

High-Intermediate 1
Unit 8: Reading
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Useless Regrets

regret (noun) = remorse = a feeling of sadness about something sad or wrong or about a mistake that you have made, and a wish that it could have been different and better

regretful (adjective) = remorseful

regret (verb) = feel remorseful = to feel sorry about a situation, especially something sad or wrong or a mistake that you have made

For all sad words of tongue or pen

The Saddest are these:

“It might have been.”

-John Greenleaf Whittier

American Poet (1807-1892)

I ought to have applied to college.

I could have become a doctor.

My parents might have encouraged me more.

I shouldn't have missed that opportunity.

I could have been rich and famous by now.

Not only the saddest, but perhaps the most destructive. According to recent ideas in psychology, our feelings are mainly the result of the way we think about reality, not reality itself.

destructive (adjective) = causing, or able to cause, damage

According to Nathan S. Kline, M.D., it's not unusual to feel deep regret about things in the past that you think you should have done and did not do—or the opposite, about things you did do and feel you should not have done. In fact, we learn by thinking about past mistakes. For example, a student who fails a test learns that he or she should have studied more and can improve on the next test.

M.D. = Medical Doctor



Dr. Nathan S. Kline, American Psychiatrist

However, thinking too much about past mistakes and missed opportunities can create such bad feelings that people become paralyzed and can't move on with their lives. Arthur Freeman, Ph.D., and Rose DeWolf have labeled this process "woulda/coulda/shoulda thinking," and they have written an entire book about this type of disorder.

paralyze (verb) = cripple = to cause a person, animal, or part of the body to lose the ability to move or feel; to cause a person, group, or organization to stop working or acting normally

The international sanctions have paralyzed North Korea's economy.

If you don't carry injured people carefully, they might become paralyzed.

paralysis (noun) = being paralyzed

move on = continue

label (verb) = call; name; describe

entire = complete; whole

disorder (noun) = abnormality; abnormal function

In *Woulda/Coulda/Shoulda: Overcoming Regrets, Mistakes, and Missed Opportunities*, Freeman and DeWolf suggest challenging regrets with specifics. "Instead of saying, 'I should have done better,'" they suggest, "Write down an example of a way in which you might have done better. Exactly what should you have done to produce the desired result? Did you have the skills, money, experience, etc. at the time?" In the case of the student who should have studied more, perhaps on that occasion it was not really possible.

overcome = win over; defeat

specifics ≠ generalities

specifics = the details of a subject

desired = expected

on that occasion = at that particular time

A Split Quotation Containing a **Nested Quotation**:

"Instead of saying, **I should have done better,**" they suggest, "Write down an example of a way in which you might have done better. Exactly what should you have done to produce the desired result? Did you have the skills, money, experience, etc. at the time?"

When people examine their feelings of regret about the past, they often find that many of them are simply not based in fact. A mother regrets missing a football game in which her son's leg was injured. She blames herself and the officials. "I should have gone," she keeps telling herself. "I could have prevented the injury. They might at least have telephoned me as soon as it happened." Did she really have the power to prevent her son's injury? Should the officials have called her before looking at the injury? Probably not.

examine = evaluate

not based in fact = unrealistic

officials = people who are in charge of something

Once people realize how unrealistic their feelings of regret are, they are more ready to let go of them. Cognitive psychologist David Burns, M.D., suggests specific strategies for dealing with useless feelings of regret and getting on with the present. One amusing technique is to spend ten minutes a day writing down all the things you regret. Then say them all aloud (better yet, record them), and listen to yourself.

let go of = get rid of

once = as soon as; when

cognition (noun) = the process of understanding

cognitive (adjective) = related to cognition

get on with = continue

- I shouldn't have told that joke in the office. My career is ruined.
- I ought to have cleaned the house instead of going out this weekend. My mother's right. I'm just lazy.
- My friend could have told me he was going out of town this weekend. He's an inconsiderate jerk. I should never have started going out with him.

Once you listen to your own "woulda/ coulda/shoulda" thoughts, it's easier to see their illogic. For example, it's unlikely that your entire career is in ruins because of one joke. You're an adult and you can choose to go out instead of cleaning house. That doesn't make you a lazy person. And your friend isn't a jerk for making a single mistake.

jerk = an idiot; a stupid person

illogic = being unreasonable/illogical

unlikely = improbable

After you recognize how foolish most feelings of regret sound, the next step is to let go of them and to start dealing with life in the present. For some, this might be harder than sighing over past errors. An Italian proverb notes, "When the ship has sunk, everyone knows how they could have saved it." The message from cognitive psychology is similar. It's easy to second guess about the past: the real challenge is to solve the problems you face right now.

sound = seem

sigh = to breathe out slowly and noisily, expressing tiredness, sadness, pleasure, etc.

Main Ideas:

- Regrets are destructive feelings.
- Reality is made in our mind. In other words, reality is subjective and our emotions are the result of the way we think.
- Regrets are sometimes useful because we learn by thinking about our past mistakes. But having too many regrets is very destructive and cripples our life.

- We should challenge our regrets with specifics.
- We can write down our regrets to see how illogical they are.

Source:

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