

# 9

Chapter

# Stop Should-ing on Yourself

Most of us overuse words and phrases such as “I should,” “I need to,” and “I have to.” For some, it causes a great deal of anxiety and depression. Sometimes these words are completely inaccurate—in reality, the person does have the option to *not* do the thing they say they have to do, should do, or need to do. Most of the time, these words at least exaggerate reality. After all, the only things we really need to do are eat, sleep, breathe, and have somewhere sheltered to live.

Perhaps the most important things to remember about the imperatives we tell ourselves, and often tell others, is that there is usually a choice and there is almost always something that we *want* to do that is involved with the task. In a way, this is another B<sup>3</sup> (see Chapter 8). By changing a “need to” situation into a “want to” situation, we often relieve anxiety while simultaneously increasing motivation. **First of all, “need to” and “have to” are commands that create tension, and “should” doesn’t feel much better.** Furthermore, I believe there’s a bit of a child in all of us such that when we are told that we “need to” do something, we don’t want to do it, even if it’s a self-imposed “need to.”

Think about Tom Sawyer whitewashing the fence in Mark Twain’s novel. He turned a job into a privilege by getting people to believe that they really *wanted* to do this work. Imagine if he told people they *needed* to whitewash the fence. How many takers do you think he would have enticed?

In addition to finding the “want to” in every situation, we can introduce some flexibility in how the task is accomplished. Let’s say that your floors are dirty. You initially think, “I *need* to sweep, mop, and vacuum.” If you changed that to “I *want* to sweep, mop, and vacuum,” that would be unlikely to be helpful because most people don’t like to do housework so it would be a lie. What *do* you want? You want your floors to be clean. If you change your thought to “I *want* my floors to be clean,” it’s true and more motivating. You could also think, “I want to cross it off my list, because I’ll feel better when it’s done.” Experiment with a variety of “coulds” as well: “I could clean them tomorrow,” “I could hire a cleaning person,” “I could make it a condition of my kids’ allowance,” “I could get my spouse to share the tasks,” or “I could vacuum today and sweep and mop tomorrow.”

On a day-to-day basis, be mindful of how often you say these imperatives. If you aren’t certain about this, ask family, close friends, and perhaps colleagues if you overuse these words. If you do overuse these words, think about how they may be affecting your children, spouse, colleagues, and friends—particularly if you are “should-ing” on them. Consider whether you would like for others to gently let you know when you are using imperatives. Think about who you could get feedback from without feeling defensive and how you’d like for them to let you know.

## Finding “The Want”

In the left-hand column, make a list of things you haven't done that you are feeling like you *should* do or are telling yourself that you *need* to do or *have* to do. Then, in the right-hand column, write at least one sentence for each of the statements on the left, changing them so that they contain the words “want to” and/or “could.”

Should Do, Need to Do, or Have to Do	Want To or Could

Focusing on the place in your body where you feel anxiety or tension, read one of the statements in the column on the left. If you are alone, say it aloud. How does it feel?

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Focusing on the same place in your body, read your alternative *want to* and *could* statements. How does it feel? How motivated are you to get started?

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Continue down the list, reading each of your original statements and alternative sentences aloud.

## Exploring Alternatives to “Shoulds”

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In the event that the previous exercise is ineffective, this more involved worksheet may be more helpful. Below is a sample worksheet for someone who doesn't like to work out but enjoys the benefits of working out. **On the next page there is a blank worksheet for you to use.**

What is the “should/need to” statement?

I need to work out.

What will happen if I don't do it?

I'll be sorry that I skipped it and may not sleep as well tonight.

What is the “want to”?

I want to have that great feeling I do after I leave the gym. I want to be healthy. I want to sleep well. I want to keep my weight down without worrying too much about how much I eat. I want to be strong.

When else could I do it or what are the alternatives?

I could go in-line skating or go for a bike ride. I could even go for a walk. In the future, I could join a tennis league or get a friend to exercise with me.

What would make it more pleasant?

Taking some good tunes and a tasty sports drink. I could find a class that I like more than lifting weights and being on the cardio machines.

Will I be glad that I did it?

I'm always glad that I went!

Reframed “want to” statement(s):

I will be glad that I went to the gym because I feel more relaxed, sleep better, and can enjoy my lunch more. It's good for my mental and physical health. Therefore, I really do want to go to the gym.

## Exploring Alternatives to “Shoulds”

What is the “should/need to” statement?

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What will happen if I don’t do it?

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What is the “want to”?

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When else could I do it or what are the alternatives?

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What would make it more pleasant?

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Will I be glad that I did it?

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Reframed “want to” statement(s):

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