

Key One: Right Thinking

Unlock the Door to Self-Control

For as he thinks within himself, so is he.

—KING SOLOMON

KEY #1: RIGHT THINKING.

Change your thinking to change your weight. Get rid of self-defeating thought patterns, believe that you will succeed, and you will have mastered the first key necessary to overcome your struggles with your weight. As you begin to think differently, you will succeed and you will maximize your life. What is true about you in your mind, you will live.

As I told you in Chapter 1, everyone—including you—has what I call a “personal truth.” This is whatever you, at the absolute core of your being, believe to be true about yourself. It is the story you live, the story you tell yourself about everything that is going on in your life, and this includes your weight and your ability (or lack of ability) to keep your weight in check. You hold powerful beliefs about yourself and these influence you, good or bad, and affect how you approach your weight. Everything you do and feel, and more importantly, how you do it and feel it stems from your personal truth.

You don’t have to look far to find negative examples of personal truths that can jump out and ambush your weight-management efforts: you start a weight loss or exercise program to change your shape, but your efforts bite the dust again and again, because you tell yourself that you are a hopeless case who will never succeed. Your personal truth is that of a failure—and honestly, why wouldn’t it be?

You have a long history of failure in this arena of weight control, one that you have internalized, and now it dictates to you what your outcome will be.

Yours may be a positive, accurate truth in which you see yourself as healthy and not at all obsessed with your weight, or it may be a real smashup of misbeliefs grounded in your history of failed attempts at weight control. But whatever it is, you have and live your own personal truth, whether you want to or not. Every success or failure you will have flows from that self-determined personal truth. Even if your personal truth is riddled with self-doubt and self-recrimination and self-flagellation, you will live that truth as you go out into the world.

It should be obvious then, why your personal truth is so important. What you believe about yourself, what you treat as your own reality, is dramatically important because it guides and directs your weight-management efforts. So this personal truth business is a big deal, a huge deal. If you don't get yours straight, you are doomed, and even the best-laid plans to get your weight under lasting control will be ruined.

There are very specific processes that go on inside you—internal factors that encompass the things you tell yourself, the things you believe, and the internal dialogue that shapes your behavior. These internal factors comprise the content of your personal truth, and we will examine them here. As we move forward with this key, I intend to show you what your personal truth is, and how it has infiltrated virtually every aspect of your weight control efforts, and that by ridding your personal truth of distortions and self-deception, you can stop living with a backward focus and reconstruct your personal truth in a way to ensure your success in achieving permanent weight loss. I am not going to give you a new personal truth; what you need is already there! It has always been there; it just needs to be cleaned up and rid of all the junk and misinformation you have internalized for too many years.

The first important change, if you are ever to have what you want in terms of your weight, has to happen in your personal truth. That is why we are starting with this key. Let this key serve as your map, your guide, for sorting out the fictional crap from the authentic truth so that you can reject it and finally uncover and live consistently with who you truly are. As you will discover, you have within

you everything you will ever need to be, do, and have, anything and everything you will ever want and need.

To help you fully grasp the importance of changing and refining yourself from within, allow me to share with you a story from my family life. When my two sons, Jay and Jordan, were younger, my wife Robin and I would give them birthday parties, as parents ordinarily do, and invite their neighborhood friends over for ice cream and birthday cake. Very early on, we established a tradition for the boys' birthday parties that I would dress up as a clown—clown makeup, red-bulb nose, clown suit, the works (some people say I don't need the costume, but hey, that's beside the point)—and be the entertainment. The kids always loved it and had a ball, squeezing my clown nose and tugging on my raggy clown hair. As part of my act, I carried around with me a huge array of colorful, helium-filled balloons, one for every child to play with at the party.

On one particular occasion, I remember a boy to whom I gave a balloon. Unlike the other little guys who territorially clutched the strings of their balloons, this fella looked up at me and asked, "If I let go of my balloon, will it go up real high?" Moved by his question, I knelt down and responded, "Sure it will, son. It's what's inside your balloon that makes it go up real high."

Isn't this exactly the truth about us? Our inner thoughts, beliefs, self-perceptions, and emotions can give us a lift for a positive outcome, or hold us back in complete inertia. You may be telling yourself that you will never lose weight, or that it is too hard, or that you have no self-control. If you accept these thoughts as your personal truth, you will only sabotage your efforts to manage your weight. Your negative thoughts and beliefs will hold you back. And because these internal messages create your emotional state, what you tell yourself can make you feel stressed, anxious, worried, depressed—and more apt to binge or overeat. You mustn't be duped by your own self-talk, any more than if someone else told you that you can't lose weight or get your life under control.

Unless you eliminate self-defeating thoughts, they will actually gain momentum, becoming more deeply lodged in the habitual patterns of your life and more unyielding to change. Of course, before we rid you of these thoughts, we must identify and acknowledge them, and we will do that in this key with a series of invaluable audits that

will give you the clarity you need to make important changes in your thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs.

If you have ever been to a circus, perhaps you have seen six-ton elephants tethered by rope to little wooden stakes. Have you ever wondered why one of these powerful animals doesn't yank that stake out of the ground and stampede off? When the elephants are young and powerless, they are attached by heavy chains to immovable steel stakes. The baby elephants tug and pull, but no matter how hard they try, the chains will not break and the stakes will not come out of the ground. As the elephants grow and get stronger, they come to believe that they cannot move anywhere as long as there is a stake in the ground nearby, no matter how tiny or weak the stake. They don't try to break loose because they think they can't.

So it is with people. If you are like those circus elephants, you've allowed your thoughts and actions to limit you, and like those elephants, you may not have been aware that you had choices. Well, you may not have been aware before, but I'm telling you now that you do have choices, you do have power; now you know. You don't have to stay mindlessly tied to stakes of wrong thinking and self-destructive behavior. You can "pull up the stakes," transcend your conditioning, and reprogram yourself for success rather than failure.

There are many experts who believe that obesity is a disease of choice, and I agree. There are not many diseases of choice, but obesity is certainly one of them. If you gain weight, you are choosing behaviors that encourage the development of obesity, setting up a lifestyle geared toward being overweight. Some of you are fat because you want to be that way, and you are feeding a need, or any number of needs. For others of you, obesity is a disease of metabolism; you may not necessarily eat more than slender people do, and you may indeed exercise, but for biochemical reasons, your body burns food less efficiently. Even if you are in this group, there are choices you can make to manage metabolic and biochemical logjams, and I will talk to you about them in Chapter 11.

How you approach this issue of choice is absolutely critical to your success. You are creating the situation and the state of health you are in. Once you wake up to this fact, you can begin to see, hopefully with crystal-clear definition what choices you have made that led to this result. Then you can start changing thoughts, attitudes, behaviors, and choices to get a different result.

That is not all bad news. Accepting your role in your weight problem, acknowledging that you are accountable, means that you get it. It means that you understand that the solutions lie within you. This gives you a tremendous head start toward permanent weight loss.

With this key, you will learn how to change your internal dialogue and, in doing so, regain self-control and peace of mind. When you begin to think, feel, and behave differently, when you are on the right track internally and emotionally, you'll quickly discover that, like that released balloon I described above, there is an enormous energy that uplifts you.

I realize that when I start talking about mental activity, your understandable reaction may be, "He's asking me to examine my thinking and deal with my emotions. I don't care about that junk. That's just something shrinks talk about. I just don't think about myself that much."

Trust me, I'm not going to spout a bunch of "guru-ized" stuff about thoughts and emotions, or tell you to go up on a mountaintop and get in touch with your "inner child." What I am going to give you is an unbelievably practical set of tools, techniques, and exercises so that you can observe, evaluate, and challenge what has been sabotaging your weight-control efforts internally. Please don't underestimate or discard what I'm talking about here. Once you take control of your internal activity, you're going to be amazed at the power you have to get your weight under control. Losing weight and keeping it off is not just about food. If all you did was change what you eat, you'd lose some weight, but you would not keep it off for very long because you would not have redefined your life from the inside out. For you to achieve permanent weight loss, change must come totally from within you. This is where the real power to create lasting results is found, and what you are about to do here will give you that power.

INTERNAL AUDITS

Because you cannot change what you do not acknowledge, we will begin unlocking this door with two internal audits, designed to help you clarify thought patterns that may be holding you back. The first

of these audits will look into your *weight locus of control* (WLOC), a particular mind-set that reveals who or what you credit or blame for the shape you're in. Some people, for example, blame their obesity on their genes, their metabolism, or on their food-pushing relatives. Some use the excuse that they just can't diet because their husband or children would suffer if they didn't have cookies, chips, or other foods around the house as snacks. Others believe that the power to lose weight and stay fit resides solely within themselves. And some people have a fatalistic mind-set toward their weight gain—the “it's just my bad luck” attitude.

Identifying your primary weight locus of control is important, because once you know what it is, you can exercise greater control over your thinking, feelings, and behavior. You'll be awakened to powerful resources at your disposal—resources that can help you finally achieve your weight loss goals. You'll be able to stop destructive behavior such as overeating, bingeing, on-again, off-again dieting. And you'll have a new measure of self-control over your mind and body.

With this in mind, let's complete the short questionnaire to determine your WLOC. Please be very honest in your answers. It's probably easy for you to ascertain what might be a desirable answer, but that won't help you. Nothing short of complete unvarnished truth and candor will be of any use to you here.

Once you have finished the questionnaire, we'll analyze your score, to better understand your approach to weight control, and consider ways to begin changing specific elements of your locus that are flowing in a negative direction.

YOUR WEIGHT LOCUS OF CONTROL

For each statement below, decide how much you agree or disagree with it. Of the four answer choices, select the one that best expresses how you feel about the statement: if you agree totally without reservations, then circle “a” agree; “b” if you agree slightly; “c” if you disagree slightly; or “d” if you disagree completely.

Part A. Internal Weight Locus of Control

1. Gaining, losing, and maintaining weight is entirely up to me.
 - a. Agree.
 - b. Agree slightly.
 - c. Disagree slightly.
 - d. Disagree.

2. I am overweight as a result of my eating habits.
 - a. Agree.
 - b. Agree slightly.
 - c. Disagree slightly.
 - d. Disagree.

3. I am overweight as a result of being inactive or not getting enough exercise.
 - a. Agree.
 - b. Agree slightly.
 - c. Disagree slightly.
 - d. Disagree.

4. If I set realistic, measurable goals, I can lose weight no matter what.
 - a. Agree.
 - b. Agree slightly.
 - c. Disagree slightly.
 - d. Disagree.

5. Failure to keep my weight off is due to poor effort on my part.
 - a. Agree.
 - b. Agree slightly.
 - c. Disagree slightly.
 - d. Disagree.

Part B. External Weight Locus of Control

6. Family history has most determined my weight and size.
 - a. Agree.
 - b. Agree slightly.

- c. Disagree slightly.
 - d. Disagree.
7. I need a structured, formal diet program, or else I have difficulty losing weight.
- a. Agree.
 - b. Agree slightly.
 - c. Disagree slightly.
 - d. Disagree.
8. I depend on good doctors or nutritionists to help me lose weight.
- a. Agree.
 - b. Agree slightly.
 - c. Disagree slightly.
 - d. Disagree.
9. I need prescription diet pills or other diet aids to lose weight.
- a. Agree.
 - b. Agree slightly.
 - c. Disagree slightly.
 - d. Disagree.
10. I overeat because there is too much tempting food in my environment.
- a. Agree.
 - b. Agree slightly.
 - c. Disagree slightly.
 - d. Disagree.

Part C. Chance Weight Locus of Control

11. Being at my ideal weight is a matter of good fortune.
- a. Agree.
 - b. Agree slightly.
 - c. Disagree slightly.
 - d. Disagree.
12. My failure to lose weight is just bad luck.
- a. Agree.
 - b. Agree slightly.

- c. Disagree slightly.
 - d. Disagree.
13. I will go off my diet if I have a bad day.
- a. Agree.
 - b. Agree slightly.
 - c. Disagree slightly.
 - d. Disagree.
14. No matter if I gain weight, lose weight, or stay the same, it is just going to happen, and that's life.
- a. Agree.
 - b. Agree slightly.
 - c. Disagree slightly.
 - d. Disagree.
15. I am very lucky if I stick to my exercise program.
- a. Agree.
 - b. Agree slightly.
 - c. Disagree slightly.
 - d. Disagree.

SCORING

You will score yourself separately for each of the three parts of the WLOC assessment (Internal, External, and Chance). For each "Agree" answer, give yourself 4 points; for each "Agree slightly" answer, give yourself 3 points; for each "Disagree slightly" answer, give yourself 2 points; and for each "Disagree" answer, give yourself 1 point. Record your totals in the spaces below:

Part A. Internal _____

Part B. External _____

Part C. Chance _____

Your responses to the questions for each part of the assessment generated three separate scores, each ranging from five to twenty. For

each of the three parts of the test—Internal, External, and Chance—your scores place you into one of four categories: very low, low, average, or high for each of the three parts of the test, in accordance with the following chart:

Part A: Internal Weight Locus of Control

5 to 7: Very low attribution of your weight to internal responsibilities

8 to 11: Low attribution of your weight to internal responsibilities

12 to 16: Average attribution of your weight to internal responsibilities

17 to 20: High attribution of your weight to internal responsibilities

Part B: External Weight Locus of Control

5 to 7: Very low attribution of your weight to external responsibilities

8 to 11: Low attribution of your weight to external responsibilities

12 to 16: Average attribution of your weight to external responsibilities

17 to 20: High attribution of your weight to external responsibilities

Part C: Chance Weight Locus of Control

5 to 7: Very low attribution of your weight to chance

8 to 11: Low attribution of your weight to chance

12 to 16: Average attribution of your weight to chance

17 to 20: High attribution of your weight to chance

INTERNAL WLOC

If you are in the average to high end of internal WLOC (12 to 20), you have an *internal weight locus of control*. This means that you operate from a position that says, “If I don’t lose weight, it’s my fault. If I lose weight, it’s because of my efforts.” You feel you have a direct bearing on your results, through your own actions, interactions, traits, and characteristics, and you accept responsibility, as well as credit, for how things turn out. If you’re overweight, for example, you’ll admit that you got that way because you did not eat right or did not exercise enough. You tend to take the majority of accountability for correcting your condition, including making lifestyle changes, and you hold yourself responsible for change in your life. These are positive attributes.

Advice: be aware, though, that there are downsides to having an internal orientation. For example, you might find it difficult to seek counsel from other people or to consult external sources of information for help. Ignoring external resources at your disposal cuts you off from beneficial insights, guidance, and support from knowledgeable people such as physicians, nutritionists, and other healthcare providers.

If your thinking is too internally controlled, your locus of control can create another problem for you. You may tend to internalize your failures and dwell on them. When you engage in this type of thinking, then you have a running internal dialogue with yourself that is negative, one that puts yourself down, engages in “mountain-out-of-molehill thinking,” and convinces yourself that your limitations are too great for lasting success to be realized. And when you think along these lines, you’re discounting your own abilities and extinguishing your goals of ever controlling your weight. You must work on how you interpret your failures, become aware of your negative internal dialogue, and work to change it. This key will help you.

Recognize too that there will be events over which you have no control. For example, you are not to blame for missing your morning walk because there’s a real gully-washer outside. If you say, “I’m mad at myself because I didn’t get to walk today,” you are inappropriately internalizing. You’re blaming yourself for the weather!

Or suppose you've had a perfectly compliant, motivated week. You've eaten nutritiously, and you exercised according to schedule. But the scale says otherwise. Getting mad at yourself would be a mistake, since other factors may be responsible, such as water retention, the addition of muscle to your body because you're exercising (muscle weighs more than fat), or the fact that your body has reached a plateau and is adjusting accordingly. So be realistic about what you can control and what you can't. Pay attention to how good you feel, or how loose your clothes are. These are the hallmarks of real progress.

EXTERNAL WLOC

A high or average score on the external scale (12 to 20) implies an *external weight locus of control*, characterized by highly dependent reliance on powerful others or powerful influences for your success or failure at losing weight. Let me give you an example of how external thinking might manifest in your own life. Think back to one of those times when you went on a diet, you lost a lot of weight, and your friends, with their oohs and ahhs, asked you how you did it. Because you tend to be externally oriented, you probably replied by telling them it was the Such and Such Diet. You credited a diet, instead of your own self-determination, for your success. With this orientation style, you believe that credit for your good results rests outside yourself, on someone or something else. Maybe it is the latest, greatest new diet. Maybe it is a nutritionist or a doctor with whom you worked. Maybe it is a prescription diet drug or a surgical procedure such as a gastric bypass that you credit for your weight loss. When you succeed, you take little or no ownership of this positive outcome.

By the same token, when you fail to lose weight, cycle back up, or bomb out altogether, you take little or no ownership of that, either. You blame being overweight on any number of factors other than the quart of Rocky Road ice cream you have enjoyed every night for the past five years. You feel your weight has nothing to do with your own choices to overeat or binge. It always has to do with other people, other things, and other situations, never with your own actions. For example, you might say you regained all your weight be-

cause a particular diet “stopped working” for you. Or maybe you’re like the middle-aged lug who still wants to eat the way he ate in high school—burgers, fries, pizza, beer, and so on—and still expects to weigh what he weighed way back then. He says that his metabolism is too slow. He never thinks for a moment that he’s sporting a spare tire because, like some people, he may be too lazy to exercise anymore.

No matter what the situation or circumstance, you assign blame elsewhere—even if the fault is yours and not something or someone else’s.

Advice: if you persist in thinking that your weight is controlled entirely by external forces, you’ll have a difficult time losing unwanted pounds. By pinning the blame on your family, your genes, a metabolism problem, or a diet that “didn’t work,” you may be misdiagnosing the reasons behind your weight problem. When you misdiagnose, that means you will mistreat it too, and fail to do what is actually and realistically called for.

This can ruin your chances of permanent weight loss and control because you’re not taking ownership of what’s truly your fault. You’re not facing up to the fact that your poor eating habits and lack of exercise have made you fat. Give yourself a reality check here; there are enough things that affect your weight for which you are clearly and undeniably responsible.

Your solution is to move your locus of control from the external to the internal. In doing so, you make yourself responsible for your own choices and actions. When you begin to see that your particular weight struggles may have little to do with anything outside yourself, your power to change is enormous.

Another huge problem with being in the external niche is that you tend to leapfrog from diet to diet in an elusive pursuit of the “one that works” and because that doesn’t exist, you get frustrated and you get defeated—and as a result you soon find yourself behaving your way back to Blobsville. Your weight-control attempts are characterized by on-again, off-again dieting. When this happens, you will just keep spinning your wheels and staying stuck in the same old ruts.

With too much externally-directed thinking, you’ll set goals for yourself that are too low, or not set any goals at all. For example, you might tell yourself, “I can’t achieve my ideal weight. Something will

stand in my way.” This is all negative externalizing behavior. Imagine the consequences that flow from that type of thinking. Whenever you try to lose weight, you’ve given up your self-control and crushed whatever personal resolve you might have had. Quit thinking like that, and start recognizing that you actively influence positive events in your life. Start pedaling on your own personal power.

CHANCE WLOC

If you are in the average to high end (12 to 20), you have a *chance weight locus of control*. You are basically telling yourself that you have little or no belief in yourself or anything else. You may not see any point in changing your diet, starting an exercise program, or taking any personal responsibility for your health because you believe that your behavior has nothing to do with your choices. If you’re fat or otherwise unhealthy, or even if you lose some weight, it’s an accidental occurrence, a roll of the dice in the game of chance. In your perceptual set, every result, every outcome is due to fate, accident, or just plain luck.

Make no mistake: this mind-set of chance has nothing to do with self-discipline. It’s different from not wanting to change your habits just because you don’t want to discipline yourself. Chance is a feeling of powerlessness: you don’t see the point of discipline and therefore have no motivation to change.

Advice: while research indicates that people with internal and external WLOC will lose weight, high-chance people have less hope of success. That’s because they believe that there’s no point in even trying to change because neither they nor anyone else has any input to or control over their lives.

Dominated by the mind-set of chance, they think people should love them no matter what they look like. After all, it’s just that they were dealt a bad hand. If this is your profile, you are probably treating yourself and your health very poorly. When you live like this, with so little regard for yourself, you are cheating not just yourself, but also everyone around you.

If your internal viewpoint is, “What difference does it make anyway?” or “If fortune goes my way, it’ll happen,” then you’re likely to spend the rest of your life in an overweight and unhealthy condition.

You are missing out on critical opportunities to make a difference in your own life and health.

I trust that at this point you've begun to recognize that your weight locus of control contains lies and faulty logic that form at the core of your personal truth, and that you must start nudging yourself in some different directions. Maybe your thinking needs to become less internally oriented, less externally oriented, or moved off the chance orientation altogether. This will require that you start questioning whether you're appropriately "giving credit where credit is due," that you begin living with more self-determination in certain areas, and that you become more involved in governing the outcomes in your life.

INTERNAL DIALOGUE AUDIT

Your belief about what or who is in control of your weight and your health strongly influences your internal dialogue or self-talk—the private inner conversation you have with yourself about everything that is going on in your life. It involves the negatives you fixate on; self-criticisms such as guilt and shame; and the self-deceptions and distorted views that invade your life. If your internal dialogue is negative and self-condemning, you're creating obstacles for yourself that you don't need, and you can miss real opportunities for success in truly managing your weight.

In this next important audit, I'd like you to tune in to your self-talk in order to identify exactly what it is that you tell yourself. Write down what you say to yourself about these topics:

- Your appearance
- Your body shape
- Your ability to manage your weight
- Your exercise level
- Your self-control
- Your general health

Next, look back over your writing. How would you describe the overall tone or mood of your self-talk? Is it positive, upbeat? Or is it pessimistic, defeatist, or self-condemning? Underline any writing that you think illustrates either especially positive or especially negative self-talk.

Also, what does your writing tell you about your weight locus of control? Does it add any new insight? Is your self-talk oriented externally, internally, or in accordance with chance? Record your answer.

Don't toss your important reflection in the trash can. Hang on to it, because you'll need to refer to it later. It contains some valuable information that will help you understand your personal content with greater clarity than ever before.

MAXIMIZE YOUR WEIGHT LOSS THROUGH SELF-TALK

Throughout your day, you're engaged in dialogues with many other people, but your most active and consistent dialogue is the conversation you have with yourself. You may be with ten different people throughout any given day, but you're with yourself day in and day out, and you talk to yourself more than everybody else in your life combined.

Your self-talk is the real-time mental conversation, the flow of thoughts, that you have with yourself about everything that is going on in your life. It is what you are saying to yourself, about yourself, about the world, about what happens to you, right now, all the time.

Your thoughts are behavior too. Choosing thoughts contributes to your experiences, because when you choose your thoughts, you choose the consequences that are associated with those thoughts. If you choose thoughts that are self-negating and demeaning, for example, then you choose the consequences of low self-esteem and low self-confidence that flow from those thoughts. If you choose thoughts contaminated with sadness, then you will create an experience of depression that flows from those thoughts.

And we can't discuss consequences without mentioning the physiological consequences of our thinking. When you choose your thoughts, you also choose the physiological outcomes that are associ-

ated with those thoughts. For every thought you have, a physiological event occurs in unison with that thought. Take anger, for example. An angry reaction can produce elevated blood pressure, increased heart rate, skin rashes, and other harmful physiological events.

Here's another example, one that's closer to our topic of weight management: imagine thinking, "I really don't like exercise." Your body reacts to this depressed thought by suppressing energy and action. Your body has conformed to that central computer message. With such negative internal programming, is it any wonder that your performance is poor, or that you can't stick to an exercise program for very long? Or perhaps your self-talk is filled with sour-note messages like "I'll never lose weight" or "I hate the way I look in the mirror." Those thoughts will work against you; just count on it.

What's more, since thoughts are behaviors, you must be alert to what payoffs, or rewards, you are getting from the things you tell yourself. At some level, your self-talk is working for you. For example: if you tell yourself, "I don't have time to exercise," then you're giving yourself an easy out for not ever trying to become more active. There's your payoff: you have an excuse for not doing anything about your activity level, and you avoid the pressure of reaching for something better.

Bottom line: your thoughts powerfully program you. That's why our focus with this key will be to jettison any negative self-talk you're dragging around with you and replace it with positive, productive internal dialogue.

But please don't confuse this with "think yourself thin." I don't believe something as important as weight control can be summed up in such a pat phrase, and I'm not here to tell you that the answer to your weight problem is to think good thoughts all the time. If you try to "think thin," I guarantee you, you'll stay as spread out as cold supper. This is about looking analytically at your internal dialogue, blowing the whistle on it, and changing interactions that are in direct opposition to your weight loss goals. The steps you are about to take, right here, will give you the added momentum and power to be healthy and fit for the rest of your life.

STEP ONE: BECOME AWARE OF YOUR FAULTY THINKING

Typically, faulty thinking, especially about weight and weight control, runs along predictable lines. In my work with overweight patients, I have identified ten of the most common self-defeating messages that can undermine a person's weight-control efforts. Obviously, if you know what these messages are and become aware of them in your own life, you can change the course of your weight-control efforts. The ten most common self-defeating messages I have identified are:

1. Externalizing/Internalizing

Your weight locus of control, which we looked at earlier, orchestrates and guides the content of your self-talk. If you tend to be externally oriented, for example, a lot of your internal dialogue might sound like, "I can't lose weight on my own. I'll have to take a diet drug." Or if you have an internal WLOC, you might be telling yourself, "If I'm going to achieve my goals, I've got to work out harder each time." With a chance WLOC, you might tell yourself, "Being overweight is just in the cards. There's nothing I can do about it."

Whatever primary locus is at work in your life, it tends to be an influential force on what you say to yourself. Too much thinking in any one of these three dynamics—internal, external, or chance—can create outcomes you don't want. Thus, if you've acknowledged that you're inappropriately internalizing, externalizing, or being too fatalistic (chance), then you must stop letting yourself be pushed and pulled by that dynamic. Realistically assess what you can control and what you cannot, and take action to make a difference in your life.

2. Labeling

Labels are self-descriptions in your internal dialogue that reflect certain conclusions you've reached about yourself. Many of these labels came from within you when you observed yourself messing up in life, or they have come from other people. Maybe you have been ridiculed all your life for your weight, or have been the brunt of cruel fat jokes.

In America, if you are overweight, you are stereotyped with labels such as “lazy,” “sloppy,” and “ugly.” That’s not fair, nor is it legal in certain employment situations, but it is a grievous part of life if you are overweight. People are going to be insensitive and treat you badly. Fair or unfair, it’s the way things are.

But whatever their source, you tend to internalize these labels, believe your labels, and live by your labels. They can become the definition of yourself if you let them. People dealing with weight problems typically label themselves as “failures” when they can’t lose weight. Once you accept such a label as valid, you annihilate your self-confidence, your self-determination, and your longing for a healthier, more ideal weight. If you believe a negative label, then you’ll absolutely miss evidence to the contrary.

3. Frustration Thinking

Many of you, when faced with going on a diet or starting an exercise program, tell yourself that you cannot tolerate the frustration and discomfort of not eating your favorite foods or having to haul your ample rear to the gym. Unable to stand the discomfort of changing, you have a low frustration set, expressed in thinking that goes something like this, “It’s too hard. It’s easier to stay fat. I can’t be bothered with exercise.”

So to protect yourself, you convince yourself that any type of dietary or lifestyle change is just too difficult. This type of internal dialogue is marked by constant pessimism, and you upset yourself with these limiting thoughts. One reason you persist in it is its payoff: you’re avoiding frustration and discomfort. But in doing so, you’re cluttering up your mind with all kinds of BS, so every time you think about losing weight, you quit before you even get to the starting line.

4. Fortune-Telling

Like an internal psychic, your self-talk makes predictions about your performance, and when negative, this prediction tends to be a doom-and-gloom type prophecy. Your internal fortune-telling might run the gamut from “This won’t work; I’ll never lose weight; I will fail; I’ve got too much to lose” to “I’ll never drop those last five or ten

pounds.” When this type of internal dialogue is really active, rationally confident thoughts get shunted out of your mind because they aren’t as dominant or demanding. In essence, this negative internal dialogue can become a vicious cycle of self-fulfilling prophecy, controlling your thinking and predicting the outcome you will have.

The smashing of the four-minute mile barrier in 1954 is a classic example of a self-fulfilling prophecy. People all over the world believed that running this distance in under four minutes was physiologically impossible for any human being, and so it never happened, until a young physician named Roger Bannister believed he could do it. And he did. In his legendary, record-breaking race, Bannister sprinted across the finish line in a time of three minutes and fifty-nine point four seconds. But what is truly instructive about this story is that in the very next year, twelve more runners broke this previously unsurpassable mark, and today athletes do it all the time.

If you’re working at managing your weight, tune in to whether you are making predictions about your performance. If you are, you could be setting yourself up for an outcome you don’t want.

5. All-or-Nothing Thinking

Suppose you step on the scales after you get out of the shower and the news is not good. If your internal dialogue tells you, “I gained weight again. All my attempts are useless,” you’re engaging in all-or-nothing thinking. You’re saying to yourself that the situations, circumstances, events, and results in your life are all good or all bad, black or white, with no shades of gray in between. That dialogue, with all of its self-defeating messages, is particularly damaging because it can reactivate unwanted behavior.

Look at it this way: you have dinner one night with your family and decide to have a small piece of pie for dessert—that’s fine, but then your internal dialogue kicks in, and you say, “What the heck, I’ve blown my diet. I might as well eat the whole pie.” With an all-or-nothing conversation with yourself, you entertain thoughts that because you ate a piece of pie, all was lost, so you might as well go from a bite to a full-blown binge. It is this type of distorted self-talk that often precedes addictive relapses among alcoholics, drug addicts—and overeaters.

6. Catastrophizing

When you evaluate events, do you exaggerate their meaning or significance? For example, does your internal dialogue ever chatter along these lines: “If I don’t lose weight this time, I’ll never do it.” “I gained two pounds. This is horrible.” “My boyfriend will hate me if I gain weight.” If your internal dialogue sounds like this, you are catastrophizing—expecting the worst or making a melodrama out of everything that happens to you. For you, none of life’s events, even the everyday ones, are ordinary. Every pound you gain is the most you’ve ever gained. Every slipup you have or mistake you make is a disaster. Every comment made to you is the rudest or most devastating you’ve ever heard. Like all forms of negative self-talk, this internal dialogue is self-defeating because you are reacting illogically toward a situation instead of viewing it rationally. When you talk to yourself like this, it can lead to a loss of self-control over healthy behavior.

7. Pipe Dreaming

Maybe thoughts of wanting to look like a fashion model or a Hollywood hunk are passing through your mind. Your internal dialogue is daring you to entertain fantasies of having the perfect body. Or maybe what you hear is a message that you can drop two sizes in two weeks. On the surface, this kind of talk may sound like positive, “I believe in myself” dialogue, but in truth it is very negative because the messages are unreasonable and unrealistic. Imposing unattainable goals on yourself leads to feelings of failure because these dreams do not materialize. If you’re chasing after impossible pipe dreams, you’re bound to be disappointed. You have to get real about what you can really achieve.

8. Gut-Level Reasoning

Sometimes the toxic inner environment that your internal dialogue sets up stems from transient, unreliable feelings that you may experience at any given time. For example, the belief that “I feel fat” gets translated by your internal dialogue into “I must look fat.” You accept a feeling as absolute truth, and once you begin believing it, why

would you continue to process data to the contrary? You might have a heap of evidence that runs counter to your looking fat, but your data-processing ability is so out of whack that you don't see or hear the more accurate, reliable information.

9. Self-Downing

When you come down on yourself, your internal dialogue cranks up its volume, becoming so loud that it crowds out other, more relevant and truthful information. If you're depressed about your weight, for example, your internal dialogue is likely to scream out put-downs such as, "I can't lose weight. I don't have any self-control." You start condemning yourself for not succeeding, or obsessing about what you didn't do or could have done better. I'm sure you've said these things to yourself thousands of times. The problem is, if you treat this internal browbeating as gospel truth, it becomes reality for you.

Understand that much of this dialogue, in which you put yourself down so persistently and destructively, has been told to you by others in your life. It may be that your parents, partner, or relatives have verbally assaulted you with remarks like "You can't get thin," "You don't have what it takes to lose weight or be attractive," or "You'll always be as big as a house." Their words have gotten inside your head, poisoning your thoughts and distorting how you see yourself, and have been a major determinant of your internal dialogue. But hear me out on this: it's bad enough if people in your life put you down, but it becomes disastrous if you internalize their put-downs, take over for them, and wind up kicking your own butt. You've got to acknowledge that this may be happening in your own mind, and blow the whistle on it. Only then will you have the power to change these highly destructive internal responses.

10. Poor Me Thinking

Another particularly treacherous form of self-downing is "poor me thinking," born out of feeling deprived or out of the fear of getting hungry. It can surface when you go on a diet that is overly restrictive. You find it hard to envision ever being able to enjoy a party, go on vacation, eat what other people are eating, and so forth. This is a con-

versation in which you start feeling sorry for yourself, and a lot of your self-talk might sound like: “It’s not fair that other people can eat cream puffs all day, and I can’t.” “I hate depriving myself of one of life’s pleasures.” “I shouldn’t have to work this hard to get in shape. It’s easier for other people to do it.” “I’ll get too hungry.” “I can’t go to any parties.”

What can take this self-talk (or any self-talk, for that matter) from a whisper to a whoop is poor nutrition. If you’re indeed following a diet with limited choices, this can alter your mental state for the worse. Poor nutrition throws your physiological balance off just enough to create a depressed mood, and with it, its underlying negative self-talk.

The end point of this type of thinking is highly destructive. For example, you may overeat or binge in order to compensate for your feelings of deprivation. Feeling sorry for yourself, you embark on a feeding frenzy in an attempt to cope. But what you fail to rationally take into account is that you can still go to parties, you can still go on vacations, and you can still do anything you want to do. You just need to focus on the camaraderie, the scenery, the activities, and the “battery recharge” you get from relaxation and recreation, rather than center every occasion on food. Think about deprivation another way: by overeating, you’re depriving yourself of a healthy weight, an attractive appearance, self-regard, and peace of mind.

These are some classic types of internal dialogue that may be sabotaging you. I hope you’ve recognized from this discussion that internal dialogue, when negative, is relentless, and can be highly destructive. If you’re demeaning yourself, your body, and your personal control, and your internal dialogue shows it, you’ll be compromised. Everybody criticizes their bodies. Everybody has self-doubt. Everybody has anxiety. But when any of these kinds of messages get their hooks in you, when they infiltrate your thinking, it becomes more difficult to get closer to what you really want to have and do. If you passively accept the messages of your internal dialogue, if you let it speak to you unchallenged, you have just stonewalled your chances of getting your weight under lasting control.

STEP TWO: CHALLENGE YOUR FAULTY THINKING

If your weight-control problems are due at least in part to errors in your thinking, to faulty assumptions about what is going on in your life, you have to work to challenge that thinking. Like a prosecutor in a courtroom, you must put your thoughts on the witness stand, take a hard look at the evidence and the testimony, and confront them with facts, truth, and realities.

Toward that end, you must ask four questions. These are questions that I've talked about in prior books, and I emphasize them here because they have come to be a personal yardstick for me in my life in order to make sure that my internal dialogue is rational and productive. These questions can help pave the way to positive and empowering thoughts in your own life. This stuff works for me, and I know it will work powerfully for you in your weight-control efforts. Once you get used to testing every thought and perception against these questions, you'll get to the point that trying to slip a lie past you will be like trying to bag flies. Here are the four questions:

Is your internal dialogue true?

Most of us don't question the truthfulness of our internal dialogue; instead we infect it with many of the self-defeating messages I just described for you. Take Dan, for example, a former patient of mine who frequently lapsed into eating junk food when by himself. His self-talk screamed, "I can't help bingeing when I'm alone." What I asked him went like this: "Is that really true? Is there nothing else, nothing at all that you can do when you are alone? Isn't there some activity, something that doesn't involve food, that you could do rather than binge?" Once we examined the evidence concerning the situation, Dan started generating a practically endless list of activities he could do instead of bingeing.

Start reacting to your internal responses as if they were statements on a true-false quiz (I used to love that kind of test back in school because there was at least a 50 percent chance I'd get the right answer!). Are your responses true or are they false? Can you prove it? For example, what is the evidence that you are a failure? Is this just

something that you believe now because your mother or father told you that you'd always be fat and you internalized this message because you believed them and accepted it as true, without deliberately testing it? Where's exhibit A, B, or C that you are a failure? Surely, you've had numerous successes in your life so maybe this is not true at all. Maybe you've never really thought about it. If you don't evaluate your thinking and sort out what's true and what's false, then you'll act on something that you simply accept as true, perhaps mindlessly, with no consideration of measuring it against a standard of authenticity. You've got to start challenging your internal dialogue in this regard, and expose the fictions and the falsehoods. No matter what you're telling yourself, test everything against this question. Should it be true, then you must deal with it. If it's not true, kick it out!

Does your internal dialogue serve your best interests?

It's a sure bet that you're clinging to certain thoughts and beliefs because they serve as a handy excuse or justification for why you've botched your weight-control efforts in the past. A good example is: "Because obesity runs in my family, I just can't lose weight."

When you hold such views, you're locked in classic victim thinking. You're reacting to the world as a victim, clinging to the belief that your weight problem can't possibly be your fault. You've been conning yourself without cross-examining yourself, because no one's listening to your internal dialogue except you. You've been willing to accept your excuses at face value and you've been letting yourself off far too easily.

But let me ask you this: is holding on to the excuse that you're a victim, blaming others for your results, really going to help you get in shape? Does it bring you happiness, peace, calm, and fulfillment? Is it working for you? If you answered No, No, and No, then stop listening to your own justifications and excuses for why you are putting up with these thoughts and beliefs, actions and inactions, that are not working for you. If it's not working, let go of it!

Bottom line: there are no victims, only volunteers. You are creating the situations you're in; you're creating the thoughts and emotions that flow from those situations. You must embrace the fact that you own your problems and take action to solve them.

Does your internal dialogue advance and protect your health?

Do negative thoughts about exercise make you avoid it and put your health and vitality on the line? For example, does the fact that you've grown buttery prevent you from going to exercise classes because you are too self-conscious about your body, so you just stay home and do nothing? Does your self-imposed disgust over your appearance lead to habitual bingeing on sugary foods and processed foods that exacts a physical toll you can ill afford? Are your reactions to stress generating physical accord in your body? Or are you constantly worked up, wearing down your body and subjecting yourself to disease? It may be that now is the time to understand that holding such beliefs is not helping you; that in fact, they are hurting you.

Is your internal dialogue helping you achieve your weight-management goals?

I can't express it more plainly than this. If your goal is to achieve permanent weight loss, and experience the physical and emotional health that stems from it, then you must test your internal responses against that goal. Given your goals, how does your current thinking help you get there? If you want to look better, feel better, be better, how does repeating "This won't work," or "It's too hard," help you achieve permanent weight control? Are your thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes moving you closer to what you want? Or are they leading you farther and farther away from a normal, healthy weight?

When your internal dialogue isn't true, when it doesn't serve your best interests, when it's hurting your health, when it's standing between you and your efforts to reach your weight loss goals, then it's time for you to jack up your thinking and do something different. It's time to generate positive, healthy internal dialogue that does everything the negative internal crap does not. If you shake up your internal messaging system, challenging in particular those views you hold about yourself, rather than blindly or habitually accepting them as the whole truth and nothing but, then your level of control over your weight will strengthen, and I mean fast.

STEP THREE: RESTRUCTURE YOUR THINKING WITH POSITIVE INTERNAL DIALOGUE

You've seen through the examples here that internal dialogue can be highly negative and disruptive. The flip side to this is a positive type of internal dialogue—one that is rationally optimistic and productive.

Now, I am not here to be your Norman Vincent Peale and tell you that the secret to success lies in the “power of positive thinking.” That is not at all what I am talking about. Positive, rational internal dialogue differs greatly from the power of positive thinking. Here's what I mean: positive internal dialogue consists of thoughts and messages that are grounded in reality, not lies, assumptions, or opinion. It is truthful engagement with the world that allows you to live in accord with reality.

What positive internal dialogue is not is a bunch of preachy mantras, wrapped up in truth-denying rah-rah affirmations. Let's say for example that you're in the habit of eating a bag of potato chips every day after work, while reciting to yourself, “I'm a good person just like I am.” Who's kidding whom here, anyway? The truth is that you're not requiring enough of yourself in terms of self-control. You're putting food away like a boardinghouse cat. This is not even close to what I call positive, healthy internal dialogue. If you tell yourself good things that are not based in reality, this brand of internal dialogue is not at all positive. It all comes back to your personal truth, and you know that is a truth you live. Lie to yourself, and you will pay the price of never really achieving your weight loss goals over the long-term.

A rational, healthy internal dialogue would tell you the truth so you can do something about it. If you've got a problem, admit it. Have an honest conversation with yourself. For example: “I'm not powerless over this behavior. I'm in charge of myself. I have to choose what's more important: reactive overeating or taking care of my health. It's my choice, and I can do something about it.” Whatever you're telling yourself, tune in to it, challenge its authenticity, and replace it with fact, not fiction. Don't give yourself rah-rah self-con jobs.

We discussed earlier that negative internal dialogue physiologically suppresses action and energy. When you begin to nurture your mind with rational, healthy thoughts, a similar process occurs, but one that is infinitely more transformative and empowering in its effect. If you are thinking rationally positive thoughts, your body and brain are energized and primed for success. Scientists have been studying this mind-body connection for years, and their research consistently shows that the thoughts we have can maximize performance in nearly every aspect of life. Musicians perform with fewer errors when they hold self-affirming thoughts. Salespeople increase their sales quotas. Athletes increase their speed and accuracy.

The same necessity for changing your internal dialogue applies to you. The thoughts you have about how you are going to execute your weight-control strategies will determine how well you do. That's why you must restructure your thoughts. This involves replacing negative internal dialogue with fact-based messages that drive you to do so much more than just get by.

I want you to root out the self-defeating thinking that holds you back and incorporate rational, balanced, and productive dialogue into your thinking. Doing this means that you must have a new conversation with yourself that responds to negative messages truthfully and positively. The accompanying table provides examples to guide you.

However unhelpful and unhealthy your thought patterns, you must recognize that you no longer need to think like this. You can create an internal dialogue that is healthy, constructive, and joyful. That's what this step will help you do.

It's now time for you to identify what goes through your head, test its validity, and generate positive balancing internal dialogue. You'll accomplish this by completing the chart below. It asks you to do three things:

Record instances of negative self-talk that may be contaminating your thoughts;

Test the validity of those thoughts using the four questions we discussed earlier in this chapter; and

Replace those self-defeating thoughts with positive self-talk (restructuring).



**TABLE 2. RIGHT THINKING RESPONSES
TO NEGATIVE SELF-TALK**

TYPE OF SELF-TALK	SELF-DEFEATING THINKING	RIGHT THINKING
<i>Externalizing/ Internalizing</i>	My family is conspiring to keep me fat, so I can't lose weight.	Losing weight is within my control.
	I didn't lose weight this week; I must have screwed up.	I've reached an expected plateau. That's a good sign. My body is adjusting to the positive changes I've made.
<i>Labeling</i>	I'm a loser. I'm a failure.	Replace these thoughts with descriptions that are positive and accurately reflect who you are and what you stand for. Instead of a confining label, describe yourself positively, but always realistically. Call yourself a winner. Call yourself a runner. Call yourself a body-builder. Call yourself a health enthusiast—whatever, but describe yourself in a manner that reflects a winning identity.
<i>Frustration Thinking</i>	I'm so overwhelmed; I can't do it.	As long as I continue working on my weight, I'll achieve the goals I have set for myself.
<i>Fortune-Telling</i>	I will not succeed.	No matter what happens, I'll stay the course. If I do what is required, I will succeed.
<i>All-or-Nothing Thinking</i>	I've missed too many exercise classes. I'll just quit.	Quitting will get me nowhere. I'll analyze my schedule and make exercise a time-protected priority.

(continued on next page)

TYPE OF SELF-TALK	SELF-DEFEATING THINKING	RIGHT THINKING
<i>Catastrophizing</i>	I've gained two pounds, and it's terrible.	I'll review my week and see where I can improve. After all, since starting this program I've lost 20 pounds.
<i>Pipe Dreaming</i>	I'm going to lose five pounds this week.	I'll stick to my program, a day at a time. Whatever I lose will be a positive.
<i>Gut-Level Reasoning</i>	I feel fat, so I must look fat.	There's no evidence for this. I am looking better than ever.
<i>Self-Downing</i>	I hate my thighs.	I am learning to love my God-given body, and I love how I feel and look.
<i>Poor Me Thinking</i>	I can't have fun anymore.	Not true. The fitter I get, the more fun I have, and the more activities I can participate in. Life is more fun than ever.

To help you in this important work, please take out the Internal Audit assignment you completed at the very beginning of this chapter in which you recorded your thoughts about your appearance, your body shape, your ability to manage your weight, your exercise level, your self-control, and your general health. Review those messages, selecting the ones that are defeated and negative in tone. Transfer any that apply to the worksheet below.

Don't just breeze by this assignment, thinking about your answers in your mind. Instead, write them out so that you are coherent and consistent. Putting them down on paper, then analyzing them, will help you see whether they make sense or have any basis in fact.

To complete this assignment, use the chart on page 79. In the second column ("Self-Defeating Thinking"), record your self-talk as it pertains to the six subjects listed. Identify the type of self-talk you're expressing and list it in the first column ("Type of Self-Talk"). See pages 66 to 71 for help.

Then review your answers—the thoughts you recorded—for each of the six areas and test their validity. For each thought you recorded, ask:



**CHART 1. ANALYZE AND RESPOND
TO YOUR SELF-TALK**

1. TYPE OF SELF-TALK	2. SELF-DEFEATING THINKING: WHAT DO YOU TELL YOURSELF ABOUT THE FOLLOWING:	3. VALIDITY	4. RIGHT THINKING
	Your appearance:		
	Your body shape:		
	Your ability to manage your weight:		
	Your exercise level:		
	Your self-control:		
	Your general health:		

Is it true?

Is it in my best interest?

Does it protect my health?

Does it help me reach my goals?

Write your answers in the third column (“Validity”) next to each instance of self-talk.

Finally, create positive balancing dialogue. For each self-defeating thought you recorded in column two, write an alternative thought that is positive, rational, and holds up to the truth of your weight-management efforts. Record this alternative thought in the fourth column (“Right Thinking”). Replacing negative internal dialogue with more constructive messages is an effective tool that can help you reduce the frequency and intensity of your negative self-talk.

As you go through this important exercise, tell yourself that you will probably add to this list over time, since you’ll encounter challenges down the road, and will recognize on your internal radar other negative messages. Always be on the lookout, determined to unmask distortions and wrong thinking. Getting rid of negativism is a giant step toward achieving permanent weight loss and control.

You have completed some very vital work here. If wrong thinking has been infecting your life for a very long time, keep in mind that changing it is an ongoing process. You must seek to question your locus of control, dispute the inner conversations you have with yourself, come to grips with your self-honesty, and make it a matter of practice to replace self-abusive talk with rational, healthy dialogue. You must work hard to ensure that your thinking and your self-perceptions are not continually poisoned by faulty thinking. Be patient with yourself as you go through this process, because these are new skills that you are learning, and like any new skill, you master them only through practice.