

**Title:** Declutter Your Mind: How to Stop Worrying, Relieve Anxiety, And Eliminate Negative Thinking

**Author:** S. J. Scott, Barrie Davenport

**Key words:** Declutter, actions, thoughts, memories, relationships, emotions controlling

## **Overview**

Are you guilty of constant overthinking which regularly ruins your day? Do you find yourself on a hamster wheel of thoughts, dictating your actions and causing you to frown more than you smile? Does everything seem overwhelming and just too much? If so, the answer is about to come your way! Bestselling authors S J Scott and Barrie Davenport give you all the answers, and much more!

By following the advice and exercises in Declutter Your Mind, you will be on the fast track towards peace and serenity, and with a sure smile on your face.

### **1. Your thoughts have the power to determine your actions**

According to Marcus Aurelius, “very little is needed to make a happy life; it’s all within yourself, in your way of thinking”. This means that your thoughts have the power to dictate your actions.

Everyone has negative thoughts sometimes, it’s impossible to expect to go through life in a constant bubble of positivity; this isn’t a Disney movie! The

key is to be able to recognize these negative thoughts, and avoid becoming overwhelmed by them. If you can do that, you can avoid the impact on your mental health and general wellbeing.

Thoughts are a natural part of life, they are your inner monologue, and they are there all the time, whether you're conscious of them or not. Our authors suggest stopping for a second and becoming aware of your thoughts — you'll soon see how they add up to a constant stream of chatter!

The problem is, these thoughts can often dictate your actions in life, causing you to either miss out on opportunities, or make a wrong move. This constant chatter inside your head can distract you from the here and now. You might think the answer is to stop the constant loop, but that's impossible; thoughts are there for a reason. The more you try and stop it, the more it will make itself known. What you need to do instead is learn how to control your thoughts and reframe them. You have more control than you realize, and that is what this book is going to teach you.

## **2. Humans are hardwired towards negativity**

The human brain has around 100 billion neurons, and there are even more within your spinal cord. It is thought that the links between these neurons (called synapses) add up to around 100 trillion. With that in mind, how are you supposed to control the thoughts that are generated by all these complicated structures? With a lot of decluttering!

As a human, it is far easier to be negative than it is to be positive. Our authors call this the “negativity bias.” Dr Rich Hanson, Senior Fellow of the Greater Good Science Centre at Berkeley has a good point to make: “The brain is like Velcro for negative experiences, but Teflon for positive ones”. This sums it up perfectly! We jump straight towards the negative, and we overlook the high likelihood that the situation is more positive than we think.

*“Your mind is the basis of everything you experience and of every contribution you make to the lives of others. Given this fact, it makes sense to train it” ~ Barrie Davenport*

It is possible to train your brain to be more positive, through an exercise called reframing. We will talk about this in more detail shortly. The problem is, if you’re stuck in a negative mindframe, you’re also stuck in a cycle of low mood and anxiety. The key to a happier life is therefore to declutter your mind, gain control, and reframe your thoughts towards the positive side.

### **3. Why are we mentally cluttered?**

There are many reasons for mental clutter, but our lifestyles play such a huge part. Stress is a massive part of daily life these days. Our authors point out the case of Dan Harris, an ABS New Anchor, who went on to write a book called 10% Happier. Harris had no idea he was suffering from

severe stress, until it all got too much and he had a full panic attack, live on national TV.

We also have far too much choice these days, something our authors refer to as the “paradox of choice”. Of course, having freedom and many choices is a wonderful thing, but too much can cause overthinking, which leads to anxiety. This even goes as far as going grocery shopping; how are you supposed to make a quick decision on the type of sugar to buy when there are six different types?

*“Increased choice leads to greater anxiety, indecision, paralysis, and dissatisfaction” ~ S.J. Scott*

The fact that our minds are hardwired towards negativity doesn't help things either.

#### **4. The importance of breath**

One of the greatest tools we have at our disposal in terms of controlling thoughts and easing “in the moment” overthinking is within you right now — your breath. We take around 20,000 breaths every single day but we don't even notice, because your body does the work. The thing is, you can take control over your breathing and therefore control your thoughts. When you're panicking and overthinking, your breath is likely to be shallow, not

making it all the way down to your diaphragm; you can control that breath, slow it down and make it deeper, and calm your thoughts.

Put simply, breath plays a huge part in helping when you're stressed, anxious, or on a treadmill of overthinking. The best ways to work with this include:

- Sit up straight and don't slouch. By sitting up you will allow oxygen to get to where it needs to go, and you can help the process by mentally breathing into those particular areas
- Breathe through your nose and not your mouth. Your nose has a built in defense system which filters out toxins and air which is too cold
- Use abdominal breathing, i.e. pushing your stomach out slowly when you're inhaling, and letting it deflate back down when you exhale
- Know the difference between shallow breathing and diaphragmatic breathing. Shallow breathing ends right at the chest, whereas diaphragmatic breathing is far deeper, and more beneficial

The next time you want to detach yourself from thoughts which are unhelpful or negative, turn your attention inwards and slow your breathing, making it deeper at the same time. You'll soon notice you gain back control.

## **5. Why you should try meditation**

Most people roll their eyes when they hear the word “meditation”, but it’s not all about chanting and sitting in the lotus position if you don’t want it to be. Meditation can be as simple as being calm and turning your thoughts inwards for a short amount of time. Deepak Chopra said “meditation is not a way of making your mind quiet. It’s a way of entering into the quiet that’s already there, buried under the 50,000 thoughts the average person thinks every day”.

*“Meditation is a lot like doing reps at a gym. It strengthens your attention muscle” ~ Barrie Davenport*

There are many different types of meditation, and it’s really a case of finding what works for you. The simplest way to start, however, is to sit somewhere quiet and comfortable, and to focus only on your breathing. As any distractions enter your brain, simply push them away. If you make it a part of your routine to practice this daily, you’ll notice the differences. A study by the University of Washington showed that meditation is extremely useful for increasing productivity and focus. Other studies have also shown that meditation is useful for reducing stress levels.

## **6. Reframing thoughts and your mind**

The human brain is capable of critical thinking and creative thinking, but uninvited thoughts do nothing but cause stress and clutter up the mind.

This can easily be overcome by learning how to reframe your thoughts, but it certainly takes time and effort.

Reframing involves being aware of the thoughts you're having and learning how to separate yourself from them. Giving thoughts a name helps; rather than thinking "I'm so busy, I'm never going to get everything finished", turn it around to "I'm having the thought that I'm not going to get everything finished".

Another option is to say "no" very loudly, and to visualize a barrier between you and the thought, e.g. a large wall, or you could imagine placing it in a box and locking it closed. Other people find it useful to place a rubber band on their wrist, and whenever a negative thought appears, simply snap the band.

Most people have a trigger. Finding out what your trigger towards negative thinking is is the best way to help yourself avoid it. Brainstorm and write down what your triggers really are. Distract your mind and keep yourself busy if all else fails!

## **7. Why core values are vital to goal setting**

Identifying what is really important to you in your life will help you to gain control over your thoughts. Many people struggle with understanding how this works, but by knowing what your core values are, you can focus on the things that are truly important, and kick out the things which aren't, the

things which cause you stress. Your core values will also act as a yard measurement in life, and your choices and your overall decisions will be made against them.

Put simply, knowing what your core values are helps you to declutter your mind of the things that are needless and a waste of time. They also help you be who you truly are.

In addition, knowing your core values helps you to set goals in your life. Without goals, we drift from place to place, without really ever achieving anything, and without really knowing what true happiness feels like. Having goals doesn't mean that you're living in the future, because we all know that having our heads a few years in front of us is a fast track toward not being present in the here and now. Without goals and plans, life is going to happen anyway; the difference is, when you have plans you have a greater chance of getting to where you want to be. Of course, there is a difference between thinking about the future and making plans, and worrying about it needlessly. As Abraham Maslow, a famous psychologist, once said: "the ability to be in the present moment is a major component of mental wellness".

Make sure the goals you set are SMART:

- Specific
- Measureable
- Attainable
- Relevant



- Time Bound

Your goals should also easily connect to the things you love and enjoy in life, otherwise what is the point?! With every goal you achieve, you'll feel empowered and more confident, especially when it comes to work.

## **8. Relationship problems are the fast track towards misery**

It is a common fact that relationship problems are one of the biggest reasons for unhappiness in our lives. It's impossible to go through life and not experience problems in this area, but if you find that you're constantly running into similar problems with the same person, it's time to assess whether they deserve to remain in your life. Never feel guilty for extracting a person from your life if they cause you constant misery.

A long study, called the Harvard Study of Adult Development, found that people who placed focus on relationships and connections within a social circle were far happier and healthier than those who focused more on achievements. Of course, this means harvesting healthy and happy relationships, the traits of which include:

- Putting the relationship first, or making it a priority
- Having open lines of communication
- Being able to deal with problems in a healthy way
- Trust and respect on both sides

- Shared hobbies and interests
- Intelligent and emotional intimacy
- Being able to accept and forgive
- Physicality and intimacy, in romantic relationships

If you find that you're having problems with certain relationships in your life, you first need to look within yourself. It's no good trying to change someone else, it won't work. You only have the power to control your reactions to them.

## **9. How to be more present**

Have you ever been out with a friend or partner and they've spent a large amount of time on their phone, not really paying attention to you or anything going on around them? It's annoying, isn't it? We're so constantly "switched on" these days that being present is a vitally important component in healthy and happy relationships. A study by the University of North Carolina found that couples who regularly practiced mindfulness, e.g. being present in the moment, quickly saw vast improvements in their relationship.

Learning how to really "listen" is something everyone needs to do. Empathic listening isn't as hard as it sounds, but it will make a huge difference in your relationships. Try these steps:

- Allow the other person to take over the conversation and pay complete attention to them
- Don't interrupt, even if you want to make a valid point
- At suitable times, ask questions which are open ended and are designed to get them to talk and open up more
- Don't come to conclusions without having heard everything
- Once they've finished talking, repeat back the main points of what you heard

By doing this, you are in the moment, present with that person and your relationships will become stronger as a result. Other methods to try include avoiding self condemnation when speaking, and avoiding making negative remarks about other people. This makes others think you're a negative person as a result. You could also try loving kindness meditation, which scientists at Stanford University found to be very useful in helping to increase connections within a social setting. This involves sending positive thoughts and words to other people.

The final point to make in terms of being present and improving your relationships is to avoid making comparisons to other people. This brings down your self esteem and it damages your outlook. Social media has made it all too easy to compare ourselves to the wealth of others, but the reality of their lives is also often an illusion, too. Try and develop a "glass half full" attitude, and be grateful for what is inside the glass.

## **10. Wave goodbye to the past**

Past relationships and events from the past can easily damage relationships in the here and now can help to cultivate a generally negative outlook. Words said in the past can stay with us for years, and when feelings are left unresolved, they can fester and cause huge, open wounds. The bottom line is that if you want to be present and improve the relationships you have in the here and now, you need to wave goodbye to anything that happened in the past, decluttering your mind and letting it go.

Resolve anything that you can, challenge your side of the story and examine if anything could have been done differently, and what you can learn for the future. Finally, offer total forgiveness. This doesn't need to be directly to the person, it can simply be in your own mind, which allows you to gain closure and move on from the situation.

## **11. When it's time to let go**

There will be times in life when you have to let go of certain people, simply because they are causing you more unhappiness than happiness. Of course, this can hurt, especially if there are strong feelings attached to that person, but our authors state that if anyone is causing you any of the following, it's time to let go:

- Abuse of any kind, such as physical, emotional, or verbal
- Disloyalty on a constant basis and telling lies often
- Integrity which is questionable at best
- Negativity much of the time
- Being emotionally immature and using emotional manipulation tactics
- Any undiagnosed or unresolved mental health problems and addictions
- A lack of willingness to communicate

Sometimes, a relationship doesn't have any particular toxic effect, it simply runs its course and doesn't offer happiness any longer. You should never feel guilty for this, but should be sure to remove someone from your life in the right way, e.g. with a face to face conversation, giving the other person the closure they need. Think about how you would want this to be done to you.

## **12. How to declutter your home**

Your home needs to be a place of peace and serenity, somewhere you can go at the end of a long day and feel safe and secure. However, most of us focus on collecting "things", which clutter up our space and make it hard to relax. We become obsessed with the collection of meaningless items and spending our time on social media, missing out on the here and now. In the words of William Morris, "have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful".

Visual and physical clutter has a negative effect on the brain and makes it difficult for us to focus. The Neuroscience Institute at Princeton University conducted a study which proved that if your general environment is full of clutter, you won't be able to focus or relax.

Decluttering your home should therefore be a priority, and can be done in 10 minute increments every day. By being organized and doing this in stages, you will make steady progress, helping to declutter your mind as you go along.

### **13. It's time for a digital detox**

Most people hear the phrase "digital detox" and immediately panic. What you should remember, however, is that there was a time before social media, and everyone survived very well indeed! Think about the amount of time you spend on your digital devices, e.g. your phone, laptop, tablet, gaming devices, etc. Then, realize how that is taking you away from the here and now, stopping you from spending valuable time with your loved ones and having real experiences.

Our authors suggest having an hour of digital free time every single day, and instead of doing anything "switched on", turn to a manual hobby instead, such as reading a book, drawing, making something, or playing a musical instrument.

You could also think about decluttering your actual devices, too. If you work on a laptop and it's full of unused files, your brain isn't going to be able to focus or concentrate on the task at hand. Get rid of any files that you don't need and have a system which helps you to store and find things easily.

## **14. Simplify it all down**

We're all so focused on ticking things off our to do lists and rushing from one appointment to the next, that we forget to actually live and just "be"! All of this doesn't really achieve much at all, but our brains have been tricked into thinking that doing nothing is actually bad for us. It's not! Sometimes doing nothing is the best thing to do! Our authors suggest trying the following tips for a simplified life.

- Prioritize the tasks you need to do in a day
- Question whether you really need to do the things you do, e.g. the commitments you have made
- Have three firm goals every day and focus on those
- Have "sacred time" every day, to simply do nothing and enjoy the feeling
- Make sure that your children have plenty of time to do nothing in particular; this is vital for their development
- Always leave work on time

- Have a break from the digital world every so often

## **15. Goodbye to procrastination**

One of the biggest focus killers, and certainly one of the fastest ways towards mental clutter, is procrastination. Putting things off because we simply don't want to do them creates a snowball effect in the mind, and these tasks hang over you like a dark cloud. Christopher Parker once said, "procrastination is like a credit card; it's a lot of fun until you get the bill".

If a task needs doing, really needs doing, then get it done and forget about it. No clutter, no stress, no dark cloud. Most of us spend at least an hour every day procrastinating, and when you add that up over a year, that's around 52 full days of work! Think of the things you could actually do with that time; you could learn a whole new language or write a book!

To avoid procrastination, make sure that you plan ahead and work out which tasks are the most important. Make sure you have everything you need to complete the task to hand, and take any troublesome distractions out of the equation. You could also try visualization here, e.g. visualizing the feeling of having the task finished, which should spur you on to actually do it. Have some breaks, and then when it's done, reward yourself. That is the best way to get a task done that is prone to causing procrastination.



## **Conclusion**

Your thoughts do not have to control you; they will do so if you let them, but you can take back that control and turn it all around for the better.

Negativity doesn't have to be your go to setting, and while nobody can be 100% positive all the time, you can reframe your thoughts and become a generally more positive person with the exercises in this book. Being more positive has a huge number of advantages, including greater health and happiness throughout your life, and better relationships as a result.

### **Try this:**

1. Write down the things in your life that you are grateful for, and help to cultivate that "glass half full" mindset.
2. Reframe the negative thoughts you have throughout the day by replacing them with positive ones.
3. Set aside 10 minutes every day to sit and do absolutely nothing