

Compensatory Strategies

In Video Two of your training series, you will learn about what I (Christine) call your “Compensatory Strategy”. Use this worksheet in addition to the video to understand and identify your particular compensatory strategy.

What is a Compensatory Strategy?

Your compensatory strategy (CS) drives your behavior and choices without you even realizing it and is consequently responsible for a lot of the results, or lack of results, in your life today. The tricky thing about your CS is that you are REALLY good at it... but it's not good for you because it was developed during a time, or times, when you were struggling or suffering. Once you bring conscious awareness to your CS and shift out of using it so much, you are going to be able to create different, more desirable results in your life and discover what you are truly gifted at.

Here is how a compensatory strategy develops...

It comes from decisions you made and beliefs you formed a long time ago. We all have experienced things that are deeply painful and then, in an effort to cope and hopefully protect us from more pain, we develop a compensatory strategy. At times when we have felt unworthy, unsafe, unlovable, or broken, we form some pretty damaging belief systems. We buy into the misunderstanding that being ourselves is no longer enough. We believe we are not safe unless we can control things. We believe we are not loveable unless we can prove it to others or please them. Our mind/ego then develops a compensatory strategy in response to these limiting beliefs.

Understanding why you do what you do leads to lasting change. Your compensatory strategy (or strategies) absolutely informs and influences the choices you make and the actions you take in the present, which then impact your future. Often it takes feeling really stuck and unsatisfied to get us to question and investigate these behaviors that have gotten us to where we are which then motivates us to transform our actions.

The Seven Compensatory Strategies:

To help you uncover your own compensatory strategy, here are some common compensatory strategies and explanations of how they develop. You may identify with more than one of them, as some characteristics overlap, however, there will be one that stands out as the motivation that drives your choices and behavior the most.

As you review these, also consider the behaviors your primary caregivers modeled — especially anyone you looked up to or whose approval you sought. Many times we learn our compensatory strategies from others: we either decide to be just like them, or we choose a completely opposite strategy.

Compensatory Strategies

1 *High achiever.*

If you use this strategy, you are **highly driven and have accomplished a lot in your life**. You feel best about yourself when you achieve. You have been acknowledged for your accomplishments and are perceived as successful. Failure is not an option, and if you judge yourself as failing in any way, you are unreasonably hard on yourself. **The next milestone is always on your radar**. You developed this strategy to make up for feeling you were not enough just being who you are (based on criticism, teasing, or feeling left out). Or you could have developed this strategy because you were only rewarded for your accomplishments (and the reward felt like love). **You are also probably very busy and rarely sit still**. There is always something to do, and your entire schedule is full. Most of the time, you feel stressed, possibly overwhelmed, yet you get a high from constantly being on the go. **You take on much more than most people could handle and pride yourself on being busy**.

2 *People Pleaser or Chameleon*

When this is your strategy, **making sure everyone else is happy and likes you is a priority**. You put others first and do whatever it takes to avoid upsetting someone else. You avoid confrontation at all costs. Pleasing others and having them like you makes you feel safe and loved. You have an uncanny ability to read the people in a room and morph into whatever it takes to make them feel at ease. **You thrive on being whoever you need to be in order to blend in and avoid any negativity**. You tend to be outwardly optimistic and can act like everything is fine even if it isn't. **You cannot say no without a huge justification and/or apology**. Perhaps you grew up in a house where there was a lot of fighting and upset, or strong personalities, so you became a peacemaker or highly adaptable. You may have developed the people-pleasing/chameleon strategy to avoid getting picked on. Or maybe you were acknowledged early on for being a "good girl" or "good boy" and thought putting your own needs aside was the way to get love. Even though on the outside you seem fine, you are highly skeptical that people really like you. **And even though you morph to fit in, you really don't feel like you belong**.

3 *Type A or Control Freak*

With this strategy, you get a lot done and love to be in control. **You are a great planner, think everything through, and feel best when things are going your way**. You'd rather take something on yourself than delegate it. "Going with the flow" is completely ineffective for you. This strategy often develops when your trust is violated in some way and you decided the only person you could rely on is yourself. It can also develop as a result of a rattling Expectation Hangover that happened at a young age, causing you to believe that controlling things was the way to manage and prevent the unexpected. **You tend to be a worrywart and experience high levels of anxiety especially if there is any uncertainty in your life**. This strategy can develop from rarely feeling peace or safety and needing a strategy to distract yourself. It can also come from experiencing a highly traumatic situation and not having the support system or tools to process it, which causes the pain to get lodged inside you. **You probably also keep yourself busy because it keeps you from having to feel or think about the pain**. It also prevents you from having to get to close or intimate with anyone else (including yourself).

4 *Validation and Approval Seeker*

This strategy makes you overly reliant on feedback from outside sources. **You desire to be seen, heard, and liked.** This develops from either an overdeveloped or underdeveloped ego: either your parents always made you feel you were the best, so your sense of worth was constantly dependent on outside validation; or you never truly felt seen or supported by any healthy parental figure, so you were on a constant quest for outside approval to make up for it. **Even when you get the validation you long for, you doubt it or want it in a different way, or from someone else.** You often go to a Chinese restaurant when you want nachos meaning you keep going to certain people hoping they will give you the validation you crave, but they continue not to serve it. **When you are not receiving consistent validation from someone you doubt their love for you or question your worthiness.** You are miserable at acknowledging yourself, yet, may also feel a sense of entitlement.

5 *Performer or Comedian.*

If your strategy is to be a performer or comedian, everyone loves being around you because you prefer to keep things light. **Going deep or being in uncomfortable situations is torture.** You prefer to make people laugh, to entertain them. You might be sarcastic or eccentric, to divert people's attention from seeing the real you. These strategies develop because you found distraction a useful way to keep yourself safe and to somehow fit in. You might have grown up in a chaotic household where you became a performer to distract people from engaging in the chaos. **Perhaps you use humor as a way of avoiding vulnerability because you feel insecure or unable to express your deep feelings.** Sarcasm can be a sneaky way to bring out hidden anger or aggression. Or you may have had big feelings as a child but did not feel safe to express them, so distracting yourself and others became a strategy for channeling that energy.

6 *Rescuer or Caretaker*

If your strategy of choice is to assume the role of rescuer/caretaker, **you take care of everyone else.** You are the person people call when they need something, because you'll drop everything to help them. **Boundaries are also a challenge for you.** You often find yourself in relationships with needy people and spend more time attempting to rescue them than caring for yourself. **You want to make sure everyone feels they belong and are extremely sensitive to the needs of others, often at the expense of your own needs.** This strategy develops from feeling responsible for making sure someone else is okay (usually a parent) early on. Your sense of worthiness came from being there for someone else, and you avoid your own pain by caring for others. You tend to take on people as "projects." **You are great at dishing out advice but no so great at actually taking it yourself.**

7 *Perfectionist*

If you embrace this strategy, you are unsettled by things that are not absolutely perfect. **You give 110 percent to everything you do and worry a lot about doing things "right."** You have extremely high standards and rarely feel you are measuring up to them. You don't tolerate mistakes. **You judge yourself harshly,** protecting yourself by being much harder on yourself than anyone else could be. You delay doing things, even things you really want to do, because you think everything has to be perfect before you can begin. **You talk about things far more frequently than you actually do them,** and you tend to err on the pessimistic side. The perfectionist strategy develops from growing up in a very judgmental, fear-based environment. Often perfectionists grew up with parents or authority figures who were hard on them in the name of love and dished out a lot of "constructive criticism." This criticism was internalized and now fuels the belief that love means **pushing yourself hard,** which drives the perfectionist behavior.

Exercise:

Now that you have identified your primary compensatory strategy, it's time to take it one step further and investigate how it is impacting your life. Stay out of judgment and come from the neutral place of research so you can gather a clearer, more conscious understanding of what drives your behavior. Judging or over-analyzing your compensatory strategy is not necessary. When you feel you are in research mode, move through the following steps, answering each question in your journal.

- 1 Identify your primary compensatory strategy, the one that you find yourself using the most.

- 2 Describe the development of your compensatory strategy. What happened to you that made you feel inferior, unsafe, unloved, or unworthy? Or what happened that made you feel so loved and rewarded that you decided you must do it all the time to continue to feel that way?

- 3 Describe the ways your compensatory strategy has driven your behavior. What actions have you engaged in as a result of using this strategy?

- 4 List the payoffs of your compensatory strategy. What has it helped you accomplish? What positive experiences has it created?

- 5 List the costs of your compensatory strategy. How has it hindered you? In what ways has it depleted you?

- 6 Looking ahead, how could continuing to rely so much on your compensatory strategy create regrets in your life?

- 7 If you stopped using your compensatory strategy so much, what qualities or attributes about yourself could you use more of? What actions could you start taking that are more supportive to your well being?