / I Shouldn’t*** table on page 2 and label the right-hand column ***Says Who?***. For each *should* / *shouldn’t*, identify specifically who has deemed it so. It could be a person or group, society in general, social media, you, or all of these.

# Shushing the *Shoulds*

Let’s start with the very good news. Though you may have identified others as *shoulding* you, ALL *shoulds* are self-imposed. As such, we can stop *shoulding* ourselves and **powerfully *choose* what we will or will not do.**

Sure, others can impose *shoulds* on us, but we don’t have to accept them, because

we don’t *have to* do anything we don’t want to.

I hear you. I hear you: *BUT SUE, people depend on me!* ***I have to*** *work, do the laundry, make lunches, and countless other things I don’t want to do!*

Despite being brainwashed by others and telling ourselves that we *have to* do, be, and have certain things, the empowering truth is:

**Everything** **we do is our conscious or unconscious** **choice**.

But, after years of mindlessly abiding by *shoulds,* they’ve become automatic habits—so much so, that we don’t even realise we have a choice.

**To be clear:** we may not like do something, however, we may *choose* to do it to avoid the (potential) negative consequences of not doing it, or because we’ll ultimately feel better than if we don’t do it, or because we want to support someone.

Regardless, acknowledge that you are making every decision—consciously or otherwise—and that no one else can *make* you do anything.

So, let’s liberate ourselves and make empowered, conscious decisions!



#### **Love Practice:** Get Consciously Clear

When faced with a *should*, ask yourself (and for stickier *shoulds*, solicit the unbiased ☺ viewpoint of a supportive friend):

* *Do I really have to do this?*
* *Really?*
* *What’s the worst thing that could happen if I didn’t do it? Can I be at peace with that?*
* *Could I delegate this? Could I hire someone to do it?*

Whether you choose to do the *should* or not, celebrate yourself for making a deliberate, empowered decision based on conscious reasoning rather than from the habit of doing a *should*.

## You Powerfully Choose **Not To Do** the *Should*



#### **Power Tool:** I’m FOR Me

If you powerfully choose not to do a *should,* which may upset or disappoint another person and your inner bully goads you with nastiness like, *“You’re a horrible, selfish person. What kind of friend are you? You should be ashamed of yourself,”* soothe yourself with the Loving declaration:

***“I am not against this person. I’m FOR me!”***

## You Powerfully Choose **To Do** the *Should*

… and the *should* is a request from someone. Make sure you’re not (unintentionally) making a ‘backroom deal.’ These deals go something like this:

*“Okay, I’ll do this thing for you that I don’t want to do, but now owe me.”*

The problem with these deals are the other person isn’t in the backroom with you, let alone agreeing to the deal. Also, you’re setting yourself up to be burned when the person doesn’t honour the deal they didn’t know anything about. And you’re setting the person up to disappoint you.

Only agree to requests you can do without attaching strings to them

(unless the person verbally agrees to the strings ☺).

Many of us comply with *shoulds* that involve other people to avoid their rath or because we don’t want to disappointment them. Though valid at times, we don’t want to make this a habit. If that habit ship has already sailed for you (as it had for me ☹) and you need help to set yourself free, these fabulous workshops may be just what you need:

* *Cure Your Dis-Ease to Please*
* *Whose Life are You Living, Anyway?*
* *Care Less to Love More—How not to care (so much) about what other people think*

## *Shoulds* you want to do, but feel resistance in doing them

What’s with these *shoulds*? I can understand the reluctance in communicating a difficult boundary, going for a mammogram, or hosting a friend’s Tupperware party, but some *shoulds* I really *want* to do such as meditating, yoga, or going to bed before midnight. When *shoulds* have this push-pull quality, we can ask some empowering questions:

* How is doing this *should* serving me?
* If another person is involved, how is it serving them?
* What can I do to make the *should* fun, joyful, and uplifting? Can someone do it with me? Can I pair it with another activity that delights me?
* How can I do it more easily, efficiently, and effectively?
* Who can support me in doing this *should*?
* How will I feel once it’s done? How will I feel if I don’t do it? How do I want to feel now? How do I want to feel while I am doing it?

When you’ve made the decision to perform the *should*, do it with as much joy as you possibly can.

And if you catch yourself playing the victimising Complain, Blame, and Defame Game internally or otherwise (old habits die hard ☹),

* remember *you* made the powerful, conscious decision to do the *should*.
* re-mind yourself of the benefits that helped you arrive at that decision. It’s why you chose to do it:

to feel better in doing it—than not doing it.

* OR perhaps you may need to revisit your decision. Maybe you really don’t want to do the *should* after all.
* OR maybe you just need to tell yourself a better-feeling story about the *should* …

# Tell a Better Feeling, More Truthful Story

The stories we tell and the words we use to tell them are enormously powerful. They not only create our life, but they influence our experience of it.

For example:

I *have to* feels like oppression.

I *choose to* feels like freedom.

I *want to* feels like joy.

I *can’t* feels like restriction.

I *won’t* feels like power.

I’ve *got to* feels like pressure.

I *get to* feels like opportunity.

Start shifting your language to reflect the authority you actually have over your life and watch that reality soak all the way down into your mind, heart, and body. When you really believe you're in charge of your own life and choices, you stand taller. You communicate more clearly. You have an indefinable charisma.

~ Katherine North

## I Can’t vs. I Don’t

To impress upon you the importance of the words we use, a couple of studies conducted by Oxford University[[1]](#footnote-1) shows the power of making a one-word change to influence our behaviour.

The one study involved 30 women who registered for a ‘health and wellness seminar.’ They were asked to choose a long-term health and wellness goal (let’s use the example of a daily yoga practice). They were divided into 3 separate, equal groups. Each group was given a strategy, which was a statement to affirm when they felt tempted to skip their daily yoga practice.

They were told that their progress would be monitored accordingly: “During the 10-day window you will receive emails to remind you to use the strategy and to report instances in which it worked or did not work. If the strategy is not working for you, just drop us a line and say so and you can stop responding to the emails.”

The strategy statements were as follows:

* Group 1: *“Just say no.”* (this was the control group with no real strategy)
* Group 2: *“****I can’t*** *miss my yoga practice.”*
* Group 3: *“****I don’t*** *miss my yoga practice.”*

The results:

* Group 1: *“Just say no.”* 3 of the 10 women met their goal for all 10 days.
* Group 2: *“****I can’t*** *\_\_\_.”* 1 of the 10 women met their goal for all 10 days.
* Group 3: *“****I don’t*** *\_\_\_.”* 8 of the 10 women met their goal for all 10 days.

Heidi Grant Halvorson, director of the Motivation Science Center at Columbia University explains what’s going on here:

“*I don’t* is experienced as a choice, so it feels empowering. It’s an affirmation of your determination and willpower.

*I can’t*  isn’t a choice. It’s a restriction, it’s being imposed upon you. So, thinking *I can’t* undermines your sense of power and personal agency.”

****

#### **Power Tool:** The *Should* Swap-out

If we’re going to do the *should* anyway, we can liberate ourselves from the negative and victimising feelings associated with words like *should,* *need to, have to, supposed to,* and *must* by simply substituting them with more accurate and empowering words such as:

* I powerfully choose to (this is my favourite because it re-minds me of how powerful I am)
* I can
* I will
* I’m going to
* I want to
* I’d prefer / I’d rather
* I intend to
* I don’t / I won’t
* I would, but… / I could, but
* I’d like to / I’d Love to (another fave of mine ☺)



## My Aha!

While procrastinating designing this very workshop, I realised, *“Wait a second! I Love researching, developing, and designing workshops.”* Without being aware of it, I turned this otherwise enjoyable project into a big, **fat**, **hairy deal** by merely *perceiving* it—and calling it—an oppressive *should*. The moment I realised this, the resistance associated with the tyrannical *should* immediately dissolved. After doing a BIG HAPPY DANCE to celebrate my awareness, I dove into creating this workshop with enthusiastic gusto. And now here we are!



#### **Take Loving Action:** Be on the lookout

What activities are you labelling *shoulds* that would otherwise be fun, easy, and enjoyable if they weren’t labelled—and therefore perceived as—tyrannical *shoulds*?

 

**Process:** Sushing *Shoulds*

1. When you catch yourself using the word *should* or any of its forms, STOP!
2. Do a happy dance to celebrate your conscious recognition of this habit you want to change
3. Get clear: *Do I really have to do this? Really?*
4. Soothe any resistance you might have in carrying out the *should*.
5. Swap out the label *should* with a more accurate, empowering word.
6. If you’ve chosen to carry our the *should,* do it with joy andwithout complaint. After all, you powerfully chose to do it.

 **Post *should* decision,** be careful to not judge, berate, or *should* yourself for that decision. Let me give you an example: you consciously decide to skip a yoga class in order to finish up a project. The next day after the missed yoga class, you berate yourself, *“I* ***should*** *have attended that class.”* (Do you see the vicious, no-win cycles we create?)

Gently re-mind yourself that you made the conscious decision not to do the *should*, i.e., attend the class and that you benefited in some way i.e., by completing your project instead. Further re-mind yourself that you are not served by making yourself wrong and give yourself a hug to interrupt this pattern.

# The Last Word on *Shoulds*

In the same way that it’s not kind to *should* ourselves, it’s not kind to *should* others. We’re all on our own path. And we’re all doing the best we can given our history. Let’s give ourselves and everyone else an ever Lovin’ break and unspeakable compassion.

“For every fork in the road there are often two paths to choose from... the one you *should* take and the one you *want* to take.

Take the second. Always take the second.”

~ Mike Dooley (Notes from The Universe)



# Love Notes

1. **I Don’t” versus “I Can’t”: When Empowered Refusal Motivates Goal-Directed Behavior**

By Vanessa M. Patrick and Henrik Hagtvedt — https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/663212?seq=1 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)