

If You Think You Can Do Better, Then Go Do It

“I can do better than this.”

Surely you’ve heard people utter this phrase before. Here are a couple of common examples:

“I can do better than this relationship.”

“I can do better than this job.”

Sound familiar? Here’s my proposal for anyone who uses the phrase “I can do better than X” when referring to a situation they’re thinking about leaving:

You can do better than that kind of talk. Much better.

Anytime you say “I can do better than X” where X equals a situation you’re currently a part of, that means one of the following things is true of you: you’re naive, you’re bluffing, or you’re selling yourself short.

Here’s a quick argument for that statement:

When you say “I can do better than X,” then either you’re right or you’re wrong.

If you’re right, then you’re selling yourself short because you’re sticking with something that isn’t worthy of you.

If you’re wrong, then either you know you’re wrong or you don’t know you’re wrong.

If you know you’re wrong, then you’re bluffing because you’re boasting about options you don’t even believe you have.

If you don’t know you’re wrong, then you’re naive because you’re overestimating your options, underestimating your obstacles, and bragging about it at the same time.

Therefore, you’re naive, or you’re bluffing, or you’re selling yourself short whenever you say “I can do better than X.”

At this point, you’re probably expecting me to make some kind of critical evaluation of each option. Maybe this is the part of my post where I mock the naive people, or call out the bluffers, or offer encouragement to the ones who sell themselves short. Nope. My word of advice to all three categories is the same: **If you genuinely think you can do better than X, then you should go do better than X.**

The process of pursuing the possibilities that you sincerely believe are most compatible with your true value will be good for you no matter what category you belong to.

If you're naive, it will make you wise. If you're bluffing, it will make you be honest with yourself. If you're selling yourself short, it will make you realize your true potential.

For the naive, reality has an astounding ability to shatter illusions, deflate delusions, and punish bad conclusions. For the bluffers, there's nothing that makes a person speak the truth or stop telling lies quite like being forced to put your money and your muscle where your mouth is. For the ones who sell themselves short, well that's an easy one: if you really have untapped potential that's being stifled by conditions that are lesser than you, then nothing will make this more obvious than your decision to bet on yourself.

I would not only argue that it's good for you to actively pursue your perceived best option, but I'd also contend that it's far more hurtful to you and others when you do otherwise.

Consider the following two dangers of thinking you can do better while remaining in the same place:

1. It makes it difficult if not impossible for you to be satisfied — When you're in "I can do better than this" mode, you tend to evaluate through a lens of unfair comparison. The situation you're in is easily scrutinized because you have access to a ton of data about it. The situation you fantasize about is easily idealized since your romantic perception doesn't get challenged by the surface-level exposure you have to it. Don't get me wrong here. Finding satisfaction doesn't mean that you have to always believe that your current situation is the best of all conceivable worlds. However, being satisfied does require you to believe that the option you're choosing is the one that gives you maximum fulfillment *given your current knowledge, your current values, your current resources, and your current limitations*. To state that less formally, you're not going to be satisfied in any situation where you feel like you're being ripped off, robbed of what you deserve, or restrained from doing what you really want to do. This kind of scenario not only ensures your dissatisfaction, but it also sets you up for resentment. And that brings me to the second danger..
2. It's unfair to the other party involved — The moment you start identifying with a narrative that says "I deserve better than the situation I'm choosing to remain in" guess what happens to the way you see the other party involved? Whether you're conscious of it or not, you're going to treat them like you're doing them some kind of favor. And that stinks for the other party. If you show up to your job like it's beneath you, that stinks for your employer. If you see your significant other as someone who's standing in the way of your ability to create the amazing love life you truly deserve, that stinks for your significant other. The biggest favor you can do for something or someone if you truly believe you can do better is to go do better. If you have to hold back your best self

in order to be in a voluntary relationship, then you're also holding back the other party from being in the kind of relationship **they** deserve: a relationship where their presence is celebrated and continuously greeted with appreciation and respect. And those are things you simply can't provide as long you see yourself as the tireless martyr who righteously puts up with an inferior party or position.

In light of these two dangers, the way forward seems clear: If you think you can do better than X, then make X your Ex and go do the better thing you think you're capable of doing.

If that seems too calloused and cruel for your disposition, then you're compelled to one logical conclusion: admit to yourself that you're actually in the best position you could possibly be in at this current moment *given your own unique combination of priorities, preferences, and principles*. Sure, you could make more money, or have a funnier spouse, or have a job with a nicer office, or whatever else you imagine, but you're not okay with chasing after those luxuries if they have to come at the expense of your moral principles, or your aesthetic preferences, or your, personal priorities. That's totally fine, but that just means *you can't really do better* because you're already doing the best you can do within the context of what you've decided is right for you.

So go do the best you think you can do or realize that you're already doing it.

Either way, don't disparage the people who have to work/live with you by staying in a situation that's beneath you, complaining about how it's holding you back, and treating your partner/peers as if they should be honored by your half-hearted effort at tolerating their mediocrity. You can do better than that. And so can the people who have to listen to you say that.