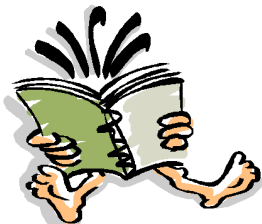


How Does Your Worry Make Sense?

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You may worry that you'll be late, you don't look as great as you "should", your partner is getting bored with you, your finances are drying up, your plane will be attacked by terrorists, and you'll make a total fool of yourself when you meet someone new. If you are [anxious](#), I'm betting my money on the fact that you are a chronic worrier.

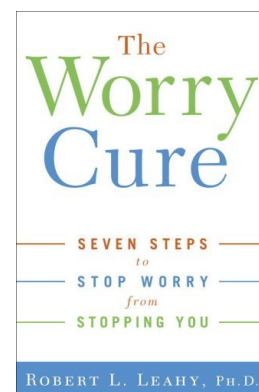
In fact, in one study 38% of people said that they worry every day. Some people say, "I've been a worrier all my life". What's intriguing about this is that chronic worriers seldom can point to anything really bad that has happened that led to their worry. In fact, 85% of the things that worriers worry about have a positive or neutral outcome. But they continue day after day—year after year—to worry about bad things that almost never happen. How can this make sense?

One way of "making sense" of your worry is to ask yourself, "Can we write a rule-book that describes how you worry?" I think we can.

The Worry Cure Rule-Book

OK. Think about yourself and how you worry. Ask yourself if you are following any of the basic rules of HOW I CAN WORRY EVERY DAY OF MY LIFE. Here are the rules that you probably follow:

1. If something bad could happen—if you can simply imagine it—then it's your responsibility to worry about it
2. Don't accept any uncertainty—you need to know for sure
3. Treat all of your negative thoughts as if they are really true
4. Anything bad that could happen is a reflection of who you are as a person



5. Failure is unacceptable
6. Get rid of any negative feelings immediately
7. Treat everything like an emergency

Oh, yeah. I forgot about the eighth rule. If you're a worrier, you probably don't trust your memory anyway---which is another reason to worry. The eighth rule is the one that makes you feel that your worry is driving you insane. It's this:

8. You've got to stop worrying right now or you'll drive yourself crazy.

Let's take a closer look at these simple, easy-to-follow rules for becoming a first class worrier.

1. If something bad could happen—if you can simply imagine it—then it's your responsibility to worry about it. If you're a worrier, you think that any “disturbing” thought that pops into your head means that you have to dwell on that thought and, if “necessary”, do something about it. If you think you might have left the door unlocked (even though you “kind of remember” locking it), then you have a responsibility to double-check it. Simply imagining something bad happening means—to you—that you have to take action. You not only pay too much attention to your negative thoughts---you think you have to obey them. “I might have made a mistake, so I have to go check it again.” I think of chronic worriers as people who are overly conscientious about their minds. Every thought becomes a commandment.
2. Don't accept any uncertainty—you need to know for sure. The research shows that worriers cannot tolerate uncertainty. “I need to know for sure that I won't get fired” or “I need to know for sure that my lover won't leave me”. As a skilled worrier, you feel that you have to keep getting reassurance, keep searching for information, and keep “testing” people to MAKE SURE. Since you can never get certainty, you worry some more. You equate uncertainty with irresponsibility, a bad outcome, or simply “unfinished business” that must be finished. “I know the chances are one in a million. BUT WHAT IF I'M THAT ONE?”
3. Treat all of your negative thoughts as if they are really true. While most other people treat a lot of their negative thoughts as if they were “background noise”, you probably treat your negative thoughts as a sure sign of something bad happening. If you have the thought, “I'll fail the exam”, you immediately conclude that this is very likely to happen. A thought is equated with an outcome. “I think I might lose my job becomes.... I will lose my job!”
4. Anything bad that could happen is a reflection of who you are as a person. When bad things MIGHT happen to you, you believe that they absolutely reflect who you are. So, if you worry about failing an exam---- then you believe that the exam is a measure of who you are as a human being. If you are late, then you assume that everyone is going to think that you are totally irresponsible. If there are difficulties at work, then it will mean that you are totally incompetent. Other people might think,

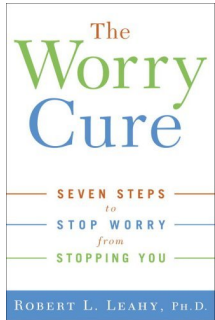
“You did well on other exams” or “You’re generally on time” or “There are always some problems at work”. But not you. You think, **THIS IS WHO I AM!**

5. Failure is unacceptable. I really should have said, “Imperfection for you is unacceptable”. But, don’t worry. You probably equate imperfection with failure. Not doing well on the exam means—to you—that you will fail in life. And you think, “Everyone notices”. If you don’t get the date that you want, you think, “I’ll always be alone”. Failure—for many worriers—is fatal, flawed, and final. So you worry so that you will be motivated---and not fail---or, so that you will be on-guard, and you won’t be surprised. You worry to catch things before they fall apart. You are being conscientious---at least, that’s what you think.
6. Get rid of any negative feelings immediately. Like many worriers, you believe that your negative feelings need to be controlled—or, better still, eliminated. That’s because you probably think, “If I don’t stop feeling bad it’ll last all day, ruin my life, and drive me crazy”. Maybe not that extreme. But worriers have very negative beliefs about negative feelings. Non-worriers are more likely to say, “Sometimes I just have a bad mood—but I get out of it. After all, I’m human.”
7. Treat everything like an emergency. If you don’t know something for sure, you think you’ve got to know **RIGHT NOW**. It’s urgent. You wake up in the middle of the night and you think, “Will I ever find the true love of my life?” Since you don’t know this at 3 AM, you then think, “I really have to know right now.” You have a hard time putting off knowing. Some people (that is, those people not plagued by worries) can say, “I’ll go back to sleep and deal with that some other time.” Not you. You’ve got to know immediately. Since you are always living in the world of the future that you don’t know, you can’t simply relax and enjoy the present moment.
8. You’ve got to stop worrying right now or you’ll drive yourself crazy. So here you are worried. And then it occurs to you that your worries might be driving you crazy, making you sick and ruining your life. So you try to **STOP** worrying. You tell yourself, “OK, Stop this nonsense.” But this doesn’t work. You think that you have to control your worries—so you get angry at yourself for worrying, but this only makes you more anxious and angry. You may try to do other things to control your thoughts---like you might start repeating positive things, such as, “I’m really a good person” or “I believe in myself”, but these affirmations only work for a few minutes. And then you feel more demoralized.

In writing out these “rules” for worriers I am not trying to make fun of your anxiety. But you can see that there is some internal logic, some consistency, in the way you think. You have been using worry to solve problems (that don’t exist), get rid of uncertainty (in an uncertain world), and assure that you will never feel bad or fail. These are impossible goals.

Think about what you think you are getting from your worry. Are you trying to avoid being surprised, are you trying to motivate yourself, are you trying to control your mind? The first step in dealing with your worries is to understand why it makes sense to you.

In future blogs I'll tell you what to do to turn your worries on their head.



To learn more about the nature of worry and what you can do about it, see my book [The Worry Cure: Seven Steps to Stop Worry from Stopping You](#).

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Links:

[1] http://www.amazon.com/Worry-Cure-Seven-Steps-Stopping/dp/1400097665/sr=8-1/qid=1170179793/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1/104-8070893-9749523?ie=UTF8&s=books

[2] http://www.amazon.com/Worry-Cure-Seven-Steps-Stopping/dp/1400097665/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1209670361&sr=8-1

[3] <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/anxiety-files>