



THOUGHT RECORD
(from *Stop Self-Sabotage*)
By Dr. Judy Ho

A Thought Record is a visual way to represent your thinking as it occurs in specific situations and events to allow you to see in real-time how your thinking affects your feelings and behaviors. It is a classic Cognitive Behavior Therapy tool first created by Dr. Aaron Beck (1976), and there are a number of forms it can take. The version below is one I developed for my clients. It provides a structured way for you to see how your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors emerge in a linear fashion and also allows you to evaluate your thinking so that you can respond to these thoughts and feelings in less self-sabotaging ways.

This exercise takes thought modification to another level by documenting what you were tempted to do as a result of experiencing self-sabotaging triggers and the feelings that are often associated with them, what helpful technique you used instead of doing a self-sabotaging action, and how your feelings changed as a result of you using a helpful strategy. This exercise will reinforce the connection between actions and feelings, and choosing beneficial action in a stressful situation can have a profound impact on your emotions and physiological responses.

This shows that not only does intervening with self-sabotage triggers help you stop self-sabotage, but it can also make you feel better about yourself or your situation. While there is a natural progression from thoughts to feelings to actions, each piece of that chain can loop back to impact the other components.

Instructions

The next time you notice a negative feeling—whether it’s an emotion that comes up, or you experience uncomfortable physiological reactions—ask yourself, *What’s going through my mind right now?* In your journal, copy the chart below, document the date and time, and jot down the thoughts or mental images you are experiencing in the Automatic Thoughts column. Also take some time to note how much you believed in these thoughts on a scale of one (not really believing it at all) to ten (believing it as much as you believe and know that the earth is round).

Then scroll back in your mental recollection and ask yourself, *What was going on right before I had these thoughts?* In the Situation/Event column, note some details about what was happening just prior to the emotion arising. The event can be either external in the form of an observable, objective event (like being laid off from your job) or an internal event like replaying a memory of a past event or visions of an imagined future event—for example, being scolded during a meeting for not following up with a client.

Next, consider the feelings you had that led you to use this Thought Record in the first place. If you felt particular emotions, write them down along with the intensity that you felt these emotions on a scale of one (barely registering) to ten (feeling extreme discomfort, to the point where you can’t focus on anything else in the moment). If you felt physiological reactions, write

down a description along with the intensity that you felt these physiological responses on a scale of one to ten.

Consider the next column. If you haven't acted on these negative feelings already, write down what you wanted to do when these negative emotions came on, whether it's hiding away in your home, reaching for a snack, or yelling at someone. Try to be honest and examine what your instinct was when these negative feelings came up, and what you felt pushed to do. If you actually acted on your negative emotions, then write a few details that describe your actions. Answer these questions with how you are feeling when you are under some stress, particularly when you've just dealt with a self-sabotage trigger and tried to deactivate it, and your emotional intensity has improved but you still feel on edge.

Now take a look at the next column. Think of something you can do that would be associated with the opposite of your current feeling. Here are some ideas to help you get started.

- If you're feeling scared . . . do something that inspires a sense of confidence. Do something that you know you're good at. Do something that takes a little guts.
- If you're feeling sad . . . get up and do something active. Do something to give back to others. Call a friend and ask how they are doing. Sign up to volunteer.
- If you're feeling angry . . . try showing care and concern for someone. Take deep breaths and try to instill a serene state of mind.
- If you're feeling rejected . . . reach out to someone by calling or sending them an email or text. Smile at a stranger. Say something nice to the next person you see.
- If you're feeling discouraged . . . encourage someone else. Root for a friend in their goal pursuit. Do something, no matter how small, that makes you feel accomplished.

- If you're feeling exhausted . . . do something that makes you feel full of energy. Get up and do ten jumping jacks. Clean a small area of your house.

Once you write down something you will do that is the opposite of how you're feeling, do it! Then come back and write down the same feelings and/or physiological reactions you wrote in the first column, and re-rate the intensity of those feelings. Did you notice a downward shift, even if it is a small one? Most people experience that the intensity goes down after one Opposite Action, and that the intensity continues to decrease with the second or third Opposite Action they do. The more you can note these effects, the more you will feel in control of your feelings, and the less likely you will be to act impulsively in self-sabotaging ways. Over time, you may find that you developed some favorite techniques. After using the chosen technique(s), evaluate the same emotions and physiological reactions you noted the first time in chart, and in the last column rate them again with an intensity level from one to ten to measure the impact of the technique.

You now know how thoughts, feelings, and events influence your behavior. You also know that when you take the time to pause and closely examine the chain of events, you can pinpoint where triggers—and, subsequently, self-sabotage—insert themselves into the progression. You've learned how to intervene in this sequence with techniques that will help you to alter your thoughts and moderate your feelings, in order to prevent self-sabotaging behaviors. It is undeniably hard work to modify your thoughts and identify your feelings, but once you get a handle on this, it will become much easier.

Date and Time	Situation/Event What observable event or thoughts, ideas, mental images led to the negative feelings?	Automatic Thoughts What thoughts or mental images (e.g., self-sabotage triggers) went through your mind? How much did you believe each one at the time on a scale of 1–10? Write down the category of self-sabotage trigger if one or more apply.	Primary L.I.F.E. factor activated What L.I.F.E. factor or factors are the automatic thoughts linked to? -Low or Shaky Self-Concept -Internalized Beliefs -Fear of Change or the Unknown -Excessive Need for Control	Feelings What emotions or physiological reactions did you feel at the time? How intense were the emotions and/or physiological reactions on a scale of 1–10?	What You Want to Do What do your feelings make you want to do (whether you actually did it or not)?	What You Did Instead Jot down the technique(s) you used -Examine the Evidence -Devil's Advocate -Imagine (or Actual) Phone a Friend -Labeling Your Thoughts -Physicalize the Emotion -Opposite Action -Card Carrying -Increasing Positive Emotions	Feelings After Write down the same feelings again and rate them from 1–10 after using the techniques

