

SELF-SABOTAGE

“Making a choice that hurts us. One that is harmful or damaging to our wellbeing, growth, status, progress or goal achievement.. Can be conscious or unconscious.”

CONSCIOUS OR UNCONSCIOUS

Often an employee may be aware they're making a choice that goes against their goals (e.g. choosing to work on an admin task when they have an important presentation to prepare). At other times, their self-sabotage may be unconscious, undermining a goal but only recognising they have done so after the fact.

THE IMPACT OF SELF-SABOTAGE AT WORK

As well as negatively impacting the person's self esteem, self-sabotage prevents them from performing at their full potential.

It can also lead to problems with colleagues who may consider the employee less reliable, less of a team player or less able. And of course customers may think less of the employee who self-sabotages, both professionally and as an individual.

HOW TO SPOT IF AN EMPLOYEE IS SELF-SABOTAGING *And what to do about it*



Self-sabotage can show up as a lack of mental or behavioural flexibility as the employee becomes caught in a loop and finds it hard to break out and find a new way of being that will serve them better.

The brain likes stability and gets locked into patterns that are quick and easy for it to follow. This is how the brain makes sense of the world and these patterns feel like normality, so even when the behaviour pattern is not serving us, it can still feel comfortable.

This can be why self-sabotage is hard to shift, as when we seek to change our behaviour or thinking, the brain works to maintain its homeostasis and shift us back to what has become a comfortable place.

THE MOST COMMON TYPES OF SELF-SABOTAGE

Self-sabotage arises from old, often childhood-related, survival strategies that helped us at the time they arose but which are no longer serving us. When these old strategies and their associated patterns of behaviour and thinking are over-used, or used inappropriately, they turn into our saboteurs.

SPOT THE SABOTEUR

THE JUDGE	Finds faults with self, others, and circumstances. Causes most anger, regret, guilt, shame and disappointment.	THE AVOIDER	Focusing on the positive and pleasant in an extreme way. Avoiding difficult and unpleasant tasks and conflicts.
THE PLEASER	Indirectly tries to gain acceptance and affection by helping, pleasing or flattering. Loses sight of own needs and becomes resentful as a result.	THE HYPER-ACHIEVER	Dependent on constant achievement for self-respect and validation. Highly focused on external success. Loss of touch with deeper emotional needs.
THE HYPER-VIGILANT	Continuous intense anxiety about all the dangers and what could go wrong. Vigilance that can never rest.	THE VICTIM	Emotional and temperamental as a way to gain attention and affection. An extreme focus on feelings, particularly painful ones. Martyr streak.
THE CONTROLLER	Anxiety-based need to take charge and control situations and people's actions to one's own will.	THE HYPER-RATIONAL	Intense and exclusive focus on the rational processing of everything, including relationships.
THE RESTLESS	Restless, constantly in search of greater excitement or constant busyness. Rarely at peace or content with the current activity.	THE STICKLER	Perfectionism and a need for order and organisation taken too far. Highly sensitive to criticism.

Courtesy: Shirzad Charmin

To spot self-sabotage, look for the behaviours that characterise each of the saboteurs. You may notice an employee who constantly procrastinates or who is persistently negative (about themselves, others and situations). It may be perfectionism to the point of paralysis; or an inability to set boundaries; perhaps an overwhelming need to be in control (of people and/or situations). These are all classic signs of self-sabotage.

HOW TO HELP EMPLOYEES BREAK THE PATTERN OF SELF-SABOTAGE

Self-sabotaging behaviours often become hard-wired into our brains, an automatic reaction or way of being that we slip into without thinking, simply because we've been practicing them for so long. However, our brains are capable of changing and developing throughout life. We can take advantage of this neuroplasticity to rewire our brains away from thinking and behaviours that are not helping us, to new ways of thinking and being that are more appropriate to our current situation.

START BY IDENTIFYING WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON

1. Encourage the employee to identify how their current behaviour or thinking is benefitting them
2. Get them to look a little deeper and think about the costs of continuing with that behaviour or way of thinking
3. Then ask them to look to the future, and to identify the gains they will make by changing their thinking or behaviour

CREATE A MENTAL SEPARATION BETWEEN THEM AND THE VOICE OF THEIR SABOTEUR

Help them create a mental distance between themselves and the negative voice in their head. This opens up a place of choice where they can choose to listen to that voice, or not. They might try saying something like this to themselves *"I notice my Stickler is telling me I have to stay until midnight to make sure this piece of work is perfect"*. By naming the saboteur and what it is saying, the employee will become more aware of what's going on and can decide for themselves if what the voice is saying is actually true or if they have another course of action open to them.

CREATE A PHYSICAL SEPARATION BETWEEN THEM AND THE VOICE OF THEIR SABOTEUR

Encourage the employee to create a physical distance between themselves and the negative voice using breathing exercises. Sitting comfortably with their feet flat on the floor, one hand on their lower belly. Ask them to take 3-4 deep breaths, counting the in-breath for three, and then a longer out-breath for five. This simple exercise will bring in a space so they have an opening to decide whether to listen to the voice or not, and to think about what action they would like to take next.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Allison Lindsay is a coach, business psychologist, breathworker and wellbeing facilitator with over 20 years' experience in the corporate world.

She now runs the School for Wellbeing Ltd, dedicated to helping employees connect the intelligence of brain and body to overcome self-sabotage, build resilience and wellbeing, and unleash their full potential through the creation of human-centred workplaces.

If you'd like to find out more, or for guidance around how to support self-sabotaging employees, please contact her at allison.lindsay@schoolforwellbeing.com