



# Embrace the 4 personal freedoms

Bởi:

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*“Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms - to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”*

Viktor Frankl: *Man’s Search for Meaning*

In his 1941 State of the Union address, Franklin D. Roosevelt outlined his Four Freedoms (freedom of speech and of worship, freedom from want and from fear). Viktor Frankl, who survived a Nazi concentration camp where those four freedoms were all denied, wrote that the only freedom which can never be taken away is the freedom of attitude – the freedom to choose how you respond to what happens to you even when you cannot control what it is that happens to you. Today, I offer a new set of 4 Freedoms. These are not freedoms that can be granted or guaranteed by someone else – they are freedoms that must be claimed and nourished by you yourself.

*Freedom from the past:* We all carry around emotional baggage and to a greater or lesser extent we are all plagued by the mental graffiti of negative self-talk (you know the voice I’m talking about – the one that tells you that you’re not good enough, not pretty enough, not smart enough, not popular enough, that you are not capable of success and wouldn’t deserve it anyway). Negative self-talk is nothing more than a malignant echo of things that were said to you in the past and that are now insinuating themselves into your sense of self-identity.

Every historian knows that the past is what you choose to remember and how you choose to remember it. In his study of geniuses, psychologist James Hillman found that they consistently fabricated a past that supported who they wanted to be in the future – for example, a musical prodigy who “remembered” waking up in the middle of the night with a desperate need to practice when her parents said she slept the sleep of the dead.

You “remember” a more positive and nurturing past by letting go of the emotional baggage of ancient hurts and grudges and focusing your mental faculties on those memories that help set the stage for the future you wish to create – even if you have to massage those memories the way the prodigies in Hillman’s studies did. In our

workshops I often show people how to use a Metaphorical Visualization technique of carrying around a rock to represent old emotional baggage. I have them carry on an imaginary conversation with their rock, explaining to it why they are going to leave it behind. On the final day of the trek we build a cairn (a pile of rocks that marks the trail for other hikers – another beautiful metaphor!). Everyone lays their rock, and the emotional baggage it represents, on the cairn and says goodbye to it. Then we turn our backs to the cairn and hike out. Some of the changes people have made just by calling out and leaving behind their emotional baggage have been nothing short of miraculous.

You confront and rewrite negative self-talk by recognizing that it is actually not you talking – and I mean that literally! Negative self-talk is *always* in the second person: you will *never* hear that toxic voice say “I’m fat, stupid, and ugly” – it will always be “*You* are fat, stupid, and ugly” as if it were someone else talking to you. The reason it’s in the second person is that *it is* someone else talking – you are listening to the malignant echo of things said to you long ago that hurt and stuck and metastasized (that’s what cancer does). Stand up for yourself and talk back to that voice – re-scripting your inner dialog is the essential first step to give yourself the mental and emotional freedom you must have to achieve your most authentic dreams and goals and become the person you are meant to be.

*Freedom from self-limiting assumptions:* We all make assumptions about ourselves, about other people, and about how the world works. These assumptions are almost always wrong, but when we act upon, or fail to act because of, them we impose serious limitations upon our potential. In his book *Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff... And It’s All Small Stuff* the late Richard Carlson said that when you argue for your limitations, they’re yours. Never assume you “can’t” because you will never know until you try.

Challenge assumptions you make about other people by being what I call a Dionarap – which is the word paranoid spelled backwards. Assume that, unless and until proven otherwise, everyone likes you and wants to help you achieve your goals. This assumption will help you overcome the fear of rejection and worries about what other people think of you (and trust me on this one – you will worry a lot less about what other people think of you if you will admit to yourself how *infrequently* other people think of you).

And challenge assumptions you make about how the world works. I recently read the manuscript for a brilliant book that I know will never be submitted to a publisher because the author has made all sorts of assumptions that have become excuses: she doesn’t have friends in the right places, she doesn’t have an agent, no one is buying books in her genre, and the like. These assumptions are holding her back more compellingly than iron bars of a jail cell.

## Embrace the 4 personal freedoms

The initial challenge to changing your assumptions is recognizing them in the first place. Assumptions are often implicit, acting below the level of conscious awareness. Any time you find yourself stuck and not taking action you need to take to achieve your goals, ask yourself what assumptions you are making – about yourself, other people, and how the world works. Then change the ones that are holding you back – assume the best and you are likely to get it.

*Freedom from emotional vampires:* Extensive research shows that the single-most powerful impact upon your attitudes, your behaviors, your beliefs, and even your income is the people with whom you associate – what sociologists call your reference group. If you spend time with toxically negative people – the emotional vampires who suck the life energy from everyone around them – it will pollute your emotional wellbeing the same way hanging around with smokers will pollute your lungs. Unfortunately, one of every five employees in the typical workplace is aggressively disengaged, and some of these people are emotional vampires who spend a good part of each day sucking the life's energy out of people they work with.

These emotional vampires will criticize you for wanting to work hard, for being passionate about your profession, and for wanting to bring joy into the workplace. They will put you down with names like “overachiever” and “quota buster” and make fun of you for wanting to be part of anything positive or constructive like participating in the daily promise from [The Self-Empowerment Pledge](#). They will steal your energy – and this is a theft even more damaging than if they were to steal your money. Unfortunately, in some cases these people are managers (Gallup calls toxic and disengaged managers “bosses from hell”).

Ideally, you will be able to claim your freedom by walking away as soon as the criticizing, complaining, gossiping, and finger-pointing begins. If you are unable to leave the room, you can claim your freedom by putting a big smile on your face and giving a positive spin to every topic of conversation. For example, whenever I fly I preempt having to hear the inevitable whining about delays, uncomfortable seats, and whatever else has my seatmate feeling victimized by saying “Isn't this amazing? We live in a world where you and I can do something that the most creative man in the history of the world, Leonardo DaVinci, spent his whole life fantasizing about – flying above the clouds. What a miracle!” After that, I *never* have to put up with their whining; they might dump their misery (co-miserate = be miserable together) on the person across the aisle, but they never dump it on me!

*Freedom from the fear of humiliation:* When people talk about fear of rejection or fear of failure, what they are really talking about is fear of humiliation. It's embarrassing to be rejected, it's embarrassing to fail. Fear of humiliation is a prison that can be more confining than any prison cell. An author I know has a ritual to deal with this fear.

Embrace the 4 personal freedoms

Before submitting a proposal or a manuscript to a publisher, he writes his own rejection letter. Here's one that he shared with me:

Dear Author (pardon the expression):

Thank you for submitting your manuscript, and thank you in advance for never doing it again. It's not just that your writing is trite and hackneyed, though it certainly is, or that your plot wouldn't make a daytime soap, much less a work of literary fiction, though that is also quite true. No, dear (ahem) author. We actually had a moment of silence in memory of the tree that died so you could create this insult to the English language. We suggest you go back to the writing exercises you undoubtedly did early in your school career – you know, writing over-and-over the sentence that begins, “I will not...” Then, dear (ha ha) “author,” complete those sentences with this promise: “I will not ever again sit down at a keyboard with the intention of writing something more serious than a letter to the editor.”

My friend finds this therapeutic. He has received hundreds of rejection letters, but none as harsh as those he writes to himself. And in the process, he is discovering an important element of the diagnosis – that none of those rejection letters are rejecting *him*, they are only rejecting something he has written. It also reminds him that when an editor rejects a book proposal, it often says more about that editor's tastes than it does about the author's writing.

### *Claim your freedom*

Set aside some quiet time for yourself and to think about how you can claim your freedom by declaring your independence from the baggage of the past, from the assumptions of the present, from the negativity of emotional vampires, and from the fears that are holding you back from pursuing your most authentic goals and dreams and becoming the person you are meant to be.

In today's world, no one can give you the freedoms that really matter. You must claim them for yourself.