

5 Reasons Affirmations Don't Work



Affirmations are very specific, positive declarations that are said and/or written in attempts to change a negative belief about ourselves. If you follow any of the popular self-help books, you'll find references made to affirmations, and even specific ones you can use when struggling with a particular problem. You can create an affirmation for virtually any issue, whether it is finding love, overcoming illness, or becoming financially abundant. The theory behind the use of affirmations is that what we think and say creates our reality, based on how our neurons fire and wire together.

The more you think and act on certain beliefs, the more that neuronal firing pattern is reinforced. This is absolutely true; our thoughts and actions are essentially "habits" that we have learned. We already know that the brain is not a fixed entity based on the research of [neuroplasticity](#), and that it's possible to train it differently with time and consistent effort. In this sense, affirmations have the potential to change our self-concepts. But while I'm all for positive thinking, one of the common complaints from many people about affirmations is that they simply don't work. It's easy to tell these people that they are "doing it wrong", or that what they believe will come to manifest eventually, but this type of response actually does more harm than good. It reinforces the inadequacy that the person attempting affirmations already feels, and is actually based in ignorance of how the mind works. Affirmations *do* work for some people, but they don't for others and actually can backfire by reinforcing negative

thought patterns. If you haven't had success with affirmations, consider the following:

1. You have low self-esteem: [Research](#) has shown that people with low-self esteem react negatively to positive statements about themselves. This finding is important to understand. It's not just that the affirmation or positive self-statements don't work, but it can *actually make you feel worse about yourself!* If you have low self-esteem (click [here](#) to take a self-esteem quiz), then likely your negative self-concept will be strengthened when using affirmations because deep down, you *know* there is no possible way they could be true.

2. You don't believe it's true, regardless of your self-esteem: Just because you make a declarative statement, and you want it to be true, doesn't mean you believe it is achievable. If you have high self-esteem, but still find your affirmations aren't working, try making them more "reasonable". For instance, if you are dealing with a medical issue and your affirmation is "I am healthy and radiant", your subconscious belief may resist that statement. Instead, using an affirmation like "My body is always healing itself" may be more appropriate. Your affirmation has to be reasonable enough that you can connect to its truth on a conscious level.

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3. There are more cons to believing your affirmation than pros: You might not have considered the pros and cons to an affirmation coming true, but this is an especially useful

exercise to consider if you are feeling stuck. While I would never discourage anyone from dreaming big when it comes to their future vision, I do recommend thoroughly understanding the pros and cons to any affirmation or goal when it seems like progress has stalled. For instance, your affirmation may be "I am healthy and a normal weight for my body" but yet being a normal weight will mean losing several pounds, buying a new wardrobe, socializing less with friends, etc. Most of our pros are conscious, which is why we set the goal or affirmation in the first place. *But the cons are largely unconscious.* Understand and address your cons first, and adjust your affirmation as necessary. For example, instead of the general statement "I am healthy and a normal weight for my body," you might affirm more specifically, "I can make healthy food choices at dinner with my friends" prior to an evening out.

4. You don't practice mindfulness: Mindfulness is the nonjudgmental awareness of the present moment. Practicing mindfulness is beneficial in pretty much all situations, but especially if you have low self-esteem, and if you feel your affirmations aren't working. I would recommend a daily mindfulness practice, beginning at 1 minute a day if this is new to you, up to 5 minutes minimum daily. Do this consistently, and I guarantee that you will develop a deeper insight into the areas of your life you want to improve, and intuition as to how to make this happen. The more mindful you can be when using affirmations, the more likely you are to use the ones that will work for you.

5. You're resistant to being told what to believe: For some of us, simply being told, as opposed to asked, is enough to create resistance subconsciously, even when we are the ones doing the telling! When we are told anything, whether it is to do something or a statement about who we are, the mind either accepts or rejects the statement rather than finding out why the statement is true or useful. If an affirmation is not

working, try rephrasing it in the form of a question. Instead of “I am creative and financially successful”, try asking “Am I creative and financially successful?” or “Can I believe that I am creative and financially successful?” This will require you to delve into your past experiences and find evidence to support that you are. Asking takes more time and focused effort to build on our past successes, but can pay off much more than telling. These types of probing questions are at the heart of the coaching process, so think of yourself as your own personal coach.

Have you used affirmations before and had success? Or tried any of the techniques I mention in this article? If so, I would love to hear from you in the comments below!