



The Top 7 Myths About Positive Affirmations

by Nancy Barry-Jansson

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It's no mystery that I am amazed by the power of positive affirmations, that I design and sell blank affirmations cards, or that it just thrills me to share my knowledge and experiences with affirmations. I first learned about and began using affirmations back in the mid-1980s, and I know some people who have used them long before that. My parents often quoted Norman Vincent-Peale, who of course, was a well-known author and speaker on the topic of positive thinking and affirmations in the first half of the 1900s. And many authors and speakers have followed in his footsteps, including Shakti Gawain, Dr. Wayne Dyer, Jack Canfield, Louise Hay, etc. The list is long! My point is that what I share and talk about is truly nothing new.

And yet, I am always surprised by how many people still do not know about affirmations or understand how they work. It's astonishing to me, that after all that has been written and taught, that affirmations are still somewhat unknown in the year 2005!

For this reason, I am dedicating this issue of the newsletter to exposing the seven most common myths that exist about affirmations. To begin, for the benefit of those who are new or just don't know, I'm referring to positive affirmations which can be defined as:

Positive statements, aligned with your personal goals, that are written and spoken with positive emotion in the present tense, helping you change your internal thinking process (the tapes that play in your head) and motivating you (consciously and subconsciously) to create positive mental and physical changes by encouraging positive action.

Affirmations, regularly written and spoken aloud, work because they:

1. Are *positive statements*, as opposed to negative ones, that make you feel good to say or read and therefore, motivate you in a positive way to take appropriate action.
2. Are *written and spoken* statements which further embed the (positive) thought deeper into your conscious and subconscious mind, replacing negative thoughts with positive ones..
3. Generate *positive emotion*, linking the statements to your internal desire to see each desire come into reality. Many people feel true joy when saying their affirmations!
4. Use *present tense* makes the statement sound "as if" you have already achieved the goal.
5. Harness all your positive energy (reading, writing, thinking) into *changing your internal thinking processes* by replacing negative thoughts with positive ones.
6. Incorporate repetition. The more you say and read affirmations, the less room your mind has for negative thoughts, and the more your brain begins to believe your goals are attainable which then *motivates you consciously and subconsciously to take appropriate action*. This happens as your old, possibly unconscious, tapes are replaced by positive, conscious ones.
7. Encourage positive action toward your goals. Without the action, changes can only take place on a mental level, so action is required to make your dreams a reality in your physical world.

The more you know about positive affirmations, the more they seem like miracles—and they are simple, yet highly effective when you follow through with appropriate action! Ok, now that you understand positive affirmations a little better, let's address the most common myths.

MYTH #1: "I don't do affirmations."

Well, if you don't think you do affirmations, I hate to be the one who bursts your bubble...the truth is that we all are using some kind of affirmation, positive or negative, every moment of our lives.



Unfortunately, most people unconsciously replay negative affirmations over and over in their heads to the point that these ideas then become part of their internal tapes. Subconscious affirmations usually form in our childhood from words and thoughts expressed to us by our families or our peers, and most tend toward the negative side. For instance, my peers taught me that I was a non-conformist and that I was not good looking. My family taught me that it was wrong to spend money frivolously on things that make you happy. As an adult, I used affirmations to correct my thinking. What did you learn from your peers and family while you were growing up?

Even if, by some miracle, you grew to adulthood unscathed by other's negative thoughts, you need to consider this: *Affirmations are everywhere around us* in the media, the books and magazines we read, in the TV and radio shows and commercials that we watch (or just listen to), in the lyrics of music we listen to, in the conversations you have with other people. You can't avoid them...unless you make a conscious effort to do so by completely isolating yourself! The problem is that most of these external (and subconscious) affirmations are negative, or they don't relate to positive goals we have for ourselves. Our minds become filled with pointless goals that mean nothing to us and leave us wondering why life seems so empty. If you aren't consciously creating your own positive affirmations, you are most likely passively absorbing negative affirmations from all around you.

Don't believe me? Ok, how often have you stopped to analyze the words and message in that song you can't get out of your head...you know, the one you've been singing over and over and over in your head all day? Chances are, those are not thoughts that you would have gone out of your way to think, yet there they are in the words of that song. How many commercials have you seen so many times that you can recite verbatim even though you could care less about the product or service? Many commercials are now written as statements, as though you are the person with the credit problems, the nagging health problem, the mortgage that needs refinancing, or some other financial or emotional woe. Talk about negative affirmations!

Don't let passive, negative affirmations get you. Decide what is important to you and create your own positive statements that will remind you of their importance. Consciously monitor your thinking, and when you notice a negative thought, confront each thought with an affirmation that points to the reality you want to experience. Taking time to monitor your thoughts can help you weed out the negative ones, and soon you will find positive thought comes effortlessly.

MYTH #2: "Oh, I've tried affirmations...they don't work."

The only affirmations that don't work are the ones that are not worked long enough to generate positive action. The right affirmations naturally encourage you to take positive action. I've used affirmations for years, and I know if one is not working it means that I've done something wrong: Either the goal is not really a true desire (most often the case—my heart's just not into it), I'm using poor phrasing (needs to be more positive), or I'm not actually repeating the affirmations enough. Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) teaches us that if we want to make a change in our behavior, we must do something at least daily for a min. of 21 straight days in order for a change to take place. If you do affirmations for 3 days, then give up, you have to start the 21 day cycle all over.

Recently, I've personally discovered that if I have too much anger or frustration regarding an issue, then the affirmations about that issue simply will not generate positive results. However, as soon as I address the anger and frustration, and can feel honest emotions (love, happiness, and joy) about the issue, the affirmations immediately start working for me! So, affirmations work on many levels. Of course, the first step for me was acknowledging the anger and frustration, and



then being willing to do something about resolving those feelings. If I hadn't been willing to take positive action to address my issues, then I'd still be spinning my wheels.

I can honestly say that positive affirmations have helped millions and millions of people. Personally, they have helped me release the victim mentality, get through childbirth, buy my own home, start my business, keep my spirits up during difficult times, and focus my thoughts. Jim Carrey has shared how he carried around a fake \$10 Million check in his wallet for years as an affirmation that he would soon be earning that much per picture. And he did. Scott Adams, creator of the Dilbert cartoons, said that he used affirmations to boost his confidence when he first started out and was working to become a syndicated cartoonist. Peter Boyle, the actor who played Raymond's father in *Everyone Loves Raymond*, shared on *Oprah* this past spring how he repeated a positive affirmation inspired by Napoleon Hill (author, *Think and Grow Rich*) and it came true for him when he was cast for the show. By the way, I use my own variant of that same affirmation, and noticed that my business starting booming within weeks of starting the affirmation. I love how I feel when I say it, and it actually makes me want to market my business!

If affirmations haven't worked for you, the first question is, "Are your affirmations tied to a goal that you truly want to experience?", and second, "Are you truly willing to write, read, and recite your affirmations regularly until your goal becomes reality?" If you can't honestly say yes to either question, then you might want to look at ways you sabotage your success. Ironically, some people don't want their dreams to come true because it means they have to change. They are perfectly happy with their dysfunctional life, including all the dysfunctional people and complaining that goes with it, not to mention the sympathy they get from everyone around them. Some have allowed themselves to be defined by their problems, and without them, they have no identity. They keep themselves stuck and anything that can help them (like affirmations) need to be proven useless. For some people, it is fear of success. For others, it is a fear that you will offend someone else, possibly a family member, if you are successful. Sometimes, we just are convinced on a deep level that something can't be done, despite our outward desire for it. Do you recognize yourself in one of these scenarios? If so, then, it's not that affirmations don't work...it's that you haven't been willing to work them and follow through with appropriate action.

MYTH #3: "I'll start doing affirmations when I figure out how I can meet my goals."

The beauty, and the mystery, of affirmations is that you don't need to know "how" to accomplish your goals in order to achieve them. In fact, I sometimes found it's more exciting not to know because you aren't tied to only one solution. If you are tied to only one solution, you are blocking all other possible solutions...even ones that you didn't even know existed! Who knows how many ways there are to accomplish your goal, let alone which ones might work faster for you than you ever thought possible? I don't know about you, but I am still not omnipotent, so there are probably lots of ways to accomplish a goal that I'm not yet aware of, so I choose not to limit myself to only one solution.

The amazing thing about the subconscious mind is that it loves to solve problems for us. Eric Maisel, a San Francisco Bay Area psychologist and creativity coach (www.ericmaisel.com), has written many books on the subject of creativity and the way the mind can assist you in creative endeavors. In his book, *Sleep Thinking*, Maisel goes into detail explaining how the subconscious works to solve our problems as we sleep each night as long as we are willing to release worry and cultivate a sense of wonder surrounding the issue at hand ("I wonder how I will..."). Whether you are looking for a lost item, or trying to find the best solution to your creative problem, the subconscious will happily consider the problem and often, you will wake up with just the solution



you have been looking for. Affirmations work in a similar way by reprogramming your conscious and subconscious minds to see your reality the way you would like to experience it.

So, stop worrying about having all the answers, and start writing and speaking your positive affirmations so your subconscious can begin working toward what is most important to you.

MYTH #4: “Affirmations are a form of brainwashing.”

Well, there is some truth to this, but positive affirmations are not intended for brainwashing other people. Affirmations, properly done, are a form of positive self-brainwashing. The operative words in that sentence being “positive” and “self”.

What we traditionally think of as brainwashing is when someone else, or a group of people, forces you to think and act as they wish, regardless of whether you want to or not. When we think of brainwashing, we usually think of cults or POW camps where people are forced to change their thinking and to conform to the agreed thinking of the cult or the controlling government. They also use repetition as a tool in brainwashing, focus on breaking the human spirit through sleep (and other types of) deprivation, and utilize other means of emotional or physical torture to accomplish their goal. Clearly, brainwashing, as we know it, is a dark use of the power of the subconscious mind. Could someone write negative affirmations and begin using them to make themselves think negatively? I guess, but why would you? Most people have enough negative affirmations coming from our environment that you really don't need any extra help in that department.

The truth is that we have all been brainwashed, in some fashion, by our culture and our environment since the moment we were born. As a child, we didn't have a choice what message was passed down by family or society, but as an adult we do have a choice.

Positive affirmations are about taking control of what you know are your shortcomings and consciously changing negative thought patterns for positive thought patterns that are better aligned with your life goals. In this manner, positive affirmations are a positive form of self-brainwashing that allows you to choose the suds, the size of the bucket, and the sponge!

MYTH #5: “Affirmations are too ‘new-agey’ for me.” Or the similar, “Affirmations are only for highly religious people.”

While there are a lot of new age practitioners who tout the value of positive affirmations, the truth is that the concept is as old as the ages. The origins of affirmations are not clear, but some believe that affirmations originated as prayers that were memorized by a predominantly illiterate population. This would make sense, as most people would only be able to memorize brief passages, and if they had a bit of a lilt or rhyme to them, it would make them easier to remember and say repeatedly throughout the day.

In the early 1800s, French psychologist Emile Coué began teaching people to say the affirmation, “Every day, in every way, I am getting better and better.” In so doing, he helped many people to overcome their personal issues and became known as the father of affirmations.

Recently, I was reading an overview of Huna, the ancient spiritual practice of the native Hawaiian people. Native Hawaiian priests and healers, known as Kahunas, had a deep understanding of the role of the subconscious in connecting our minds with our souls as a way of achieving goals. Kahuna would first fill the body with positive energy (called Mana), and then would engage the



help of the subconscious mind, just as positive affirmations do. Practices nearly identical to Huna have been discovered in remote African tribes, and the Chinese Qui Gong is also very similar, which leaves many researchers to believe that the concept has ancient roots shared by many cultures.

The whole field of sports psychology is rooted in the power of affirmations and visualization. Today's elite athletes use affirmations in conjunction with visualization to imagine themselves doing their personal best and winning. In fact, the 1980 Russian Olympic team discovered that their athletes were far more likely to be successful if they visualized themselves being successful at the same time that they said affirmations, than if they just practiced without affirmations and visualization. Researchers testing the theory with a basketball team, split the team into 3 groups: 1. Players who practiced daily for several hours, 2. Players who practiced for 1 hour and spent the remaining hours saying affirmations and visualizing themselves making baskets and winning games, and 3. Players who were kept off the court. After several weeks of this, they played the team. Surprisingly, the first group who practiced regularly, was only slightly better than the group that hadn't played at all. The second group was overwhelmingly better.

So, to think that affirmations are only a new-age fad would be to ignore their long and successful history in helping people to achieve their goals in a positive way.

While it is believed that affirmations may have started as brief memorized prayers, that is certainly not their only use, and it would be sad to it them as such. Yes, the Bible alludes to the concept of affirmations in several locations. Here is just a quick sample from a web search:

Matthew 7:7 (New American Standard Bible)

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

Luke 11:9 (NASB)

"So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

Mark 11:24 (NSAB)

"Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you."

Philippians 4:8 (King James Version/Public Domain)

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

Matthew, Luke, and Mark all point to asking what you really want, then believing that you have received them. The passage from the Philippians speaks about focusing your thoughts on positive subjects. All of them are referring to the concept of positive affirmations.

Some of the people who buy my affirmation cards like to write their favorite Bible verses on their cards, and in this way, they use the statements from the Bible in lieu of personal affirmations. Does that mean that is the only way to use affirmations? Absolutely not! To say that positive affirmations are not only for religious people is to, once again, limit their use and value.



By the way, when I chose the name, AffirmingSpirit™, for my line of blank affirmation cards, I was referring to the universal concept of spirit as the attitude or principle that pervades thought, such as 'school spirit'. But, I was also aware that the process of affirming ones most precious goals and dreams does in fact honor the individual spirit at the same time that it brings one into touch with their inner spirit. All are good things. Regardless of your personal religious or spiritual beliefs, positive affirmations are a wonderful addition to your life and can be used in whatever way best supports you in being the best that you can be.

So, positive affirmations are not limited to new-age or religious people, nor are they limited to athletes or non-athletes. They work for anyone interested in working with them! Follow the principles, and follow through with appropriate action, and you will see results. It's that simple.

MYTH #6: "Affirmations can be used to force other people to change."

Just as positive affirmations cannot be used to brainwash other people, so you also cannot use them to force them to change. At best, affirmations can be used to change your own thought patterns and internal tapes. Even then, affirmations are only effective if you are also willing to follow through with the appropriate actions. In changing yourself to be the person you really want to be, you may notice people around you deciding to make changes, but this is a choice *they* must make for themselves; no one else can make that choice for them.

The fact is that there are a few things over which we have direct control (our attitude, what we choose to think about, the people we choose to spend time with, how we take care of our bodies), but a lot of things fall into the category of being out of our control (the weather, external events, other people's behavior). Our actions might have some influence over someone, but in the end, every adult still has to make their own decisions about that which they control in their life.

For instance, a wife may decide to lose weight and realize that her husband needs to change his diet, too, in order for the wife to be successful. However, if the husband is not on-board with the new meal and exercise plan, he will likely continue his pattern of poor food and exercise choices. The wife cannot expect that the husband will feel exactly as she does, or be willing to lose weight with the same program. Once she actually chooses a plan and sticks with it, seeing tangible results, she may notice that this has a positive influence on the husband. Still, as an adult, he will have to decide on his own that his health matter in order for him to be motivated to change.

Once you take control of your own life, face your own fears, appreciate your own strengths and take steps to address your weaknesses, you will no longer have a desire to change other people. You will be content to let others think as they wish, and as long as it does not cause harm to you or your loved ones, you will not care that they think differently. Trying to change others, especially to force them to agree with your way of thinking, actually undermines your personal power because you are looking outside yourself and giving the other person the power over your life. Why waste your precious energy trying to change someone, when that energy would be better served helping you focus on improving your own life?

MYTH #7: "Affirmations alone can solve all my problems."

OK, I love affirmations and think they form the cornerstone to building positive self-esteem and a purposeful life, but even I know they don't solve all your problems by themselves. What is most beneficial about affirmations is the positive, motivated energy that they generate (when regularly



spoken aloud, written, or read). That energy is needed to fuel the positive action that will help you overcome hurdles on your way to making your dreams come true.

For instance, imagine that you know you must network in order to grow your small business, but you just dread walking into a room full of people you don't know. This fear is holding you back from taking action that you know would improve your business. So, you start saying affirmations, like, *"I truly enjoy every networking event I attend!"*, *"Networking events are opportunities to meet new friends!"*, and, *"I relax, and allow myself to enjoy networking events!"* After about a week of saying these several times a day, you begin to feel more confident about networking and start searching for events in your area (action #1). After deciding on two events that you know you can attend, you schedule them and pay any applicable entrance fees (action #2). You attend the first networking event (action #3), and discover that you already knew a few of the people there and that the event was a lot of fun. This makes you look forward to the second networking event, which you happily attend with a large stack of your business cards (action #4). The second event was also enjoyable, and while you met several new people, but didn't hand out as many cards as you expected. However, you did learn about two more networking events with affiliated organizations whose members are likely to need your services. Upon returning from the event, you follow-up with those you meet (action #5) and schedule the two new events you just found out about (action #6). After attending two events, you are no longer feeling fear around attending networking events, so you begin to evaluate your affirmations and create new ones that help you focus on connecting with the best clients. The affirmations themselves didn't solve your fear of networking events, but they did motivate you to take actions to help you overcome the previous barrier.

These are just the top 7 myths surrounding affirmations. There are many more, and perhaps one day, I'll delve into all of them. In the meantime, I hope that clarifying these myths has helped you gain a better understanding of the power and the truth about positive affirmations. May you use them daily to make the best of your life!!

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Nancy Barry-Jansson is an illustrator and the creator of AffirmingSpirit™ Affirmation Cards, which she sells online through AffirmingSpirit.com. The cards were first conceived when Nancy was looking for a more beautiful way to experience her daily affirmations, and she hopes they will help others, as well. Nancy lives in the south San Francisco Bay area with her teenage son and her two cuddly kitties.