

THE BEACON

Pest Control: Eradicating the Term-ites

Dr. Martin E.P. Seligman, in his best-selling book *Learned Optimism* (© 1990, NY, Pocket Books), calls what I call term-ites, “automatic thoughts flitting through your consciousness . . . so well practiced as to be almost unnoticed and unchallenged.”

Cognitive therapy, he says, uses five tactics to change the way we think – and talk to ourselves – about our failures and losses. In summary:

The first is what I’ll call the “*Aha!*” when you recognize those term-ites. Listen to what pops into your head when you’ve done something you believe is foolish.

Second, *bring forward the evidence* that refutes what those term-ites are saying. Are you a complete idiot? Obviously not. You have many competencies, you do a good job in many areas. So you messed up this time. What does that prove? Are you unlovable? No way! Lots of people are very fond of you. So you ticked this person off. It’s fixable – and you *are* lovable. See how this works?

Third, *craft a contrary explanation* in this particular situation to dispute the term-ites. Although I whacked my car on the garage door twice in eight days, I am not a ditz. I was *inattentive*, not an idiot.

Fourth, *distract yourself*, if you are prone to obsessing about your mistake. Take it from Scarlett O’Hara and say, “I’m not going to think about that now.” Seligman says you can control not only *what* you think, but also *when* you think it. Distraction can short-circuit a possible slide into depression, and you don’t want to go there.

Fifth, *evaluate your assumptions*. True or false: *Unless I’m perfect, I’m a failure. Unless everyone likes me, I’m unlikable. There’s a perfect solution, and I must find it. I must always behave in such a way as to bring honor to (my family, my company, etc.).* Says who? And what do they know, anyway?

Next: What Thumper’s mother told him

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