

"Until now..." Two powerful words you can use to turn self-defeating thoughts around.

Repetitive, doom-laden thoughts are common to depressed minds. SUCH THOUGHTS are both a feature of depressed, out-of-balance neurochemistry and of the way that memory is networked. Because depressed neurochemistry focuses on negativity, your thoughts dwell on SAD THINGS, SUCH AS times of loss, failure, disappointments, and ill-treatment. When you remember one time something went wrong, memory networks light up for *all the times* something similar went wrong, forming a category of things going wrong. And, because depressed minds ruminate, repetitively revisiting that network, that category then solidifies into an "It has always (never) been this way," way of thinking. Your neurochemistry causes you to create a past in which you always fail, are always disappointed or in which you never get what you want.

This kind of categorical description of past events becomes a prediction of things to come. The idea that you are destined to fail will prevent you from trying new things. Few thoughts are more likely to prevent change than those that predict defeat. Self-defeating thoughts are central in maintaining depression and blocking change. The most common in the self-defeating category of thoughts stems from the belief we are doomed to letting our past determine our future. In fact, this misery-inducing mantra, "I have always been this way," is responsible for stopping people cold, before they even attempt to change a behavior or emotion. Such thoughts are depression-reinforcing. The more often your neurochemistry causes you to think a helpless thought, the worse your depression gets.

The good news is you do not need to stay stuck in this negative memory network. There are two words that can change that downward spiral: "Until now..." In those two words lie the hope every person needs. Things can - AND DO - change. Something that has always been, need not always be. This is not pie-in-the-sky, sun-will-come-out, irrepressibly bubbly optimism, but rather a simple truth. And, for a depressed mind, it is a revolutionary idea. I have watched clients' eyes light up when they consider the power of that phrase. "Until now..." means *things could change*. It means they do not have to deny their past or pretend it was good or even think they have a bright (impossible!) future. It just means things do not need to be the way they have been. Small hope is often safer than big hope and thus more powerful for the person who cannot believe in a big change but could believe in *some* change.

"UNTIL NOW" helps reverse the downward spiral of depressed thinking is the goal. Consider common 'downers' that can be reversed with "UNTIL NOW":

-  "I have always been unlucky...until now."
-  "I have never been able to pick a good man to date...until now."
-  "I have never been the one who gets the promotion...until now."
-  "No one in my family has ever succeeded at this...until now."
-  "I have always been depressed...until now."

Even issues about self-image or self-esteem or habitual behavior could get a jump start with "UNTIL NOW":

-  "I have not been able to stay on a diet for more than a day...until now."
-  "I have never been able to complete a math course...until now."
-  "I have never exercised regularly...until now."

These statements do not change a couch potato into an Olympian athlete, nor do they guarantee that pounds will melt away or that love will show up in your life. What they do mean is that the possibility exists that you can have something better or workable, and you can start trying new ways to achieve what you want.

“Until now...” These words subtly suggest you *will* think or do something different than you have done before. They can lead you to identify what you have been doing and thinking and, even better, lead you to recognize that if you keep on doing what you have been doing you will get what you have always gotten. But if you alter your old belief, if you start saying, “Well that was true... until now,” then what was true before might no longer be your destiny. If new actions or thoughts could produce change, you will be more willing to try doing something differently than what you have done before. While they do not guarantee success (and what depressed person will believe in guarantees?) these two words help you believe that your future can be different than your past.

John was certainly a man who believed that past was prologue. He said he had *always* been a man who struggled to be engaged with others and whom others perceived as distant and unemotional. “Nothing is less true!” he exclaimed, “I am very emotional. But showing my emotions has always caused me trouble, so I just cannot do that.” In his life experience when he was emotional as a child he had been ridiculed and when he had his first serious love affair, his heart had been broken. He decided “Whenever I show how I feel, bad things happen,” and became determined never to betray how he feels. Believing that displays of emotion would result in trouble he had become isolated and depressed. What a bind he was in! He would rather be depressed and alone than risk ridicule or heartache. However, when he realized that his aloofness was hurting him also, the words “until now” helped him find his way out. He could say, “Displays of emotion have always got me into trouble...until now.” Then he chose which people were probably safe to show some emotion to, and he could test, a little at a time, how much emotional expressiveness was received well by his colleagues and acquaintances. Over a period of time, he became increasingly comfortable, his friendships deepened, and he eventually said “I love you” to a woman who was happy to hear it.

"UNTIL NOW"! With these two words you might get a new idea, see a new possibility, or feel a small hope and start the shift to an upward spiral of changed behavior and emotion, because it may have been true that you had trouble changing your thoughts...until now.