

Full transcript of author and Stanford lecturer Shirzad Chamine's TEDx Talk: **Know Your Inner Saboteurs** at TEDxStanford conference. Shirzad is the author of the bestseller book: **Positive Intelligence**.

### **Shirzad Chamine - Author & Stanford lecturer**

I'd like to start by making one thing very clear. I want you to know that I am absolutely, incredibly and totally awesome!

Now, before you start thinking that I have a problem with humility, which I don't, let me add something important.

I believe you too are awesome. Is that better now?

*(Audience: Yes.)*

But I also believe based on my research that there is — no, it's me, OK. But I also believe based on my research that there is an 80% probability that you have no idea how truly magnificent you really are. You used to know, but you've forgotten.

I'm here to show you the science behind how you gradually forget your true self, your true potential, and how you can rediscover and unleash an even happier and more capable version of yourself: **the true magnificent you!** Is that cool? Great.

I lecture on this topic right here at Stanford, and my work is based on extensive research in neuroscience and psychology.

I'd like to show you my most important evidence proving that you used to know how amazing you really are. Would you like to see that evidence?

Well, here it is. Do you think she knows how magnificent she is? Absolutely. She is radiating with it.

What about him? Do you think he knows how magnificent he is? Every strand of his hair knows how magnificent he is.

And what about these two? I know they know, because they are my precious kids, Tisa and Kion,

The point is this: you were born as a unique and magnificent being and you used to know it.

But what about this one? Do you think he knows how magnificent he is? He actually has no clue; he used to know, but by the time this picture is taken, he no longer remembers.

By the way, this is me. Adorable, right? I told you.

### **So why and how did I begin to forget who I really am?**

I was born a happy kid in a troubled household. I lived with four siblings and my parents in a two-bedroom apartment in a ghetto.

My father was scary, angry and unpredictably violent. My mother was always running around terrified. I wasn't getting much love.

Now, since my life was in my parents' hands, it would've been absolutely terrifying for me to admit that they were flawed.

So, instead, a voice started forming in my head and saying that my parents were perfect and the reason they didn't love me was, because I was unworthy of their love.

I now call this voice the **"Judge"**. Of course, once the Judge started

judging me, it also had to start judging everybody else around me so that I would be less terrified.

I grew up completely unaware that this Judge character was beginning to take control in my mind. I only discovered it 27 years later in an MBA class, right here at Stanford.

We were divided into groups of 12 MBA students sitting in a circle, sharing our emotions openly. One of my classmates in the circle turned to me and said nervously, *“Shirzad, this is really hard for me to tell you, but I often feel harshly judged by you, and it really bothers me.”*

I turned to him and said, *“John, thank you so much for telling me this. This is very helpful feedback.”*

In the back of my mind, I was thinking, *“Well, of course, you feel judged by me, you idiot! You are the biggest loser in this group. How else do you expect me to think of you?”*

But then a second person, a third person and a fourth person in the group said exactly the same thing.

I kept thanking them politely while thinking, *“What losers, blaming me for their insecurity!”* I really — I did think like that, trust me.

But somehow the fifth person finally got through. All of a sudden, I realized: Oh my God, they are right. I judge everything instantly. This Judge character in my head was constantly and brutally beating down not only others, but myself. It was the invisible character in my head. It was the invisible lens that distorted my reality. And that discovery changed my life.

Since this invisible character, Judge character in my head, secretly

sabotaged me, I called him a “**Saboteur.**”

I later discovered that in addition to the Judge Saboteur, there are nine other Saboteurs, like the **Controller**, **Stickler** and **Victim**.

Even in a perfectly happy childhood, you still develop a couple of these Saboteurs as a coping mechanisms as a vulnerable kid. For example, you might develop **Controller** tendencies to feel safer in a chaotic environment or become the Victim to get more attention.

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The problem is that these Saboteurs become the invisible masters in your head, just like my Judge had. They pretend they are you, but they aren’t you.

**That’s how you forget who you really are.** A war is constantly raging inside your head between your Saboteurs and your original true self, whom I call your **Sage**.

	SURVIVOR BRAIN	POSITIVE INTELLIGENCE BRAIN
VOICE	Saboteurs	Sage
FOCUS	Survive	Thrive
EMOTIONS	Anxiety, Anger Disappointment, Shame, Guilt Regret, Blame	Curiosity, Empathy, Joy, Creativity, Peace, Calm Resolve, Gratitude

These are based on entirely different regions of your brain. Your

Saboteurs are based on the **survival-brain region**, which is made up mostly of the brain stem, limbic system and parts of the left brain.

Your Sage is based on the **positive-intelligence brain**, which is made up mostly of the middle prefrontal cortex, ACC insular cortex and parts of the right brain.

Here is a fascinating insight and clue to your happiness. Look at this: the survival-brain region and its Saboteurs are wired, are neurochemically wired to feel stress and unhappiness. They just can't help themselves. If you want to feel consistently happier, you must learn to strengthen your Sage and weaken your Saboteurs.

It's just a matter of neurochemical science. One of the things that I can guarantee you, based on my experience, is that you can achieve all the great wealth and success in the world and still feel deeply unhappy because of your Saboteurs.

I once ran a leadership development seminar for more than 100 CEOs and presidents who are all extremely successful and look perfectly happy on the outside.

I told them, *"Look, I have coached too many successful CEOs and billionaires to be still fooled by your facade of confidence and happiness."* So I asked them to anonymously write on an index card one secret they never shared about how they really felt inside.

With their permission, I'd like to read some of those cards:

*"I am terrified of failing as the leader of my business."*

*"I am rarely at peace with myself."*

*"I fear dying of an early age from overwork and stress."*

*"I am feeling very sad and lonely, and the antidepressants I'm on don't seem to be helping."*

*"I battle with constantly ranking and judging everyone around me."*

*"I have no idea how to truly connect with my only son."*

*"My air of confidence is false."*

*"I am self-destructive, and I don't know why."*

*"I don't love myself very much."*

*"I lack strength in resisting temptations and desires."*

*"I often feel like I'm a fraud."*

*"I worry my materialism is hurting my children."*

*"I have been abusing drugs and alcohol to deal with stress."*

*"I wish I could run away for one year - just be alone."*

*And finally, "I'm afraid of ending up like my father, who is unloved and will die alone."*

This is the story of our lives, folks. I have worked with people ranging from these CEOs to people on the manufacturing floor without high school diplomas. Regardless of our level of wealth or success, these Saboteurs are still there, tormenting us.

I used to think I was particularly broken and screwed up. What a relief to discover that we are all screwed up by our Saboteurs.

## So, who are these Saboteurs?

In my research, I have classified the Saboteurs based on their motivation for independence, acceptance or security and their style of assert, earn or avoid.

This grid shows the gang of 9 Saboteurs. They are: **Controller, Hyper-Achiever, Restless, Stickler, Pleaser, Hyper-Vigilant, and Avoider, Victim, Hyper-Rational.** What a cast of characters!

Everyone has the master Judge Saboteur in addition to at least one from this gang of nine.

Now, before you are able to weaken these Saboteurs, you need to be able to catch them in your head, red-handed. Imagine that you're in the middle of an important project and have just learned that you've completely failed the midway milestones.

Here is how some of your Saboteurs in your head might be talking:

**Judge:** *"Oh, I'm a loser, just a stupid loser. Everything will start crashing down now."*

**Controller:** *"But my way's always the right way. Someone else must have screwed up."*

**Victim:** *"Oh, they did it to me again. Just watch. That next lightning will be striking right here!"* Ow, that hurt.

**Stickler:** *"I knew it! That report cover used the wrong shade of blue."*

**Avoider:** *"Oh, there's still plenty of time. I wonder where I should go for lunch."*

**Hyper-Vigilant:** *That's me tearing my hair out - if I still had any...*

And so on with the other five Saboteurs.

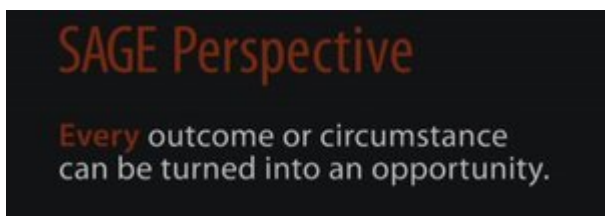
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Now, once you catch a Saboteur in your mind, what you want to do is just label that thought as "Saboteur" and let it go instead of trusting it or pursuing it.

Just notice the difference between me saying "I will fail tomorrow" versus "My pesky Judge Saboteur says I'll fail tomorrow."

You feel the difference? **You weaken your Saboteurs by exposing and labeling them.**

**Now, how would your Sage respond in the same exact scenario?**



One of the most brilliant things about your Sage is the Sage perspective. Every outcome or circumstance can be turned into an opportunity.

So you ask, "How do I turn my failure in this project into an opportunity?" This perspective changes everything.

With this perspective, you keep the positive-intelligence brain activated, which gives you access to five great Sage powers:





**Empathize.** Your Sage knows that beating yourself down when you're already down is absolutely insane. So you feel compassion for yourself and others as fallible humans. This keeps you energized and positive.

**Explore.** You become the fascinated explorer kid in the woods, turning over every rock to see what's underneath it. You become fascinated to discover all the factors contributing to your project's failure. You discover things you couldn't have seen if you were upset or defensive.

**Innovate:** You become the innovative kid on the beach, building sandcastles again. Since your positive-intelligence brain is wired for creativity, you can take all of these discoveries about your project's failure into creative new solutions for the project.

And in the interest of time, you then navigate by choosing a direction and move into fearless, bold action. Your Sage performs a lot better and remains positive even in the middle of this crisis.

Now, you would only be able to perform this way if you have strong Sage muscles. Functional MRI of the brain shows that one technique to build powerful Sage muscles is to shift your attention to one physical sensation

for ten seconds a few times every hour, a few reps an hour. This leads to some surprising recommendations.

For example, if you want to perform better in your job, then really, really taste that bite of your crunchy apple, really see the hundred shades of color in your friend's eyes, or hug your loved one so attentively that you feel her heartbeat.

This surprisingly sounds too good to be true until you study the neuroscience evidence. In order to track your progress, we can now actually measure the strength of your Sage muscles versus your Saboteurs, based on your emotions in a typical 24-hour period.


$$\% \frac{\text{Sage}}{\text{Saboteurs}} = \text{Positive Intelligence Quotient (PQ)}$$

We have defined this ratio as your **positive intelligence quotient** or "PQ." Independent researchers have now shown that with increased PQ, people are far happier and less stressed. They also perform much better.

For example, almost 40% better in sales and a third better in team performance metrics. Everyone can learn to strengthen their Sage muscles with a little practice.

And finally, you can help strengthen the Sage in your loved ones. Unlike my daughter, Tisa, my son, Kion, loves tickling. So I have invented a game with him where I start tickling him and stop only if he gives me all the right answers.

So I start tickling him and ask, "*Kion, why do I love you so much?*" He has learned to say, and he says, "*I don't know, Daddy. Why do you love me so much?*"

I ask, *“Is it because you’re so handsome?”* I know, it’s his mother’s genes – right? – you don’t have to tell me that. And he has learned to say, and he says, *“No, Daddy, it isn’t because I am handsome.”*

I ask, *“Is it because you get good grades?”*

*“No, Daddy, it isn’t.”*

*“Is it because you’re good in sports?”*

*“No, Daddy, it isn’t.”*

So I go down a long list of his great qualities, and he keeps saying, *“No, Daddy, it isn’t.”*

So at the end, I pretend great frustration, and I say, *“So why is it, Kion, why do I love you so much?”*

And he has learned to say, and he says, *“Daddy, it’s because I am me!”*

*Daddy, it’s because I am me!*

His beautiful true self, his Sage. What about you? What would life be like if you fully reclaimed your beautiful true self, your Sage?

What would be the gift of that to you, to your loved ones, to our world? What would become possible then?

**You are a special, unique and magnificent being. It’s time for you to remember.**

Thank you.

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