

## An Introduction to SMART Thinking

*Original work by Lee Stout based on the ABC exercise of Albert Ellis, Ph.D.*

The third point of SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> is learning to manage your thoughts, feelings and behavior. This exercise will show you how to get started.

Most people come to SMART because they are acting in a way that causes problems for them and the people around them. Why do you come to SMART? The answer is your personal goal.

**Your Goal** \_\_\_\_\_  
*Example: I want to stop shoplifting.*

Now, think of a recent situation in which you behaved in a way that was not consistent with your goal. First list the event. Then, list your behavior on the second line. On the third line, record the emotions you felt then. And finally, on the fourth line record the outcome of your behavior.

**The Event** \_\_\_\_\_

**Your Behavior** \_\_\_\_\_

**Your Negative Feelings** \_\_\_\_\_

**The Result** \_\_\_\_\_

*Example: I went to Macy's and stole a belt. Now I feel regret and fear. As a result, I feel I can't trust myself.*

We can't spring into action without our brain giving our body some information. Try to connect some thoughts to your actions. What did you tell yourself to convince you to act the way you did? What did you believe? In real time these thoughts can come and go in a split second. Try to slow down your thinking process and come up with a few of the thoughts that triggered your actions.

**Your Thought 1** \_\_\_\_\_

**Your Thought 2** \_\_\_\_\_

**Your Thought 3** \_\_\_\_\_

*Example: I shouldn't have to pay such a high price to own that belt.*

The thoughts you just listed are what we call irrational beliefs. We don't mean the thoughts are crazy or insane. We simply mean that the thoughts are not consistent with the goal you just listed. That is to say, you acted in a way you hadn't intended. Some people might suggest you told yourself a kind of lie. Consider these questions:

- Is my thought helpful?
- Is there any scientific or academic proof to support my thinking?
- When was the last time that thought was true for me?



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Now, use those general questions to form a more specific question about each of the thoughts you listed. The idea here is to take the strength away from the thought by revealing its irrationality. We call these questions disputes. Just come up with one question for each thought.

Question 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Question 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Question 3 \_\_\_\_\_

*Example: How does that feeling entitle me to steal the belt?*

Your questions will help you deal with those irrational thoughts if they come up again and that probably will happen. But, you're not done yet. You can actually replace the old irrational thoughts with new beliefs that are rational: helpful, personally true and possibly even provable. Replace each of your three irrational beliefs with new rational thoughts.

New Rational Thought 1 \_\_\_\_\_

New Rational Thought 2 \_\_\_\_\_

New Rational Thought 3 \_\_\_\_\_

*Example: I may want the belt, but that doesn't give me license to steal.*

When a new situation occurs that is similar to the one you just described, you can act differently if you think differently. Imagine that you had thought rationally. What action might you have taken? How do you think you might have felt? What might have resulted?

New Rational Behavior \_\_\_\_\_

*Example: I would have shopped more to get a similar belt for less.*

New Positive Feelings \_\_\_\_\_

*Example: I would have felt like I did the right thing by managing my urge to steal.*

New Positive Results \_\_\_\_\_

*Example: I would have left the store without the belt, but with a new attitude.*

In this exercise you've done several things. You clarified your main goal for coming to SMART and you took a look at a recent problematic situation. You realized the irrational thoughts you had at the time; you questioned those thoughts, and then replaced them with new rational thoughts. Finally you looked at the emotions you felt after the situation played out and the emotions you could have felt if you had acted rationally.

Changing your thinking takes time. It may seem very artificial at first. Eventually, with practice, it will become second nature. Remember, be patient with yourself, but be persistent.



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