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## **Sentence Completion Program as effective on-line coaching as exemplified by Nathaniel Branden's program for improving self-esteem**

From an early age, each person creates in their mind a system of beliefs about themselves. The first people with whom the earliest and the longest relationships are formed are parents. This relationship strongly influences our personalities and the way we perceive ourselves. The entirety of parental behavior towards the child; the acceptance or denial of feelings; blocking or lack thereof the children's desire for independence; criticism; assigning roles and labeling; the use of praise evaluators or lack thereof all affect the child-parents relationship (Faber, Mazlish 1992), and further on, the children's attitude towards themselves. The kind of beliefs that arise in this relationship (but not only) depends on the self-esteem of a person.

Many people struggle to strengthen self-esteem because they realize that this is a type of need. Satisfying this need is largely the condition of improving the quality of emotional life, and also a guarantee of achieving broadly understood success and personal happiness. "Its absence does not necessarily mean that we will die, but will hinder our functioning. Stating that high self-esteem is the need, it means that:

- It brings a significant contribution to the process of life.
- It is essential for normal and healthy development.
- It is a value serving survival" (Branden 1998: 35).

Nathaniel Branden and his team of scientists from The Nathaniel Branden Institute developed a method argument completion of sentences, which used a 30-week program improving self-esteem. "Sentence completion is a technique I have developed in my clinical practice that can be used to facilitate self-understanding and personal growth. (...) This program is aimed at raising your self-esteem. It focuses on helping you to practice better what I have identified as the <six pillars of self-esteem>" (<http://www.nathanielbranden.com/sentence-completion-i>).

This program has been published in Nathaniel Branden's book "The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem" (<http://www.nathanielbranden.com/sentence-completion-i>) and translated into many languages. Even though the book was first written for Nathaniel Branden's client, now readers can carry out this program by themselves.

In order to raise the level of self-esteem in society, the program has also been adapted to be carried out through social media, that is primarily Facebook. The author of this publication started it as an event on Facebook, which within a few days

has collected about 10 600 people interested in raising their self-esteem by means of the above mentioned program.

The program is a specially selected sentences completion method. Four to seven sentences are given for a particular week. Such a package of sentences is completed by participants from Monday to Friday. Each of the sentence needs to receive 6–10 endings. The only condition is that after completing the sentence is grammatically correct. On Saturday and Sunday all sentences are to be analyzed by the participants who additionally have to complete one additional sentence (which also has to have 6–10 endings). This sentence is fixed for the entire program.

Of the more than 10 000 people during the first week almost a thousand left the event. These were people who once stated that at that moment the proposed method did not suit them. Up to the end of the third week the next thousand people quit. Those were not interested in what happens in the event. At the fifteen-week mark, a group of people who have taken the challenge of being in the program decided to systematically (every day) work on themselves using the proposed method. The number of people who participated for 31 weeks (the Polish version has one more week focusing on accepting feelings of joy) was 130.

These numerical summary is given in order to show that this method of work is not for everyone. The number of people gathered by the Facebook event showed how vast is the need for changes in the area. Other matters on the other hand show how many people are actually willing to undertake systematic work on themselves to change their beliefs. With approximately 10 000 people interested in the program only 130 took the effort of real change and lasted till the end, or did break, but returned to the program to finish. These people are still interested in this form of work on themselves and participate or have participated in the following coaching programs already written by the author of this article.

### **How the program works?**

The program starts on Monday and ends on Sunday for the convenience of the host and participants. The idea is to work a full week with each set of sentences. On Monday, the participants get a new set of sentences. They work with it until Friday morning. They complete sentences in a special notebook or in a file on their computers. During the weekend, participants read sentences completed on weekdays. Additionally they complete only one sentence.

“The essence of the sentence completion procedure is to start with an incomplete sentence, a «sentence stem», and to keep adding different endings, between six and ten, with the sole requirement being that each ending be a grammatical completion of the sentence” (<http://www.nathanielbranden.com/sentence-completion-i>).

Finishing the sentences on Monday is a kind of arousal, focusing on the themes, which sentences direct to. Endings are the first associations with the theme of the week, participants rarely see the relationship between them. The participants often reported that it was either hard to write the required number of terminations or they produced twice as many endings as required. The principle of the program is that the sentences completion process is expected to take no longer than 10 minutes and take place in the morning. After writing the endings

participants have to perform their normal daily activities and do not get mentally attached to what they wrote. In practice, this is done so that the finishing of the sentences already stimulates our consciousness and unconsciousness to work with given subject. Participants experience more activity in the emotional sphere than in the rational sphere.

On Tuesday the process becomes slightly more organized. Participants begin to notice relationships between their endings of sentences. Endings, which tell them nothing on Monday, now change their shape, sometimes even become completely different than they were on Monday. Participants begin to see which part of their past the endings are related to, as well as the convictions behind them.

On Wednesday beliefs start to take clearer shapes. Participants see what beliefs really guided them through the years. They are often different than they thought. Sometimes the participant was firmly convinced that what guided them was consciously chosen. It turned out that the participants' way of looking at themselves forms a single sentence uttered by a parent to a child, causing laughter in the rest of the family. From the point of view of an adult, the sentence was innocent enough and the person looking at the old situation from time perspective was not affected as much. This situation, however, at a time when the participant was a child caused exceptional harm, as a small child is not able to verify whether the sentence spoken by a parent is based on reality or not. What was shown is that such a mocking was imprinted in the subconscious for 20, 30, or even 40 years. The program thus brings out beliefs from the subconscious, behind which stand often strong feelings that have not been worked out during childhood. At that point, a person often does not have enough inner strength to cope with feelings of anger, grief, disappointment, grievances due to criticism, aggressive jokes, or any other form of verbal aggression. Extracting them in adulthood is an opportunity, perhaps the only one, to re-meet them.

The participants look now for those old opinions about themselves, raised to the rank of beliefs as an adult. It gives them the opportunity to distance themselves from certain matters. In addition, the participants have also the strength to confront and work through past experiences and the feelings associated. When they were children, their parents could forbid them from expressing those feelings, as it may have had a negative effect. Over the years, a person probably realizes that suppressing those feeling causes harm and learns to express them in a more or less assertive way, that is, without attacking other people. If not, the program is arranged so as to tame the unwanted feelings and express them very assertively. This is more or less what happens on Wednesday.

On Thursday participants terminate work with old beliefs. At this point, their rationally let go of those beliefs and accept the fact that they were harmful. Once the feelings are out, participants can consciously choose new beliefs.

On Friday the participants write endings which are like a new plan for them: how to treat each other and what they should do to recover from the negative impact of old beliefs. Participants choose new beliefs without verbalizing them often because the work they have done allows them to "unlock" and act in areas in which the old beliefs affected them directly or indirectly. The knowledge of personal development area gained from the start of the program builds up and finally begins to interact with the emotional level.

On Saturday and Sunday participants read their endings of sentences from the whole week. After a brief analysis, they provide 6–10 endings to a sentence: If any of what I wrote this week is true, it might be helpful if I...“ (<http://www.nathanielbranden.com/sentence-completion-i>). Weekend sentence completion combined with the analysis leads to a kind of summary of the entire week, and sometimes to writing an action plan. It is possible because the words “... it might be helpful if I...” impose a list of actions that participants want to take in order to feel inner harmony and to follow their own needs.

### **What real changes in the psyche of the participants the program brings?**

From the opinions of people who participated in the program and completed it, as well as the personal experiences of the author, who took part in it from beginning to end, it appears that:

- The program organizes thinking. It allows the participants to realize and confront their beliefs. It provides the participants with an opportunity to track what was imprinted in their minds when they were children, analyze it alongside with the feelings then present and finally to properly categorize the already existing beliefs or to consciously create brand new ones.
- The program allows participants to confront their feelings facing the convictions imposed in childhood. Those are mostly suppressed and unwanted feelings that participants cannot deal with. They are deeply rooted and work to their disadvantage. As Nathaniel Branden writes “If you fully accept and experience the negative feelings, often we will be able to get rid of them. Having obtained because the right to exist, leave the central position.” (Branden 1998: 35). Sentence completion makes the participants reach into their subconscious and extract what is there, interfering with daily functioning, influencing decisions (often even preventing the decision-making process), causing withdrawal, avoiding responsibility, obstructing taking action, blocking spontaneous and free interaction. Thus, the program also causes the participants to:
  - become more aware of themselves, their feelings, thoughts, needs, desires, but also limitations,
  - begin to accept themselves to a much greater extent,
  - accept their feelings, thoughts, and also their looks, their sexuality, the level of assertiveness, responsibility, etc,
  - treat the program as investing time and effort in themselves and derive satisfaction from it,
  - raise and strengthen self-esteem by persevering in the program for 31 weeks (making the effort every morning after 10 minutes and possibly in the evening is the reason to think about themselves with admiration and satisfaction.

Realizing themselves actually makes them more ready to consciously enter into relationships with others; they cease to be ashamed of themselves and ways of expressing themselves ([http://www.jakmowic.org.pl/tydzien-trzydziesty-pierwszy-pewni\\_siebie/](http://www.jakmowic.org.pl/tydzien-trzydziesty-pierwszy-pewni_siebie/)). From the passivity of life they go to change the world around them. When previously they were not even “able to survive” at the

end of the program not only are they able to survive, but more importantly, they can take care of themselves and “seek appropriate forms of self-expression.” (Branden 1998: 35).

Further effects also are: courage to take action, to relate; less focus on what people think; the desire to pursue dreams, and not just thinking about them; different outlook on childhood, especially injuries; tackling roles that are assigned to them in their families; being more assertive within the meaning of assertiveness, which is “to respect their own desires, needs, values and” – already mentioned – “the search for appropriate forms of expressing them in everyday life.” (Branden 1998: 35)

## What is coaching?

The popular definition of coaching is: “Coaching is a process of work that has a goal of improving client’s performance, usually through work one on one, as well as reflection of the way application of specific knowledge and skills. Coaching acts as a driving force that liberates human potential and generates new and creative ideas, models and behaviours that lead to success.” (<http://atriagroup.org/coaching/>)

According to the experts of coaching, thanks to the methods used, among others, the client should:

- Expand own capacity
- Develop your own vision
- Achieve a balance
- Identify and activate hidden talents
- Develop personal mission
- Develop creativity
- Define the values and priorities.

Coaching can help with:

- Blocking state
- Stress
- Life and business crises
- Lack of motivation
- Problems in managing teams, changes, etc.
- Mental blocks
- Conflict situations.

Coaching is also the art of asking the right questions, which stimulate coachees to work with existing internal resources. Coaching is not psychoanalysis, but aims to stimulate coachees to discover what they have, what they care about, what values they want to confess, the purposes for which to strive. A real coach can direct the customer to defeat their inner blockades.

## Sentence Completion Program as effective on-line coaching

Sentence Completion Programs are effective coaching, even though they are carried out on-line, because the sentences used stimulate the participants to work with their individual experiences and knowledge. They help discover the positive

aspects of talents or skills, but also to break individual barriers. Every discovery of old beliefs, feelings of overwork standing behind these beliefs and selection of a new one provokes self-consciousness, breaking personal barriers, realizing what being human is about, defining a purpose, and increasing the courage and motivation to act. Work with feelings, accepting these unwanted, allowing them to pass, also results in most cases in resolving internal conflicts and the increasing assertiveness is again a step to resolve conflicts with others. These findings, but above all the personal opinions of the participants served hot in every set of sentences ([https://www.facebook.com/events/1468078440149188/?active\\_tab=posts](https://www.facebook.com/events/1468078440149188/?active_tab=posts); [https://www.facebook.com/events/1618501375054622/?active\\_tab=posts](https://www.facebook.com/events/1618501375054622/?active_tab=posts)), testifying to the effectiveness of this form of coaching.

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## Abstract

Sentence Completion Program is technique, which help people to strengthen their self-esteem. Participants of Program each day of week ended special selected sentences to develop their self-conscious, facilitate self-understanding and personal growth. Coaching has similar assumptions and this article shows that Sentence Completion Program conducted on-line is kind of coaching.

**Key words:** Sentence Completion Program, coaching on-line, self-esteem

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