

Dale Carnegie - How to Stop Worrying and Start Living | Managing Worries

Dale Carnegie's "How to Stop Worrying and Start Living" offer a comprehensive guide to managing and eliminating worry.

The central premise is that worry is largely a mental habit that can be broken through conscious effort and the adoption of specific, tested techniques. The book emphasizes practical application over theoretical understanding, providing formulas and real-life anecdotes to illustrate its principles. Key themes include the detrimental physical and mental effects of worry, the importance of living in "day-tight compartments," the necessity of fact-finding and decision-making, the power of positive mental attitude, the value of self-acceptance and appreciation, the transformative potential of helping others, and the significance of faith and financial prudence.

Main Themes and Key Ideas

The book highlight several recurring themes and crucial ideas for combating worry:

1. The Destructive Nature of Worry: Worry is depicted as a profoundly damaging force, affecting not only mental well-being but also physical health. Carnegie illustrates this with stark examples: "I can see, within one block, one house where worry caused a nervous breakdown-and another house where a man worried himself into diabetes."

Eminent doctors confirm that diseases like "heart trouble, stomach ulcers, or diabetes" are "all worry diseases!" Worry physically manifests and ages individuals.

"Few things can age and sour a woman and destroy her looks as quickly as worry. Worry curdles the expression... It may turn the hair grey, and in some cases, even make it fall out."

The ultimate price: "Business men who do not know how to fight worry die young."

2. The "Day-Tight Compartments" Philosophy (Living in the Present): A cornerstone of Carnegie's advice is the concept of living one day at a time, preventing past regrets or future anxieties from overwhelming the present.

An Army doctor's advice, likened to an hourglass: "When we start in the morning, there are hundreds of tasks which we feel that we must accomplish that day, but if we do not take them one at a time and let them pass through the day slowly and evenly, as do the grains of sand passing through the narrow neck of the hourglass, then we are bound to break our own physical or mental structure."

This philosophy enabled one individual to perform tasks more efficiently and without "the confused and jumbled feeling that had almost wrecked me on the battlefield."

"Just for today I will try to live through this day only, not to tackle my whole life problem at once. I can do things for twelve hours that would appal me if I had to keep them up for a lifetime."

3. A Magic Formula for Solving Worry Situations (Fact-Finding, Analysis, Action): Carnegie proposes a systematic approach to addressing problems that cause worry, emphasizing rational thought over emotional reaction.

Step: Get the facts. This involves "collecting all the facts pertaining to the situation" and sometimes even pretending to be a lawyer arguing against oneself to get "all the facts that are damaging to my wishes." Thomas Edison's extensive notebooks are cited as an example of thorough fact-finding.

Step: Analyse the facts. Once facts are gathered, they must be "analysed and weighed." (implied through Galen Litchfield's technique.

Step: Arrive at a decision and act. "When we have made a decision... we must act on that decision." (implied through Galen Litchfield's technique) Waite Phillips warns against over-thinking: "There comes a time when any more investigation and thinking are harmful. There comes a time when we must decide and act and never look back."

This method is shown to reduce worry and enable effective action, as seen in the story of Galen Litchfield facing a Japanese admiral.

4. Co-operate with the Inevitable (Acceptance and Resilience):

Some situations are beyond our control. The wisdom lies in accepting them and adapting, rather than resisting.

The analogy of the automobile tire: early tires resisted shocks and were "cut to ribbons," while those designed to "absorb the shocks... could 'take it'."

"It is astonishing how quickly we can accept almost any situation-if we have to-and adjust ourselves to it and forget about it."

The core message is encapsulated in Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr's "Serenity Prayer": "God grant me the serenity To accept the things I cannot change; The courage to change the things I can; And the wisdom to know the difference."

This principle is Rule for breaking the worry habit.

5. Put a "Stop-Loss" Order on Your Worries (Setting Limits): Borrowing from stock market strategy, this principle suggests defining a point at which one stops investing emotional energy into a worry.

Charles Roberts advises: "size up each situation that threatened to destroy my peace of mind and say to myself: 'See here, Dale Carnegie, this situation is worth just so much fussing about and no more?'"

This involves developing "a decent sense of values" and a "private gold standard-a gold standard of what things are worth to us in terms of our lives."

Key questions to ask: ". How much does this thing I am worrying about really matter to me? At what point shall I set a 'stop-loss' order on this worry -and forget it? . Exactly how much shall I pay for this whistle? Have I already paid more than it is worth?"

6. Don't Try to Saw Sawdust (Letting Go of the Past): Regretting past events that cannot be changed is futile and wasteful.

"Even a Mongolian idiot wouldn't dream of trying to go back 180 million years to change those [dinosaur] tracks. Yet that would not be any more foolish than worrying because we can't go back and change what happened 180 seconds ago."

This principle encourages focusing on modifying the *effects* of past events rather than dwelling on the events themselves.

7. Cultivate a Positive Mental Attitude and Mindset: The power of thought in shaping reality is heavily emphasized.

"Our mental attitude has an almost unbelievable effect even on our physical powers."

"If we cherish creative thoughts of courage and calmness, we can enjoy the scenery while sitting on our coffin, riding to the gallows; or we can fill our tents with 'ringing songs of cheer', while starving and freezing to death."

Milton's wisdom: "The mind is its own place, and in itself Can make a heaven of Hell, a hell of Heaven."

James Allen's philosophy: "A man will find that as he alters his thoughts towards things and other people, things and other people will alter towards him... All that a man achieves is the direct result of his own thoughts."

The ability to control one's "thoughts; dominion over my fears; dominion over my mind and over my spirit" is attainable by "merely controlling my actions-which in turn control my reactions."

8. Appreciating What You Have (Counting Your Blessings):

Shifting focus from what is lacking to what is possessed is a powerful antidote to worry and self-pity.

The story of Harold Abbott, who, upon seeing a man without legs, realized his own "incredible riches" and overcame his self-pity, gaining courage.

"Add up your assets, and you will find that you won't sell what you have for all the gold ever amassed by the Rockefellers, the Fords and the Morgans combined."

Reading inspiring stories of individuals overcoming immense physical challenges (like Borghild Dahl, practically blind for half a century, who found joy in the ability to see a little) helps put one's own worries into perspective.

9. Find Yourself and Be Yourself (Self-Acceptance): Embracing one's unique identity and strengths rather than trying to be someone else.

The story of Cass Daley, who turned her "misfortune" of a "large mouth and protruding buck teeth" into a comedic asset by accepting and even exaggerating them.

"Never before, since the beginning of time, has there ever been anybody exactly like you; and never again throughout all the ages to come will there ever be anybody exactly like you again."

Irving Berlin's advice to George Gershwin: "If you do [take a job as my secretary], you may develop into a second-rate Berlin. But if you insist on being yourself, someday you'll become a first-rate Gershwin."

10. If You Have a Lemon, Make a Lemonade (Turning Adversity into Opportunity): Reframing misfortunes as opportunities for growth and improvement.

Chancellor Robert Maynard Hutchins' advice: "'When you have a lemon, make lemonade.'"

A wise man asks: "What lesson can I learn from this misfortune? How can I improve my situation? How can I turn this lemon into a lemonade?"

Ben Fortson, who lost both legs, found a richer life through reading, music, and a profound change in "sense of values" after his accident.

11. Helping Others as an Antidote to Self-Pity and Worry: Engaging in altruistic actions shifts focus from one's own problems and fosters happiness.

Ralph's transformation from a teased "orphan brat" to a respected helper by "getting interested in them [his tormentors] and see how much you can do for them."

Dr. Alfred Adler's "fourteen-day cure for melancholy": "Try to think every day how you can please someone."

"That experience showed me again the necessity of making other people happy in order to be happy ourselves. I found that happiness is contagious. By giving, we receive."

Carl Jung suggested that "about one-third of my patients are suffering from no clinically definable neurosis, but from the senselessness and emptiness of their lives." This emptiness is often filled by helping others.

Professor William Lyon Phelps's method of engaging with and complimenting service people: "taking an interest in people makes them beam with pleasure."

A Chinese proverb: "A bit of fragrance always clings to the hand that gives you roses."

12. The Role of Faith and Spirituality: For many, a religious outlook provides solace and strength in overcoming worry.

"William James-the father of modern psychology-wrote to his friend, Professor Thomas Davidson, saying that as the years went by, he found himself 'less and less able to get along without God'."

The transformative story of a woman who was on the verge of suicide but found relief through prayer and giving "thanksgiving to God for the blessings He had given me."

Dr. Carl Jung's observation: "Among all my patients in the second half of hie-that is to say, over thirty-five-there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life."

The counsel from Matthew: "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; not yet for your body, what ye shall put on... But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

13. Handling Criticism: Criticism often stems from the critic's own desire for importance and can be a sign of one's own accomplishment.

Cadets kicking the King: "when you are kicked and criticised, remember that it is often done because it gives the kicker a feeling of importance."

It "often means that you are accomplishing something and are worthy of attention."

14. Managing Fatigue and Relaxation: Physical and mental rest are crucial for preventing worry and maintaining energy.

"Mental work alone can't make you tired." The fatigue often comes from the emotional and nervous tension associated with the work.

"Tension is a habit. Relaxing is a habit. And bad habits can be broken, good habits formed."

Relaxation begins with muscles: "You always begin to relax with your muscles!"

Importance of frequent rests, even short ones: "Rest is repair... even a five-minute nap will help to forestall fatigue!"

Sleep advice: If unable to sleep, "forget all about it. Just say to yourself: 'I don't care a hang if I don't go to sleep. It's all right with me if I lie awake till morning.' Keep your eyes closed and say: 'As long as I just lie still and don't worry about it, I'll be getting rest, anyway.'"

15. Financial Prudence to Reduce Money Worries: Managing personal finances effectively can significantly alleviate a major source of worry.

"Rule No. 1: Get the facts down on paper." Keep detailed records of spending to understand where money goes.

Live within a budget: "which is going to bring us more happiness-forcing ourselves to live within a tight budget, than having harassing letters in the mail and creditors pounding on the front door?"

Build credit and borrow from regulated sources (like banks) in emergencies.

Teach children responsible attitudes toward money, perhaps through a "cheque-book" system for allowances.

Explore avenues for earning extra income, such as turning a hobby into a small business (e.g., Mrs. Speer baking pies, Mrs. Ora Snyder making candy).

Practical Formulas and Techniques Highlighted

Actionable steps

Live in Day-Tight Compartments:

Focus on "One grain of sand at a time. ... One task at a time."

Magic Formula for Worry Situations:

Ask: What am I worrying about?

Ask: What can I do about it?

Prepare to accept the worst, if necessary.

Then, calmly try to improve upon the worst.

Fact-Finding:

Collect all relevant facts, even those that contradict your desires.

Decision and Action:

Once a decision is made based on facts, act and "never look back."

Keep Busy:

"The worried person must lose himself in action, lest be wither in despair."

Use the Law of Averages:

Ask, "What are the chances, according to the law of averages, that this event I am worrying about will ever occur?"

Co-operate with the Inevitable:

Accept what cannot be changed.

"Stop-Loss" Order:

Assign a value to a worry and decide at what point to stop emotional investment.

Don't Saw Sawdust:

Don't waste energy on changing unchangeable past events.

Control Thoughts:

"Control my actions-which in turn control my reactions."

"Just for Today" Statements:

A series of daily commitments to live agreeably, seize the day, avoid criticism, etc.

Gratitude Exercise:

Make a list of all good things you possess if you feel yourself becoming negative about a person or situation.

Help Others:

Get interested in helping others as a cure for self-pity and emptiness.

Prayer/Spiritual Outlook:

Seek a religious outlook on life as a foundation for peace and strength.

Frequent Rests/Relaxation:

Implement short rests before feeling tired, and practice muscle relaxation techniques.

Exercise:

Use physical activity as an "antidote for worry."

Financial Management:

Get facts on paper, budget, build credit, teach children financial responsibility.

Conclusion

Dale Carnegie's approach to conquering worry is intensely practical and behaviour-oriented. It emphasizes conscious choice, disciplined action, and a shift in perspective. By understanding the detrimental effects of worry, adopting proactive strategies for problem-solving and acceptance, cultivating a positive mindset, embracing self-acceptance, finding joy in helping others, and grounding oneself in faith and financial stability, individuals can systematically dismantle the habit of worry and build a more peaceful and fulfilling life. The countless anecdotes sprinkled throughout reinforce the universality and effectiveness of these principles.