

THE WORST THINGS EXERCISE

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This is for those of us who can sometimes feel anxious or intimidated when we are climbing in front of others.

This used to be such a massive issue for me and still crops up from time to time. Usually it is when the gym or crag is very busy, I am attempting a route that feels challenging, out of my comfort zone or that I've seen others climb with seeming ease.

As I begin climbing I perceive peoples eyes penetrating like tiny grappling hooks tethering me with the weight of their judgements. "Look at him struggling" they whisper. "It's so easy, he must be incredibly weak" they murmur. "How embarrassing for him" they snicker with blushing cheeks.

As I hopelessly flounder, my arms becoming pumped out, useless blocks, I eventually let go and sag to the end of the rope. While I sit in my harness dejected, my audience of hecklers turn their backs, shaking their heads disgusted with my lackluster performance.

Of course, besides getting pumped and falling, none of this actually happens. It's just the dramatic presentation in my own worried brain. In fact, most of the time people are too distracted by what's going on in their own head to even notice me climbing. And yet I, and many others, often have this type of experience.

Below I offer a simple, practical exercise to help you begin to shift from what others are doing or thinking to focusing on what is important to you in the moment. I first experienced an exercise like this from [Tad Hargrave who owns Marketing for Hippies](#). It's a great way to begin to get in touch with what is important to you about who you are as a climber and a human being.



Step 1:

Sit down with a piece of paper and list all of the worst things you imagine people might say about you and your climbing. Don't hold back. Let it rip. What do the voices say? You're weak? Slow? Terrible technique? Scared? Pathetic? No business being on that route? Take 5-10 minutes to cough it all up.

Step 2:

Now take the top three worst items from the list above. These are the things that if you actually heard someone say about you you would be mortified! Write down those three items and sit with them for at least 10 minutes. Ask yourself; What is it about these words that bothers me so much? What does it feel like to imagine being called these things? Let the experience sink in. Notice how your body and mind react to focusing on these words.

Step 3:

Now take those three items and think about what their opposite would be. So the opposite of "scared" might be calm and focused. "Terrible technique" might be smooth and efficient. "No business being on the route" might be inspiring and courageous. Write these down and sit with them for at least 10 minutes. Again, pay attention to what you experience when you focus on these words. What do you notice? If you need to, tweak them a little until you feel warmth in your heart when you read them. This isn't about, "Just being positive" it's about connecting to what is important to you.

So often we can find ourselves focusing on the negative chatter in our heads. It's easy to get carried away by it. But if we are able to stop and observe, we will often realize that what we are really worried about is not being the person and climber we truly want to be. When we are able to shift our focus away from the negative chatter and worries we can refocus on who we truly are and what really matters to us. With our focus here, we naturally flow in the process and journey.

Step 4:

Take a 3 x 5 notecard and write out:

I am willing to be...

Followed by the words that you came up with above. So it would look something like this:

I am willing to be calm, focused, smooth, inspiring, efficient and courageous.

Two items to note:

1. Notice that it begins with “I am willing” rather than “I want” or “I need” etc. This is important and points to the fact that these qualities of being (calm, focused, etc.) are within you and not something outside of yourself that you are trying to grasp. You are helping your brain to look and find ways to demonstrate these qualities.

2. You may have thoughts like, “Yeah but I’m not focused or courageous when I climb.” This is really normal. I call it the acorn and the oak tree effect. If we see others demonstrating a quality we admire at a very proficient level we imagine that we have to immediately do the same or we are falling short somehow. I find it helpful to think of it like this; we are all acorns in the beginning of building certain skills and there are always big, beautiful oak trees to aspire to. If we remember that it is the same tree just at different stages it is easier to stay focused on our own growth process. Soon enough you will be a towering oak tree of focus and courage!

Step 5:

Over the next few weeks bring this card with you to the gym or crag and read the phrase to yourself whenever you start to notice that self conscious voice start to chatter. Softly focus on the words and gently bring your attention to the experience. It may be helpful to say the phrase as a mantra as you move through your climbs. What is your experience? How does your body and mind react to shifting your attention?

One final note:

While it is totally natural for our attention to slip back to the negative chatter from time to time, if you find yourself struggling intensely or simply unable to shift your attention away from the chatter, it may be an indicator that some further support could be helpful. Please feel free to reach out to me via email or book a [free consultation](#).



