

Sometimes losing your mind is a good thing...

In their new book, **Leave Your Mind Behind**, Matthew McKay, Ph.D., and Catharine Sutker, who previously collaborated on the *The Self-Esteem Companion*, team up to offer a direct challenge to the cognitive status quo

Have you ever had a song in your head for no apparent reason? A song you hated, by an artist you never listen to? Our thoughts are like that sometimes — random and uncontrollable. But although we typically have little control over our thoughts, we often invest them with a lot of authority — even when they contradict what our experiences tell us to be true.

For example, take a moment right now and think, “There’s a seven foot tall monkey sitting next to me.” Well? Did you run screaming from the room? Of course not. You knew that, contrary to your thoughts, there was no such creature sitting next to you. What if instead you had thought, “I’ll never get a better job,” “I’m boring,” or “No one loves me?” You might give thoughts like these more credence, even though they are nothing more than random words, just like the seven foot tall monkey. But often we take thoughts like these literally and let them affect how we think about ourselves and how we live our lives.

Leave Your Mind Behind (New Harbinger; \$14.95) offers a collection of light-hearted practices to help readers learn to observe their thoughts without getting caught up in them. Each practice is grounded in a component of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (pronounced as the word *ACT*) called *cognitive defusion*: the process of “de-fusing” or not identifying or becoming one with your thoughts.

While some of the exercises may seem strange — imagine hearing your thoughts in the voice of a headless monster! — the purpose of these activities isn’t to stop or control problematic thinking. Instead, they show readers how to observe their thoughts without judgment and learn to live with the confounding and marvellous word-making, storytelling machine that is the human mind. **Leave Your Mind Behind** will hook you from start to finish, challenging your natural assumptions while sprinkling in humor and levity to keep you engaged.

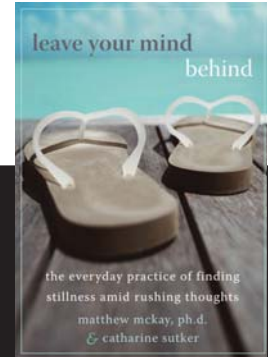
About The Authors

Matthew McKay, Ph.D., is a professor at the Wright Institute in Berkeley, CA. He is the author and coauthor of more than twenty-five books, including *The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook*, *Thoughts & Feelings*, and *Messages*.

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Excerpt, Chapter 12 Judging everything

Most of us do a good bit of judging. We can find flaws in virtually anything:

- That tree over there—it’s a bit lopsided.
- The chair I’m sitting in—a little too soft and spongy.
- The sunset—not enough flaming orange.
- This park—the lawns are a little brown.
- My mother-in-law—too critical.

Right now do this exercise. Look around your environment. Whether you are in a room or somewhere outside, let your eyes roam and settle on various objects. Now see if you can make a judgment about what you’re looking at. Notice any flaw it might have. Keep going—moving your attention from thing to thing—and evaluating each one in turn.

Here’s the question: Is there anything that can’t be evaluated, that doesn’t have some flaw? Answer: Probably not. This simple fact becomes important because every one of us experiences moments when we actively look for flaws—in ourselves, in others, in the objects around us. And we can always find them.

Why do we judge? What drives us at times to seek the negative? Listed below are some reasons why we make judgments. Give a little thought to each one, and see which might apply to you.

- To predict or resolve a problem (the most helpful kind of judgment).
- To protect us from disappointment.
- To try to fix or perfect ourselves or others.
- To prove ourselves better than someone else (they have flaws we don’t possess).
- To prove that we’re as bad as we think, or as bad as someone else (usually our parents) thought.
- To punish ourselves for mistakes or wrongdoing.
- To get relief from hurt or shame (by judging those who hurt or shamed us).

Sometimes knowing the function of a thought gives us perspective. And helps us take our thoughts a little less seriously.