

# Brain Engineering and Changing your Self-Talk



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Did you know that scientists have learned more about the brain in the last ten years than in all previous centuries because of the accelerated pace of research in neurological science and new

research techniques? Or that even the brightest mind uses less than 1% of the brain's total potential? Does this make you a bit curious about what else you might be able to do if you knew how to activate the 99% of latent brainpower that's waiting to serve you?

And if you're already a bit skeptical, ask yourself how many routes you take from home to work. Probably no more than two or three on average. Yet if I were to offer you \$100.00 for each new route you could find, isn't it true you would never run out of possibilities? Even if you did exhaust street routes, there would be short-cuts through alleys or parking lots and across vacant lots or fields. You can apply this metaphor to your brain. Imagine the many ways you could create new patterns of thought, paradigms, and options.

"Brain Engineering" is our term for the process of applying information from many fields of study about the brain and human potential to solve current business problems. From fields such as NeuroLinguistic Programming (NLP), psychoneuroimmunology, and accelerated learning, companies can gain new insights which can increase productivity, improve quality of life (to balance quality of service and product), and address the challenge of doing more with less—faster and better.

One such application has been through the research from our book, [You Don't Have to Go Home From Work Exhausted!](#) that will allow you to end the day with energy to spare. For over 25 years, we have collected stories from ourselves and our Clients about:

1. Insights into burnout and ways to create an early warning system so that you spend less of your life in burnout and more enjoying being vitally refreshed;
2. The link between brain dominance and personal energy and ways you can leverage your work style into abundant energy and enthusiasm;
3. Ideas from our book, [Time Management for Unmanageable People](#) that explain why your messy desk and other so-called "bad" habits might be the secret to your success;
4. Avoiding Hurry Sickness (which has become epidemic in corporate America) and tips to balance your daily pace for peak performance;
5. Other timely business topics based on fresh research which offers practical tips to improve your performance.

For now, let's do a little brain engineering, using practical strategies to tackle three common productivity problems:

**1.** "Certain parts of my job really drain my energy! I dread them before, during, and after I rush through them, but, let's face it, they are a necessary part of the job. So how can I get myself to do them without losing energy or wasting valuable time procrastinating?"

Think of your brain as having two voices, like two people in a horse costume. The person in front can see out, but the one in back can't and only knows what's going on by listening to his buddy in front. If the front guy says, "They love us," the guy in back feels great. But if the front guy says, "They hate us and are throwing rotten tomatoes and walking out of the theater," the guy in back feels anxious and like a failure.

In the same way, your self-talk all day long tells your subconscious what's going on "out there." For example, you might hear yourself think, "Another useless meeting. I hate sitting for hours getting

nothing accomplished. What a drag!" And, sure enough, you go to the meeting and find lots of evidence to back up your self-talk. On the way back to your office you grumble to yourself once more about how useless the meeting was. Is it any wonder that your subconscious is tired, frustrated and grumpy after that—and any time you hear the word "meeting?"

**ACTION TIP:** Think of something in your work that you are required to do that typically drains your energy or causes you to procrastinate: for example, filling out expense reports, dealing with employee conflict, resolving a difficult situation with a client, conducting performance reviews, developing proposals, etc.

Notice your self-talk before, during, and after the dreaded event. Now get curious. How could you reframe that event so that it becomes positive? For example, "I take pride in keeping on top of my work and supporting my work team. Timely expense reports make the process go smoother for the accounting team. They will appreciate my promptness, and this can improve our teamwork."

Then right before, during, and after you accomplish the task, relax, take three slow, deep breaths and again remind yourself of why you feel good about what you are choosing to do. Also, imagine that the work goes smoothly and effortlessly and has a positive result.

If you practice this approach at least three times in a row with any previously dreaded work task, you can expect to experience a significant change in your performance, attitude, and energy. When your subconscious hears you convincing it that you are a hit, it will respond with trust and enthusiasm.

The secret is to unlearn negative work habits and replace them with a positive synergy between your self-talk and the attitudes which follow. This is why people who expect to be lucky usually are. And this is why people who daydream about bold achievements are often the big winners.

So dream bold dreams, visualize them vividly and often, especially just as you are drifting off to sleep and waking up in the morning.

These two periods each day are natural periods of alpha brainwaves. Whatever you entertain during these times will flavor your sleep work (dreams) and waking behavior.

Now, did you ever think an expert on brain engineering would be encouraging you to daydream more to tap your latent potential, increase your productivity, and create positive energy on the job?

**2.** Let's examine another common block to high productivity. How often do you feel pushed and overwhelmed by a long list of "should's" and "have to's"? In other words, you have so much that you should do and have to do that there is precious little time, much less energy, to get to things you'd really like and enjoy doing. From the standpoint of brain engineering, it's interesting to learn that how we position tasks for ourselves can make a big difference in our energy.

Any time you tell yourself you should or have to do something, a part of your brain has made the commitment (usually your adult, disciplined self, characterized by the left hemisphere). But your more playful, imaginative self (characterized by the right hemisphere) has lost interest or would prefer other pursuits. So you experience a major energy drain when part of you insists on pushing ahead while the other part hangs back, perhaps procrastinating or rationalizing why later would be better.

**ACTION TIP:** Get curious about how you can honestly shift all your "should's" and "have-to's" into "choose to's," "want to's," and even "get to's." For example, if business travel is something you dread but do a lot, how can you make it a "get to?"

Step one: What if you refused to take another trip? You'd probably lose your job or at least not get to do the job you are doing now. You'd miss working with those clients who are located elsewhere, as well as some interesting challenges. If you traveled less, that could also mean less revenue and, therefore, less income. So, considering all the benefits, maybe you do want to travel.

Once, I had the opportunity to travel for the better part of three weeks to eight U.S. cities as a spokesperson for MCI Business Markets.

Since weekends and evenings at home are precious to me and my husband, my heart sank a bit at first as I realized how much time at home I was giving up. But, as I reviewed the situation with Larry, my husband, he pointed out the tremendous business opportunities and offered his support at home. By shifting my focus, I was able to truly make the many legs of this trip fun, productive, and energizing -- the opportunity of a lifetime. I focused on how it was helping me, my team, MCI, and all the people we were able reach with our positive message.

Thinking in this way, can you see how this potentially draining assignment might genuinely become very positive, something you truly CHOOSE to do or even GET to do? What's fascinating is that making this mental shift by creatively reframing the situation changes your internal energy. You become energized when you anticipate benefits for you and others.

**3.** "By the time I get home in the late evening, I'm in no mood for anything except to collapse on the sofa. Quality time for myself or my family doesn't exist because I'm so tired!" How does this experience relate to productivity on the job? If you don't enjoy evenings and weekends, you'll soon drag back to work without much energy or enthusiasm. Balance between your personal and professional lives is essential and leads to higher creativity and vitality. The following tips can make a big difference.

**ACTION TIPS:** First, on your way home from work, only tell yourself what went right during the day. Although this approach sounds simple, it's effective. An executive vice-president in a utility company found that by focusing on his accomplishments, he realized that his day had usually been well spent. Instead of feeling overwhelmed by reviewing all the work he didn't get to and the stack of obligations waiting for him the next day, he was in a good mood, ready to have some fun, enjoy his family, and do something good for himself.

Secondly, explore new or old hobbies and outside interests. Keep something going that fascinates you and takes your mind totally away from job worries, something that even causes you to lose track of

time. Ed Platt, a general manager dealing with a difficult union situation, related his experience: "About two years ago I found myself coming home from work totally drained. I had no energy for anything except my job and family and no interest in hobbies or outside activities. Then Ann encouraged all of us who were participating in the Perspective III Leadership Development Program to find a hobby we could enjoy in our spare time. I got interested in stained glass and made more than 75 pieces over the next two years. The amazing thing was that I had time to do this when I had felt that I was so tired I could do nothing else. When I came home from work, the glass projects were a release and an energy builder. The handwork let me forget about other cares."

"I learned a very important lesson as people became interested in my glasswork. Several times I committed myself to projects and schedules rather than just letting it happen (at my own speed). It was not nearly as much fun or energizing. Now when I work on a piece for someone, it is without a schedule. For me, committing to a schedule was contamination of my joy time."

In summary, let me encourage you to try one or more of these simple yet effective shifts in thinking and balancing your commitments to work and to your equally significant need to rest, relax, renew and enjoy some fun. As you learn to balance quality of products and services in the workplace with quality of life on and off the job, you will be amazed at how much more energy you will bring to every part of your life.

Seminars and additional resources are available from Ann McGee-Cooper and Associates, Inc. 214 357-8550 or visit us at [AMCA.com](http://AMCA.com)