

“*Men are not disturbed by things, but the view they take of things.*”

EPICETETUS (55–135 A.D.)

“*What about things like bullets?*”

HERB KIMMEL, BEHAVIOURALIST, PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY,  
UPON HEARING THE ABOVE QUOTE

# Banish mental gremlins

The last chapter was all about creating powerful visualisations of your energy and vitality, but there's something that can stomp on positive visualisations and thoughts, and even kill them: *limiting beliefs*. Limiting beliefs are fears and ego-driven negative thoughts I call **MENTAL GREMLINS**. These little beasts reside in your mind, revealing themselves just when they can blow your confidence, add pressure to your project, or just generally ruin your day.

Maybe you've never noticed your own self-chatter – little voices inside your head that chat to you. They remind you of things, sometimes encourage you (these are the mental good fairies), but too often they criticise you or tell you that you mustn't fail, that change will be very bad, or some such rubbish.

Here are some examples of common mental gremlins:

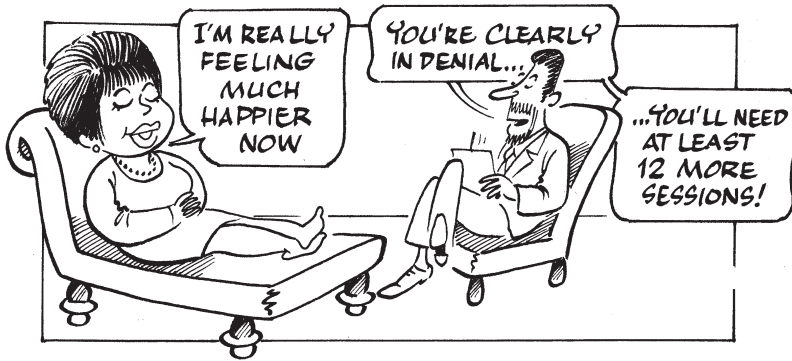
- Everything has to be perfect
- I have to be right
- I have to have control
- I have to be strong
- I'm afraid of . . . rejection, failure, change
- I can't change
- Nothing ever works
- This isn't fair
- I can't handle this
- I can't ask for help
- I must . . . I should . . . I ought
- Hurry up
- I'm so clumsy
- I'm such an idiot
- I'll never be able to . . .
- I'll never be a success at . . .

Recognise any of these? You probably do, and you might have some gems of your own. After your excuses, they are your *biggest* barrier to achieving the energy, vitality, happiness and great life that you want.

But you know what? YOU DON'T HAVE TO PUT UP WITH THEM ANYMORE! You have the power to bounce them right out of your mind. In order to do this, *first* you must **believe** that you have the power, and *second* you must **be persistent** in your efforts to eradicate them. Let's take a look at how you'd achieve these two things.

## Belief

Your belief that you can banish mental gremlins is critical to your success. Sadly, most people think they are stuck with these monsters, and this in itself becomes a great excuse for bad energy habits. Statements such as 'I can't help it, I'm a worrier' or 'I'm just a perfectionist and I guess I'll never change' are clear examples. As I said in **Chapter**



7 – **Mind your language**, you must be very careful about the things you tell yourself repeatedly. You'll believe them.

Remember that your mind is completely under your control. That's an obvious, common sense statement, but not believed or utilised by everyone. Using the power you have to control your own mind makes you the master of your own destiny, and it's truly awesome. Don't waste this power. As soon as you believe this power is yours, it will no longer be in the Gremlins' clutches.

If you need further confidence in your ability to dominate your mental gremlins, ask yourself: 'Who is actually saying these things to me?' If the answer comes back: my father, mother, brother, sister, school bully, teacher or similar, then you must say out loud to these people: 'You do not have any control or power over me. You never really did. The only control you have is what I give you. Every time I hear you I am going to boot you straight out of my head and refocus on something positive' (you can use an affirming statement that you'll develop in Chapter 13 ☺).

If your answer to 'who is saying these things?' is 'I don't know', you can say something like, 'You are just a pathetic gremlin, and what you're saying is a load of rubbish'... then continue with your affirming statement.

If you're still not convinced of your power to do this, consider this amazing quote by Viktor Frankl. It is one of the most empowering statements I have ever read. He said:

'... everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances.'

When he wrote this, he really meant *any* circumstances. Viktor Frankl was an Austrian psychologist who was imprisoned in four different Nazi concentration camps during World War II. He said that the times when things looked bleakest were the times he forced the despair out of his head by focussing on happy memories from the past and hopes of his life *when* he got out – not 'if'. He understood the power of the mind to choose thoughts that would help him to survive, not spiral him down even further. In his case, it really was a matter of life or death.

So if you now believe that you *do* have the power to choose your thoughts, how are you going to exterminate the gremlins for good? Well, it's probably a life's work. But there's no reason not to start now and pick them off one by one.

You know how when you learn something new, the process is slow the first few times you use this knowledge, but speeds up over time? The required thought patterns or actions eventually become second nature or automatic. In the same way, getting rid of the gremlins and replacing them with more useful thoughts will take time – but can become second nature. This is where the **persistence** comes in. Let's look at the tools

you can use and how you can maintain your attack on any thoughts that bring you down.

“*Stand guard at the door of your mind.*”  
ANTHONY ROBBINS

First off, when you recognise a gremlin and decide to exterminate it, summon up a memory that challenges and counteracts it. For instance, instead of thinking 'I can't handle this', you can recall a time you've

handled things competently, coolly and calmly. Be prepared with a number of examples to deliberately focus on when your confidence wobbles. To add to the staying power of this idea, make a note of these memories and put them in your diary.

“We create our lives a thought at a time. And sometimes, it comes down to changing a thought such as ‘Why did this happen to me?’ into ‘There is a divine plan and there is a reason for this, and my choice is to create the most positive reaction I can.’”

DEE WALLACE STONE

Another simple tool you can use to change your thoughts is to distract yourself with thoughts of an upcoming fun event, by phoning a friend, or doing some light reading. You can also work on a project that takes all your attention and mental effort, or by solving some sort of puzzle. This is a tactic that works well if you are a worrier, because you can't stay in that worry loop when you're thoroughly absorbed in something else. Some people in high-pressure jobs switch off by doing dangerous sports such as rock climbing or downhill mountain biking because it requires 100% focus on the activity, and it's like being in another world. The way to infuse your life with this sort of habit is to have the sudoku book handy, or make a date to do that sporty activity with a group.

A third, and one of the most effective ways to beat the gremlins is to choose a more empowering statement to focus on and repeat to yourself or out loud. For example, you might decide to think, ‘I can do this’ and deliberately refocus your mind on this statement whenever the ‘I can't handle this’ gremlin rears its ugly head. **Chapter 13 – Affirmations and celebrations** is all about these ‘affirmational’ statements and how to make them stick.

Don't wait until you ‘have time’ for this because it will never materialise. Make it ‘up front and present’ in your life in whatever way you need to – in your handbag, briefcase, car, on the table by the door, as a string around your finger reminder, your mobile phone greeting – be creative!

### The power of focus

When Richard Branson and Per Lindstrand made their record-breaking hot-air balloon crossing of the Pacific Ocean, lost fuel tanks, fire and uncontrollable increases in altitude threatened not only the journey but their lives. It would have been easy to spiral into: ‘Oh my God we’re doomed, we’re going to die.’ But Richard used the tools of distraction and focus astonishingly well. He says in his autobiography ‘Losing My Virginity’,

‘I put all thoughts of death out of my head, and for the next ten hours concentrated intently on the dials . . . I just looked at the dials and pretended that I was driving some sort of weightless car which I had to keep within a ribbon of road.’

He also focussed on speaking to the video camera, pretending he was speaking to his family and that all was well. If it can be done in life-threatening crises, then you can easily use this tool in everyday life to maintain focus on what you want instead of on self-imposed limitations.

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 Answer these questions here, or download a clean copy from [www.stop-making-excuses.com](http://www.stop-making-excuses.com).

#### What are your top three mental gremlins?

If you don’t know, don’t worry. Just pay attention to the voices in your head over the next week or so, and start to be aware of any messages that bring you down.

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**How will you 'challenge' these gremlins – that is, increase your belief that they're stupid and false?**

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**What tools will you use when they show up in your head, and how will you use them? Be specific!**

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