Rational and Irrational Beliefs

Rational or Irrational?

Maxie Maultsby and Albert Ellis list five basic principles against which an idea [or a program incorporating a set of ideas] can be judged as rational or irrational, reasonable or unreasonable.

Here is the formula:

1. If I believe this thought to be true, will it help me remain sober, safe, and alive?
2. Is this thought objectively true, and upon what evidence can I form this opinion?
3. Is this thought producing feelings I want to have?
4. Is this thought helping me reach a chosen goal?
5. Is this thought likely to minimize conflict with others?'1

The Notorious Five

'There are five irrational beliefs that many of us hold and that we can learn to unlearn them. The notorious five are:

1. Musterbation (shoulding, demandingness). I must succeed and obtain approval.
2. Awfulizing. I lapsed two weeks ago. Isn't that just awful? [No.]
3. Low Frustration Tolerance. I can't quit smoking; it would be too hard for me.
   [Cancer is even harder.]
4. Rating and Blaming. I'm worthless because I made a mistake, or, the world's a rotten place to live.
   [Know a better one?]

5. Overgeneralizing – Always or Never attitudes. AA is good for everybody; it worked for me; or, AA is a lousy outfit; I tried it and it didn't work for me.' 2

What are Rational Beliefs?

'Rational beliefs represent reasonable, objective, flexible, and constructive conclusions or inferences about reality that support survival, happiness, and healthy result; they:

1. Promote productivity and creativity;
2. Support positive relationships;
3. Prompt accountability without unnecessary blame and condemnation;
4. Encourage acceptance and tolerance;
5. Strengthen persistence and self-discipline;
6. Serve as a platform for conditions that propel personal growth;
7. Correlate with healthy risk-taking initiatives;
8. Link to a sense of emotional well-being and positive mental health;
9. Lead to a realistic sense of perspective;
10. Further the empowerment of others;
11. Stimulate an openness to experience and an experimental outlook;
12. Direct our efforts along ethical pathways.

What's the Concern?

Harmful irrational beliefs cloud your consciousness with distortions, misconceptions, overgeneralizations, and oversimplifications....They limit and narrow your outlook such that you repeat mistakes. Some forms put temporary escape

of tension over long-term goals and benefits. We find core irrational beliefs present in destructive…conditions such as impulsiveness, arrogance, defeatism, condemnation, depression, anxiety, hostility, insecurity, addictions, procrastination, prejudice, envy, compulsions, and obsessions.’ [3]

1. “From Addiction, Change, and Choice”, by Vince Fox, Chapter 9, p. 111
2. “When AA Doesn’t Work for You, Ellis and Velten: Quoted from “Addiction, Change, and Choice”, by Vince Fox
3. “Smart Recovery, A Sensible Primer”, by Dr. Bill Knaus.