



HOW WELL DO YOU TREAT YOURSELF?

Take our quiz to find out if self-sabotaging behaviour has turned you into your own worst enemy instead of the best friend you deserve

by STACEY STEIN

ALL BONA FIDE BEST FRIENDS SHARE

certain trademarks. They push you to go for that fantastic new job, encourage you to haul your butt to hot yoga or provide a sympathetic ear when you're feeling down. Chances are, you can mentally check off all of those boxes when it comes to being a fabulous friend to the women in your life. But do you take the same care with yourself? According to experts, many of us don't, because we let unrealistic fears get in the way of being our own BFF.

One of the key impediments to cheering ourselves on or exploring new opportunities is our fear of making mistakes, which we see as being synonymous with failure, says Emily Blake, a Montreal-based psychologist who specializes in treating anxiety disorders and depression.

"However, the very notion of trying to prevent mistakes sets us up for failure," says Blake, adding that, instead, women should view imperfection as a necessary part of every process.

This fear of failure, coupled with the age-old worry that we'll be construed as selfish if we put ourselves first, stymies many women on the road to success. But it doesn't end there: Self-sabotaging behaviour can manifest itself in many different ways.

"It could be someone who makes negative predictions for herself and then doesn't try things based on those predictions. It could be someone who creates self-fulfilling prophecies or someone who does a lot of avoidance coping," says Alice Boyes, author of *The Anxiety Toolkit: Strategies for Fine-Tuning Your Mind and Moving Past Your Stuck Points*. One trait that unites those who self-sabotage is a tendency to create

obstacles and undermine themselves – this is not the hallmark of a healthy friendship with oneself.





Sound familiar? Then it's time for change. The journey begins with self-awareness: You need to understand what traits are stand-

ing between you and, well, you. To help you get started, we've created a quiz. Find out which "flower" you are most like, and then learn how to cultivate change from within. Before you know it, you'll bloom into the friend you deserve: supportive and encouraging.





Let's dig in!

QUIZ





Which phrase best describes your approach to life?

-  Be prepared
-  Go for it!
-  I'd rather stay home
-  Fake it and hope no one notices





You're at a party and you spot someone you have long admired from afar. You are most likely to:

-  March right up to them and introduce yourself – what have you got to lose?
-  Stay glued to the one friend you know
-  Introduce yourself, engage in some pleasant banter and then blurt out something awkward
-  Practise in your head exactly what you're going to say before you approach them, anticipating that there's a good chance they won't be interested in you anyway





The night before an interview for your dream job, you:

-  Think of an excuse to skip the interview – chances are, you won't get the job anyway, so why put yourself through that stress?
-  Study up on the company, anticipating what questions they might ask, and imagine yourself bombing the interview
-  Sleep like a baby
-  Stay up all night watching TV, which causes you to oversleep the next morning so that you end up arriving late for the interview

Your boss offers you a huge promotion, but with the big title and pay hike come big responsibilities. "If you do well, this could open up even greater opportunities," he tells you. Your response?

-  You tell your boss "Thanks, but no thanks" – you're happy staying where you are
-  You graciously accept the promotion while secretly wondering how long it will be before your colleagues realize you're not cut out for the job and you arrive late to your first meeting on your first day
-  "How soon can I get my new business cards?"
-  You tell your boss you're flattered, then spend the next several days doing everything humanly possible to prepare for the new job

You have never thought of yourself as funny, but your new love interest seems to think you're a riot. When he tells you this, you:

-  Panic – it's only a matter of time before he finds out how unfunny you really are and leaves you
-  Wonder if you have been wrong all along – hey, maybe you are funny after all!
-  Joke "It's all downhill from here!" and then go home and watch Comedy Central all night – can humour be learned?
-  Change the subject



Maybe I am
funny?

Your answers are
mostly



You're a sunflower

You are strong and ready for any eventuality, but sometimes your anxiety about a situation causes you to overprepare.

Do you anticipate every possible doomsday scenario and devise different contingency plans? If this sounds like you, you are most likely what psychologists call a "defensive pessimist." This is very different from someone with a tendency to self-sabotage and can actually help some people succeed. "People who self-sabotage tend to be pessimistic in a way that's not helpful, because it leads them to avoid trying things," says Boyes. Defensive pessimists, on the other hand, will try things, but their nature "prompts them to take the appropriate caution."

Employing defensive pessimism is a way for some people to manage their anxiety and direct it toward effective action. "This involves setting low expectations and mentally rehearsing possible negative outcomes," says Julie Norem, a professor of psychology at Wellesley College in Massachusetts and author of *The Positive Power of Negative Thinking*.

"As they think through what might happen, they provide themselves with a blueprint for how to prevent negative outcomes," she says, adding that using defensive pessimism as a strategy helps people harness anxiety so that it works for them rather than against them.

hmm



Your answers are
mostly



You're a petunia

Like summer's sunny flower, you assume things will go well for you, and they usually do.

Unlike a person who has a tendency to self-sabotage, an optimist does not assume that a negative outcome is the only possibility. Optimists are characterized by their positive expectations and emotions and are far more likely to be persistent.

Optimists should be cautious, though, that their optimism doesn't lead them to sabotage themselves by being overconfident or complacent. "Ordinary optimists need to be on guard against not considering negative possibilities and then finding themselves unprepared," says Norem. She adds that they also need to be sure they're not maintaining their optimism at the cost of ignoring their real feelings. "Negative feelings feel bad, but that doesn't mean that it is bad to have them," she says.

Your answers are
mostly



You're a violet

Like the pretty purple flower, you sometimes shrink away from situations you don't feel confident about.

One of the key ways that people self-sabotage is by avoiding situations altogether. "They expect to be rejected by other people and they tend to think in an all-or-nothing way," says Boyes, who has worked with patients with avoidant tendencies. "When they're not sure of what action to take, they take no action at all."

Avoidant tendencies manifest themselves in different ways. For example, an avoidant person may agree to do something they feel they're unable to do, leading them to ultimately make an excuse to get out of it. "The way they cope is to avoid dealing with things in an honest and upfront way, and this ends up creating more stress for themselves," says Boyes.

When it comes to relationships, people with avoidant personalities will usually be unwilling to talk about "emotional" topics or may just steer clear of close relationships altogether.

In a work context, this type of person would most likely abstain from stepping forward for promotions because they lack confidence, even though they might be very qualified.

Your answers are
mostly



You're a rose

You are as beautiful as a rose, but you've got a few thorny issues to deal with, and your biggest one is staring at you in the mirror.

At the core of a self-sabotaging personality is a lack of belief in oneself. "There's fear of change, fear of the new, fear that their self-image is incompatible with who they want to become," says Terry Estrin, a Vancouver-based registered psychologist. "Self-sabotage acts as an escape valve. While anxiety and fear build as you get closer to your goal, self-sabotage gets rid of anxiety by blowing off the pressure."

In their careers, self-sabotaging people may underperform if they're in a position that they feel doesn't match their (often false) assessment of their skills. "Anxiety and fear of failure can often lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure," says Jason Plaks, an associate professor of psychology at the University of Toronto. Plaks conducted a study that revealed that people who view their abilities as fixed (in other words, they believe their overall level of performance will remain constant in the long run) are more likely to become anxious when faced with dramatic success. This causes their subsequent performance to plummet. In a relationship, a self-sabotaging person may constantly be testing the other person's love. Ironically, the fear of losing their partner will often lead them to continually place demands on the other person and behave in a way that will ultimately result in their partner pulling away.



PETAL POWER

How to turn your self-sabotaging behaviour around so you can be a better friend to yourself. Here are a few tips from the experts.

BE AWARE. Blake suggests asking yourself "What is most important to me in this situation?" to help foster self-awareness. "Awareness provides us the freedom to choose how we want to be in each and every moment," says Blake. To further heighten self-awareness, she recommends just breathing and noticing your thoughts and feelings, including any uncomfortable ones that may arise when you think about pursuing what you really need or want.

START A JOURNAL. Terry Estrin, a Vancouver-based psychologist, suggests writing down all your thoughts before going into a challenging situation. "It's a way of downloading all the negative messages and getting them out of your head," he says, adding that journalling is a great way to "look back over the geography of one's life and learn from it." Journalling helps us understand and cope with our emotions, and over time patterns may emerge that give us greater insight into our behaviour. "Journalling can help us become scientists in an observational study of ourselves," explains Estrin.

MEDITATE. Estrin emphasizes the importance of gaining distance from the self-limiting messages in our heads. "Meditation allows us to start seeing our thoughts – most of which are just old 'recordings' – as not very helpful," he says. If you're new to meditation, keep it simple (you can even start with a book like *Meditation for Dummies* or a free meditation recording from iTunes). "Meditation puts us into the observer role, so we begin to observe patterns of thoughts and habitual actions and begin to react in a more mindful, intentional way," he says.

CONFRONT FEAR. "Each time you do this, it takes you up a notch in terms of what you're able to tolerate," says Estrin. He explains that everyone wants to be comfortable, and we're often limited by the belief that life must be comfortable. As such, fear is not only bad; it's unbearable. "When we take a run at fear, we often find ourselves feeling exhilarated, liberated, alive," says Estrin. "By doing the very thing we fear, we become open to a world of new possibilities."

TREAT YOURSELF WITH COMPASSION. While we often help others instinctively without questioning whether or not they deserve it, we aren't always so generous with ourselves, according to Blake. "Self-compassion is about treating yourself with loving kindness because you need it, removed of the obstacle of deservedness, which may trigger fears of selfishness," she says. "Self-compassion says 'All humans deserve kindness,' and you must include yourself in that circle of compassion."

BALANCE SELF-CARE WITH CHALLENGING YOURSELF. Chances are, you treat your best friends with kindness while rooting for them to do their best. Be the same way with yourself. "Some people stay in their comfort zone but miss out on opportunities, while others push themselves to the point of burnout," says Blake. Try to strike the right balance between being gentle with yourself while taking on challenges that will help you realize your full potential. ✍