48 Pre-written
CBT Thought Bubbles

Hands-on visuals for increasing awareness of problem thoughts

Joel Shaul, LCSW

How to make them:

Print out the entire file. Use cardstock or laminated paper. Color is important, as the red ones are the automatic negative thoughts and the green ones are the antidote thoughts.

How to use them:

1. **Introduce the basics of "Poison Thoughts" and "Antidote Thoughts."** A good way to do this is to have the children watch a six-minute YouTube video I made: https://bit.ly/2Ut6E43 . There are many, many other activities on the website to do in combination with the Thought Bubbles – check them out.

2. **Make a "Poison Thought Game."** Scatter the thought bubbles all over the floor. Say something like this: *"We're going to do a kind of matching game. These red thought bubbles are different kinds of thoughts that make people upset. The green ones help to fight the red ones. See if you can find green ones to match up with each of the red ones." There are some Antidote Thought bubbles that match more than one Poison Thought; this does not have to be exact."*

3. **Play "Hunt for your Poison Thoughts."** Say something like: *"Each person has certain Poison Thoughts that bother them more than other ones. Which ones bother you the most? Which Antidote Thoughts do you need to fight them?"* You can do this activity by either scattering the thought bubbles around the floor, or taping them up to a wall, or else by holding them up one at a time in sequence for the child/ children to look at.

4. **Fill out the blank thought bubbles.** The pre-written thought bubbles cover many of the most common problem thoughts and beliefs affecting children with autism spectrum disorders. I provided blank thought bubbles to allow kids to customize their Poison and Antidote thoughts. I suggest that you print out a lot of these blank ones on paper and keep them handy to help children sort out their problem thoughts.
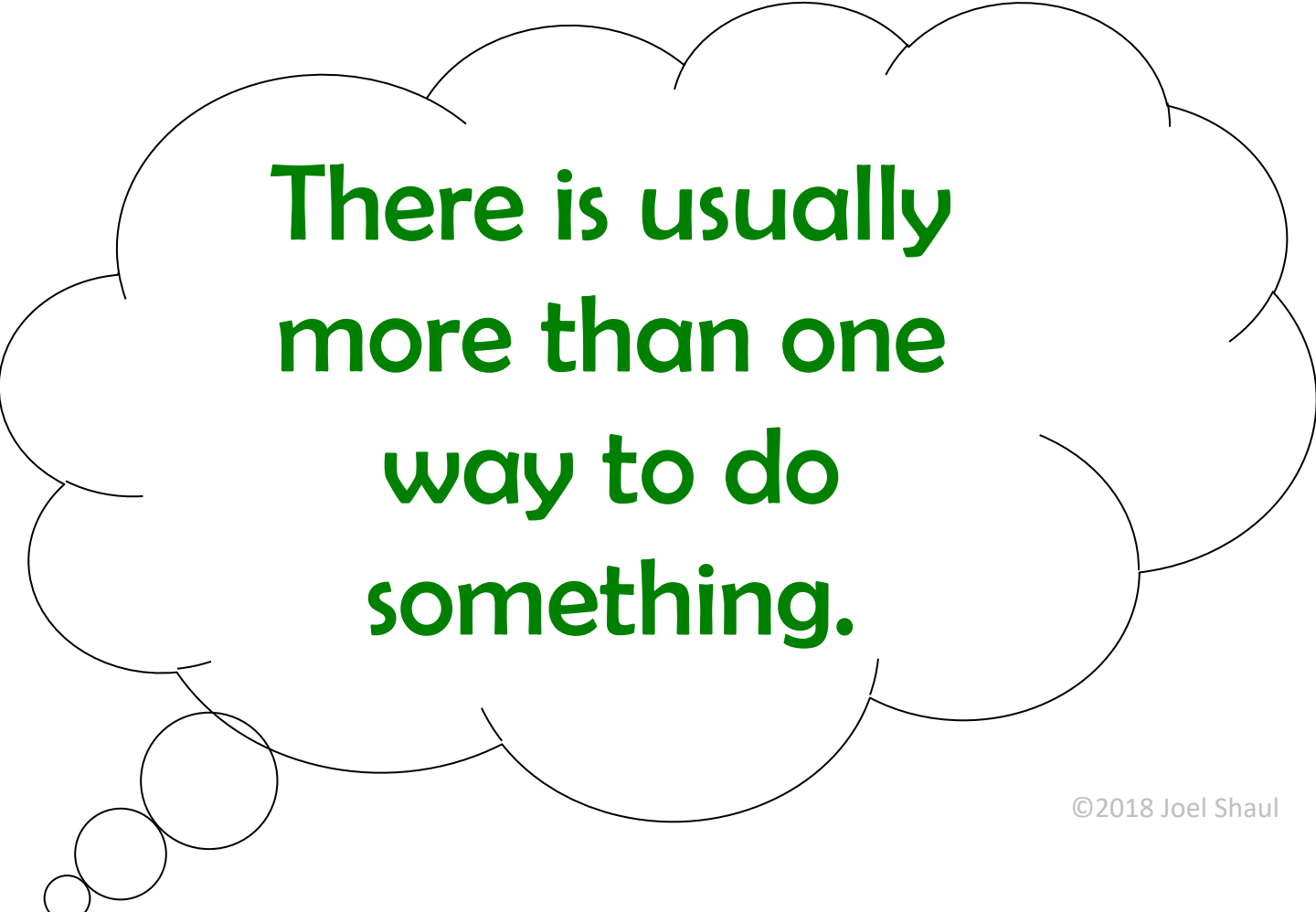
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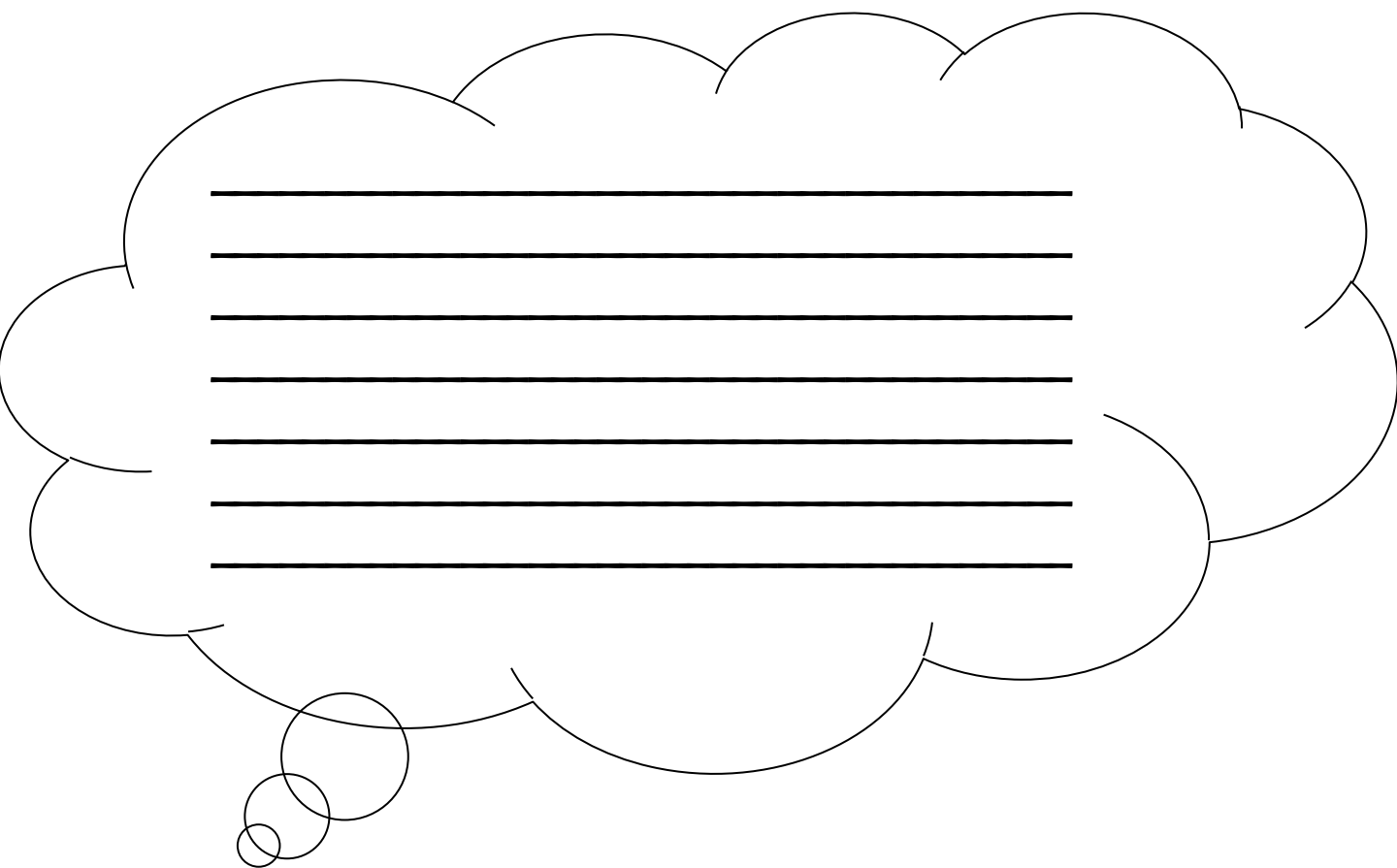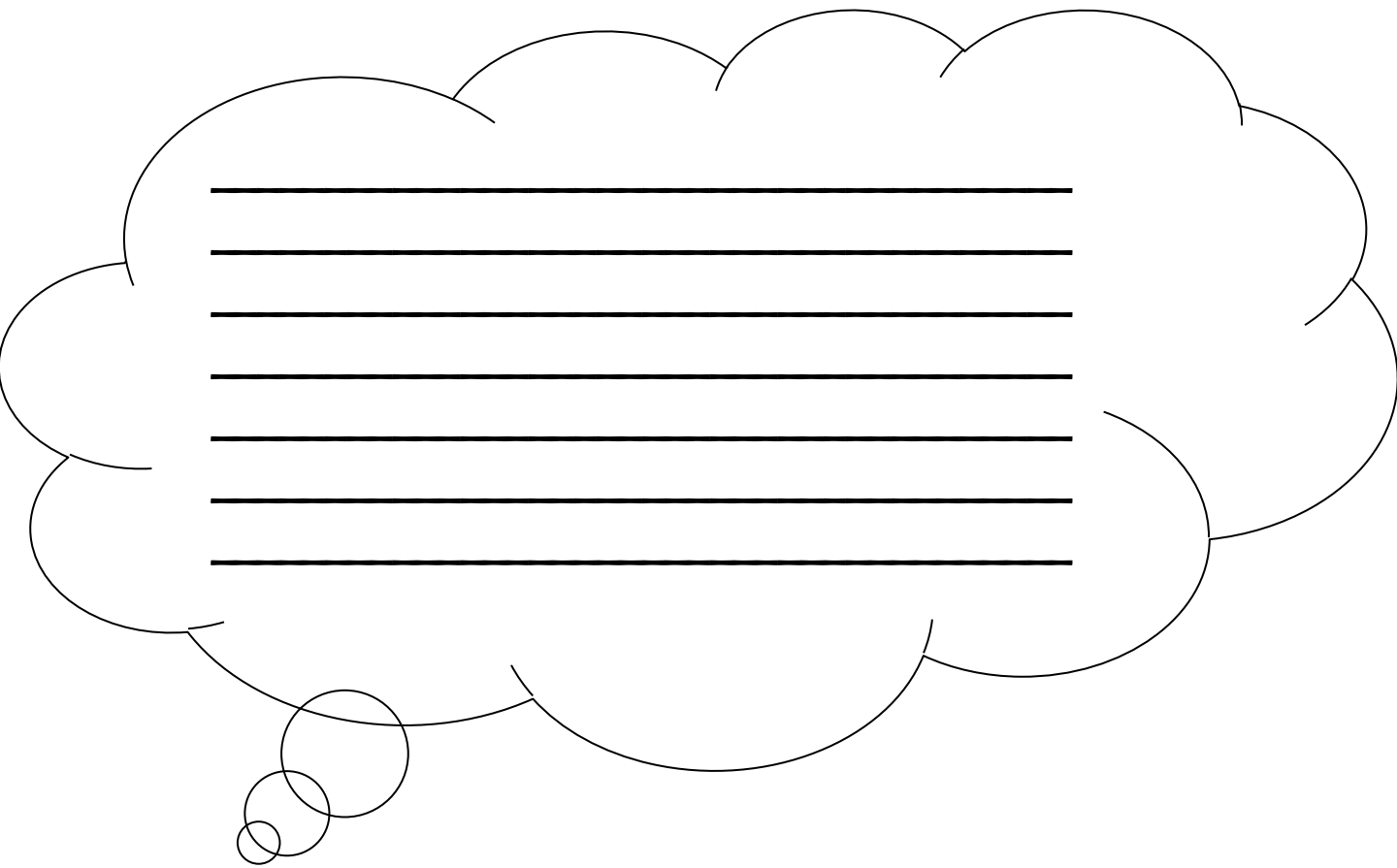
People are not doing it *my* way/ the *right* way!

People are breaking rules!

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There is usually more than one way to do something.
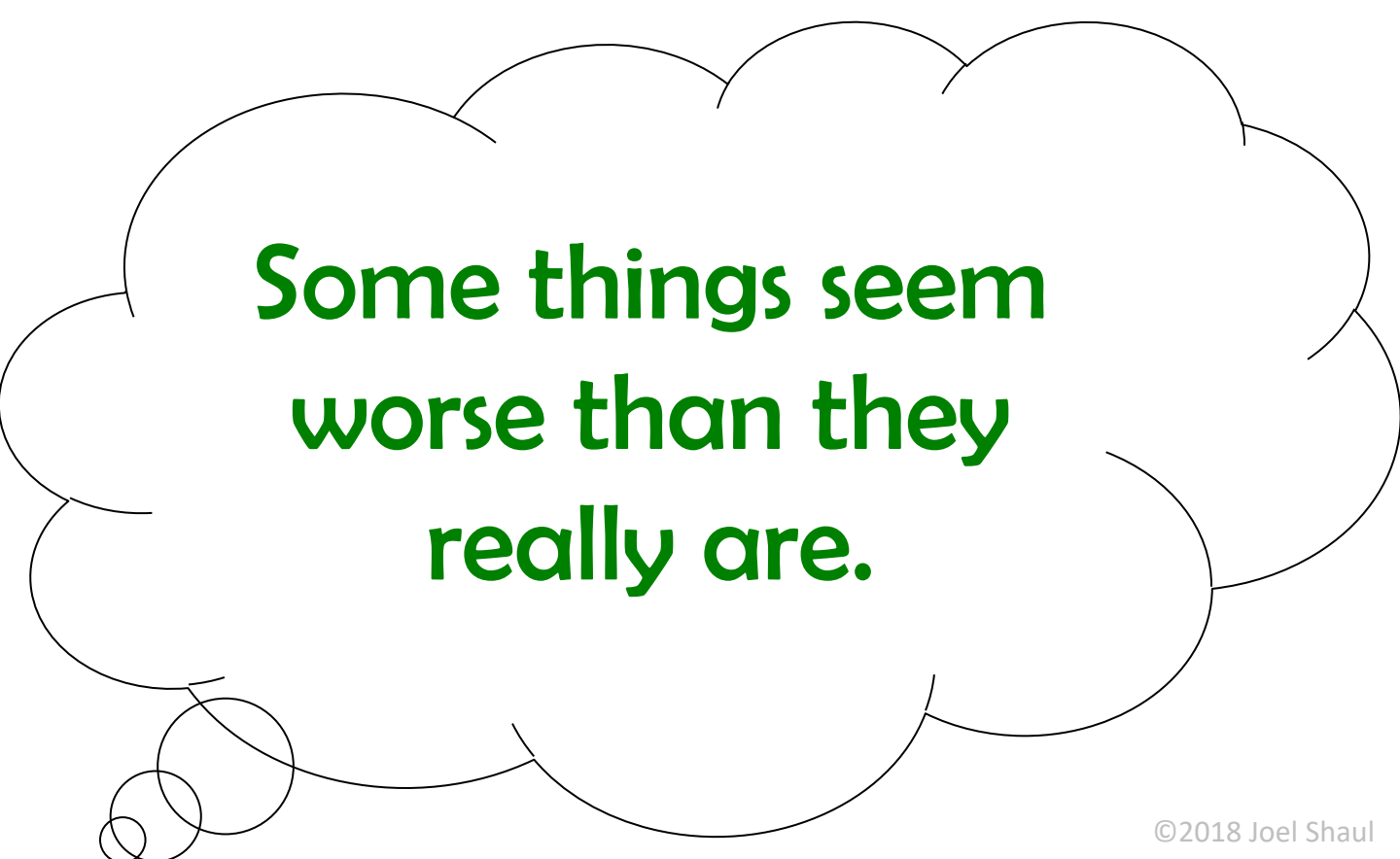
It's not usually my job to enforce rules.
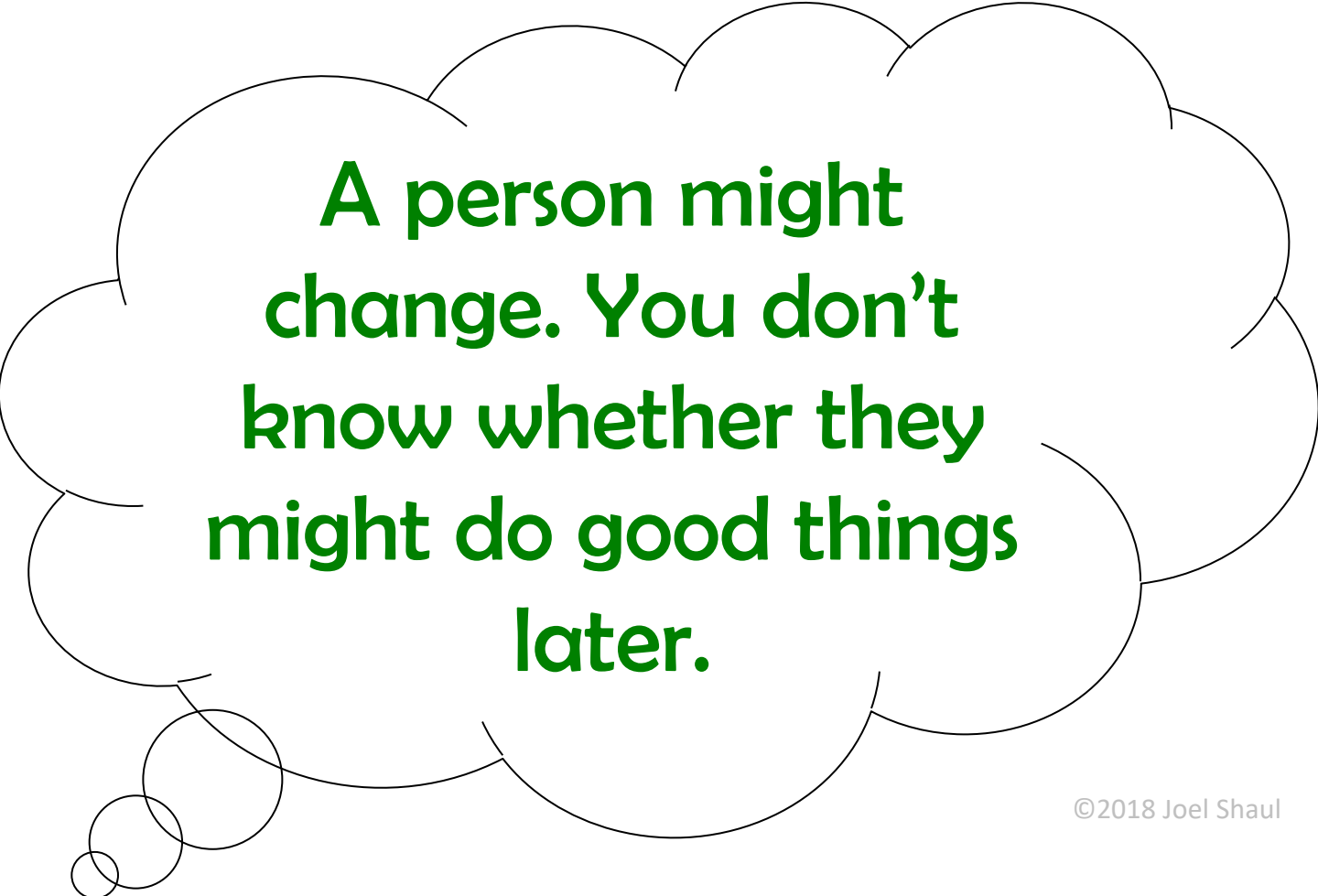
This person is completely bad forever!

This bad thing is completely bad forever!

A person might change. You don't know whether they might do good things later.

Some things seem worse than they really are.

I can't deal with this change!

I don't want to stop what I am doing!
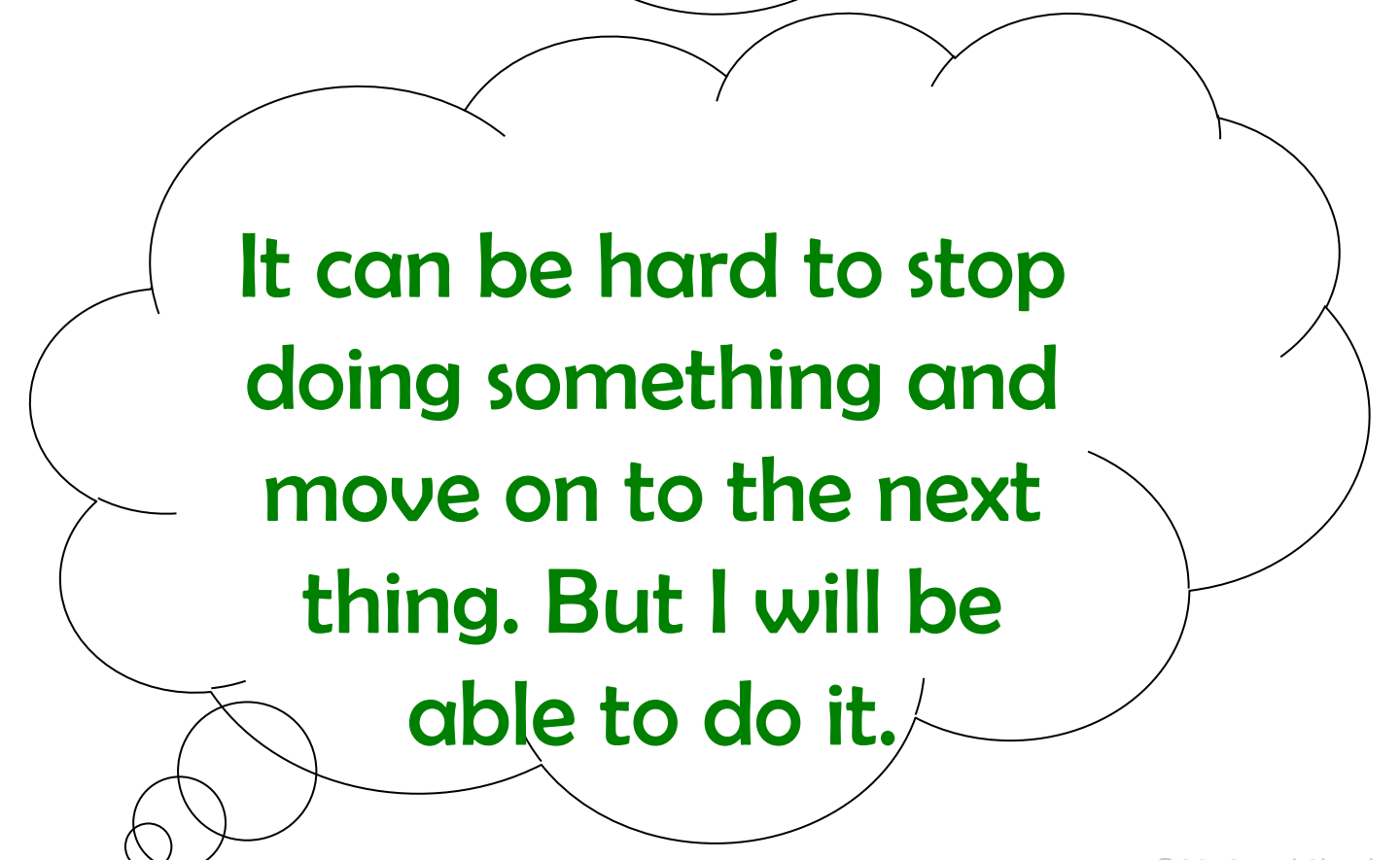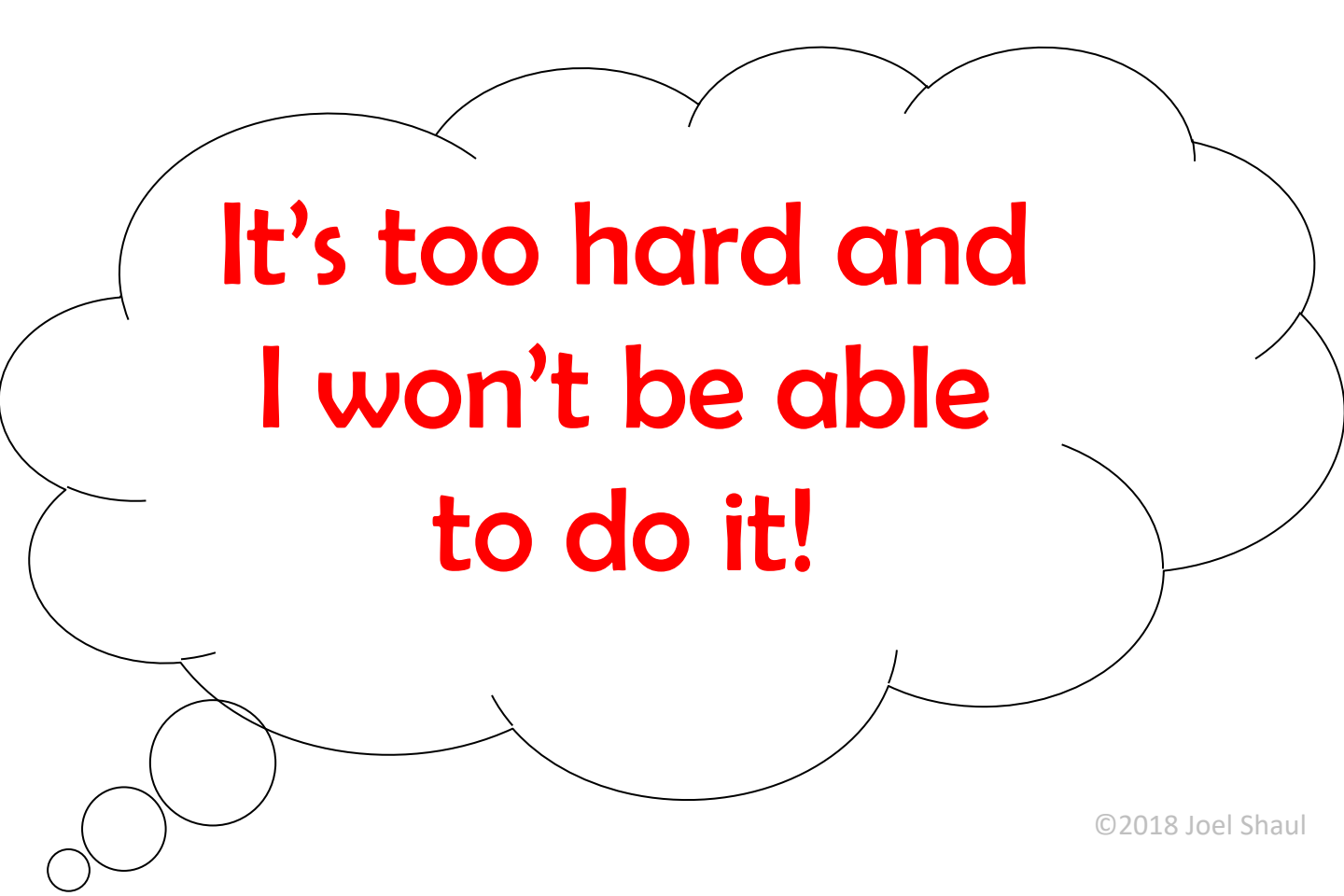
When I stop doing what I like and start doing the next thing, it may be hard at first, but I will manage.
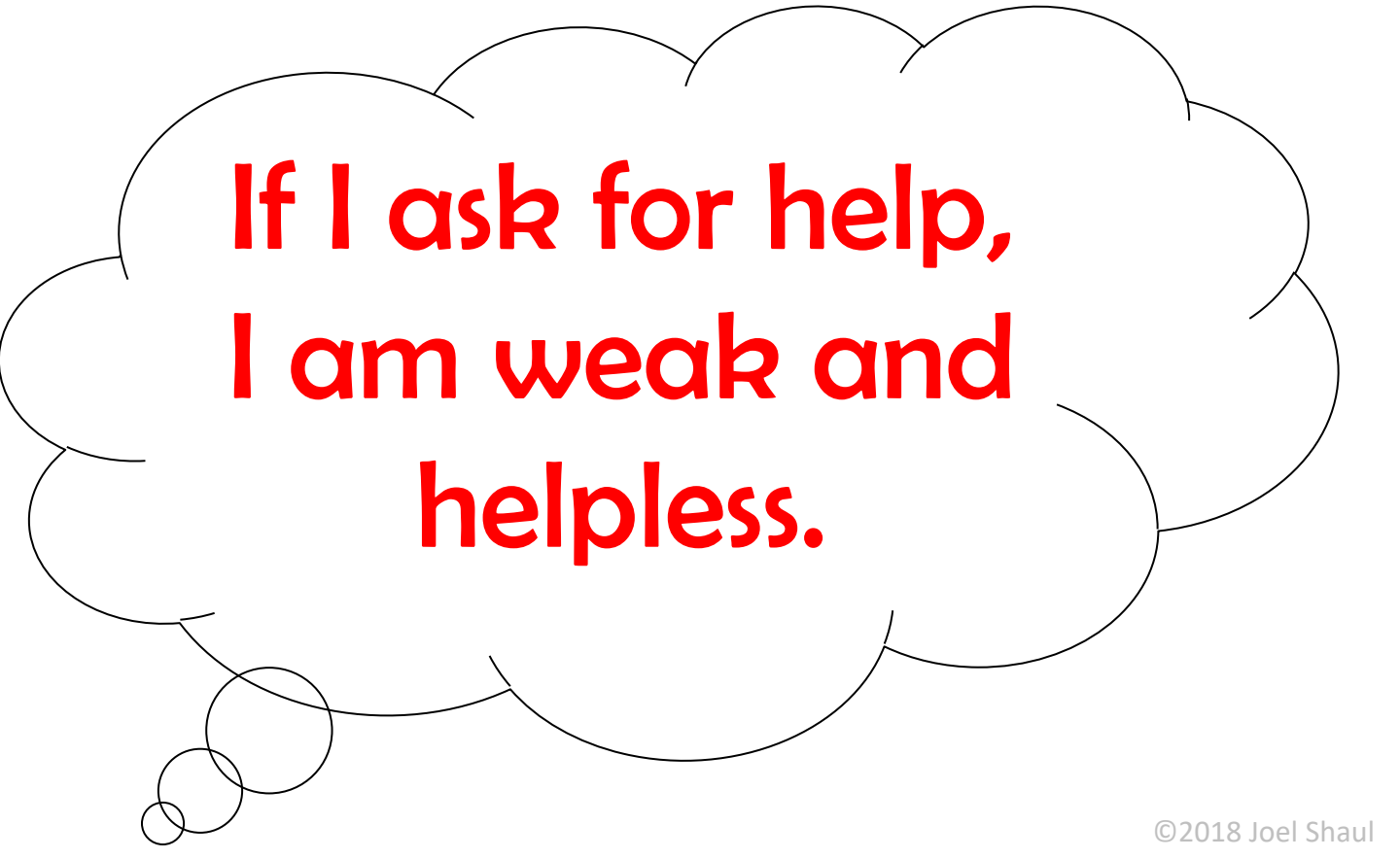
It can be hard to stop doing something and move on to the next thing. But I will be able to do it.

It's too hard and I won't be able to do it!

If I ask for help, I am weak and helpless.

I have done hard things before. There's no way to know until I try.

It is brave and smart to ask for help when things are hard.
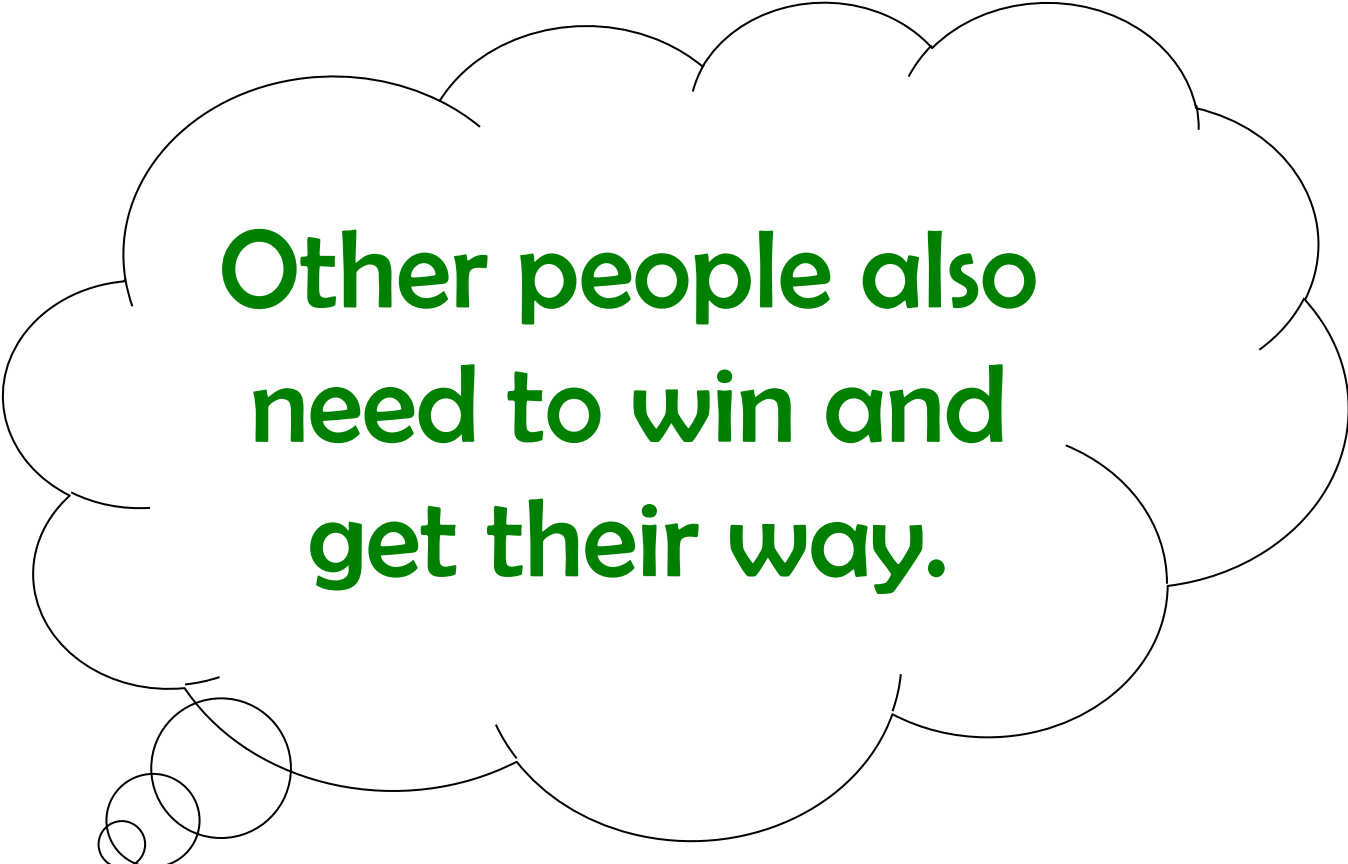
I need to win
and get my way!
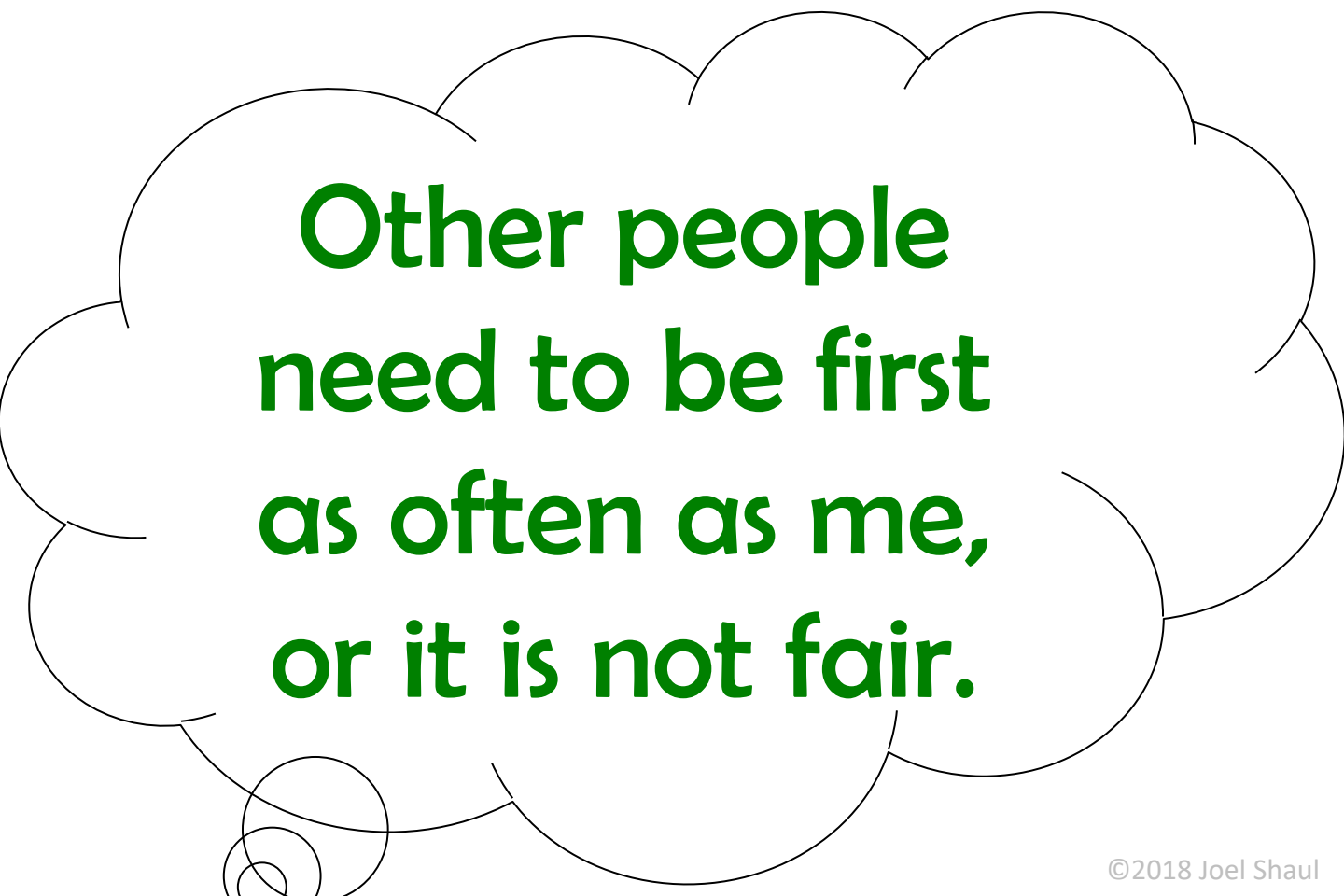
I need to be first!

Other people also need to win and get their way.
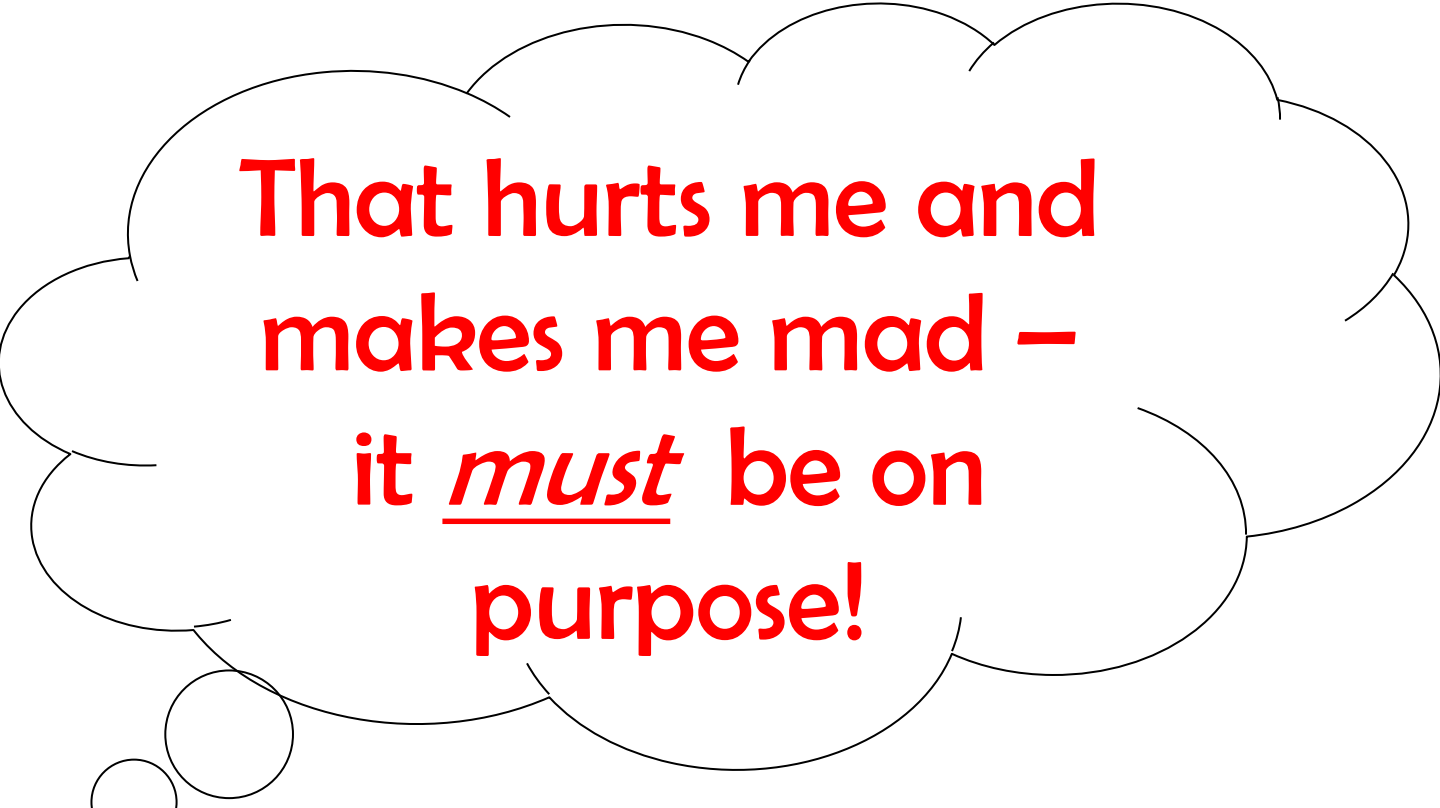
Other people need to be first as often as me, or it is not fair.

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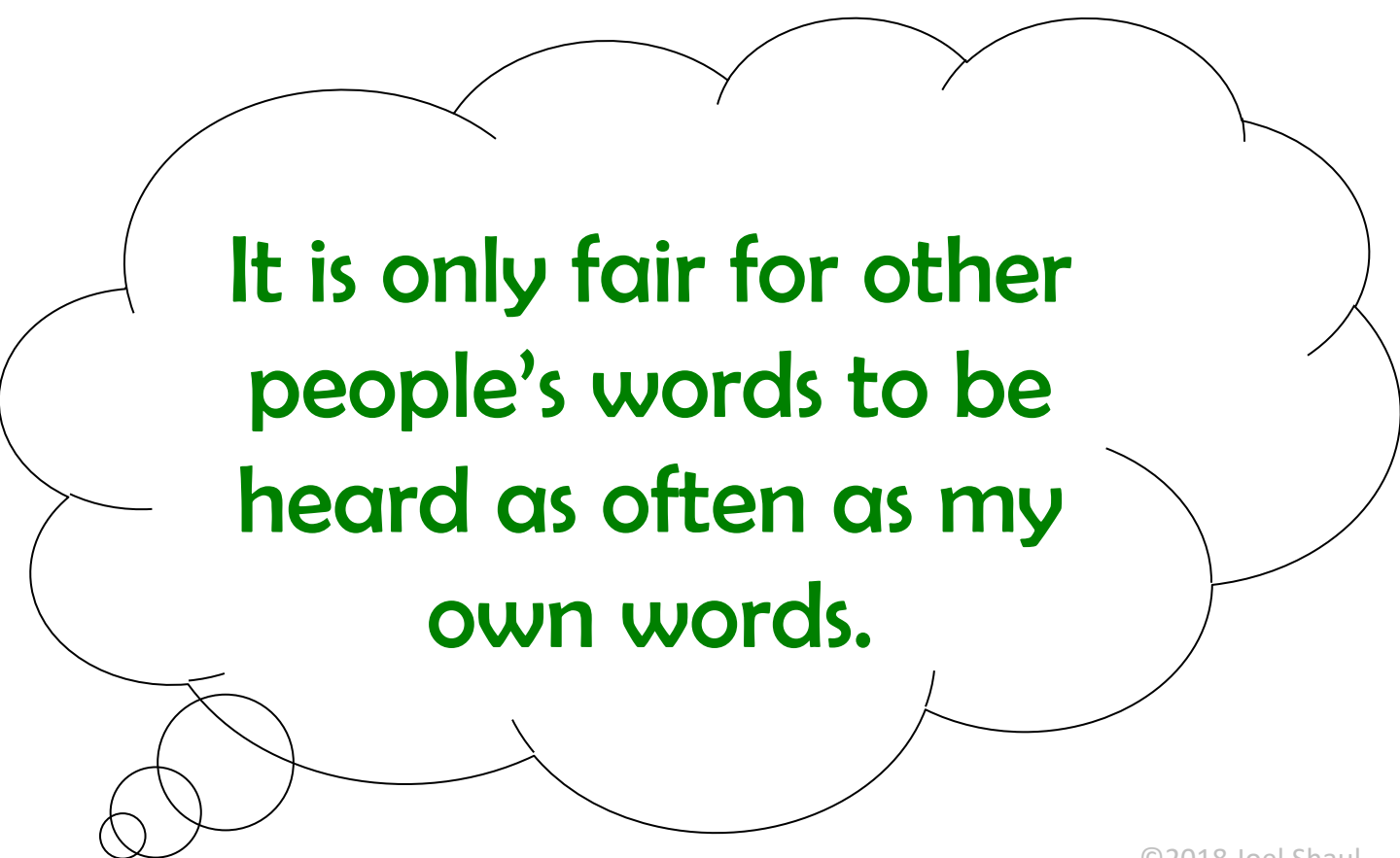
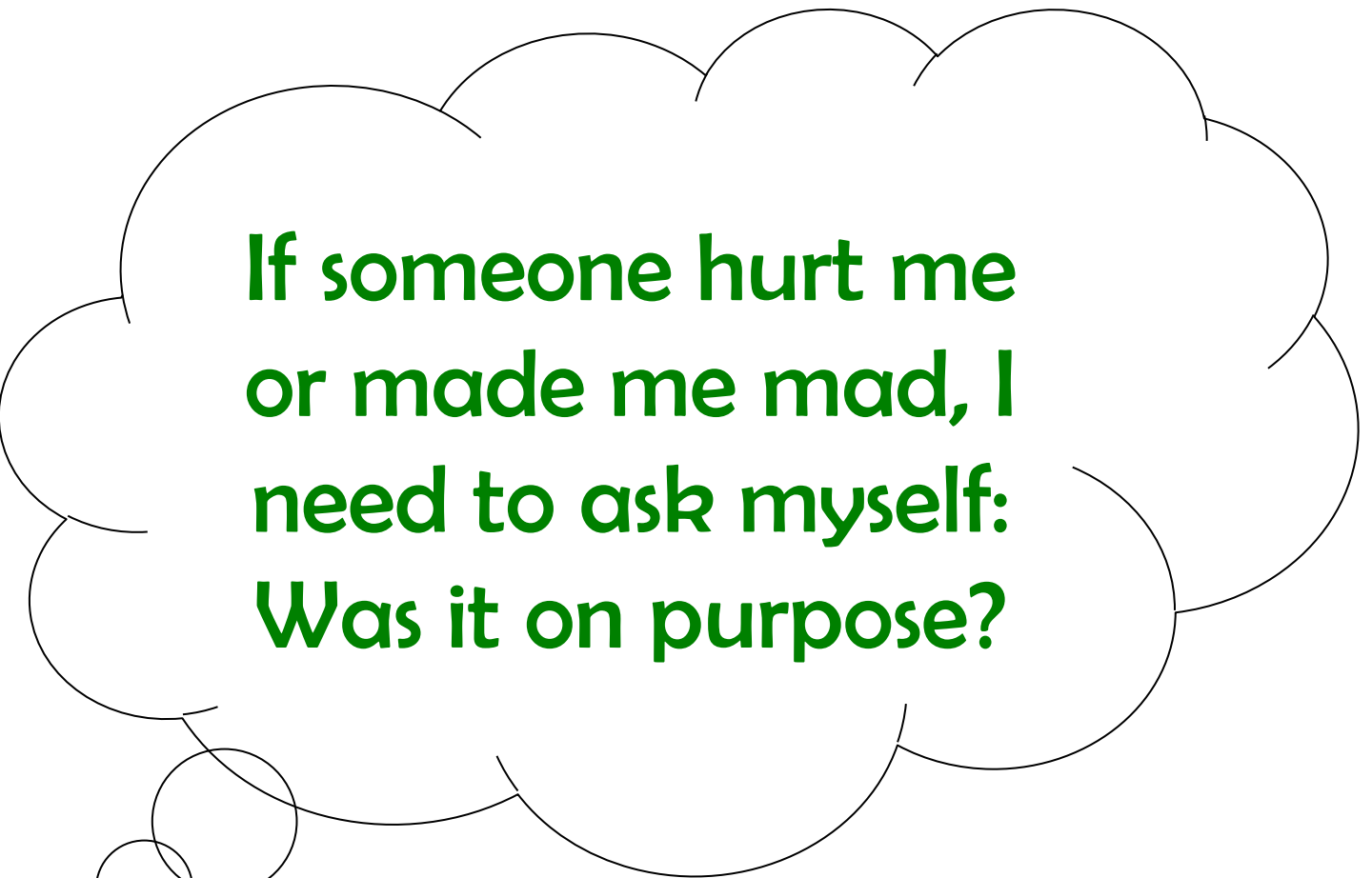People just talk, and don't listen to what I have to say!

That hurts me and makes me mad – it _must_ be on purpose!
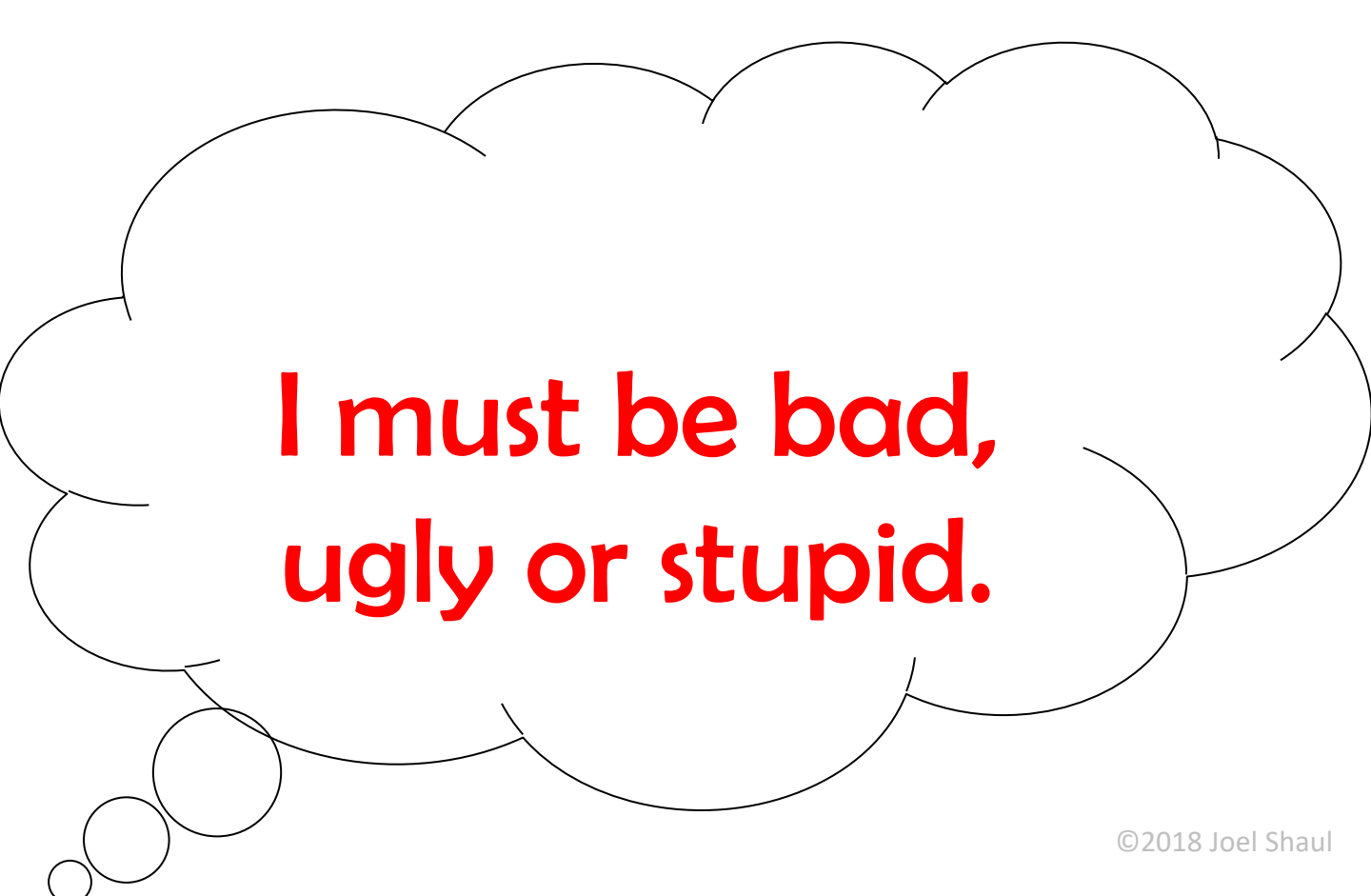
It is only fair for other people's words to be heard as often as my own words.
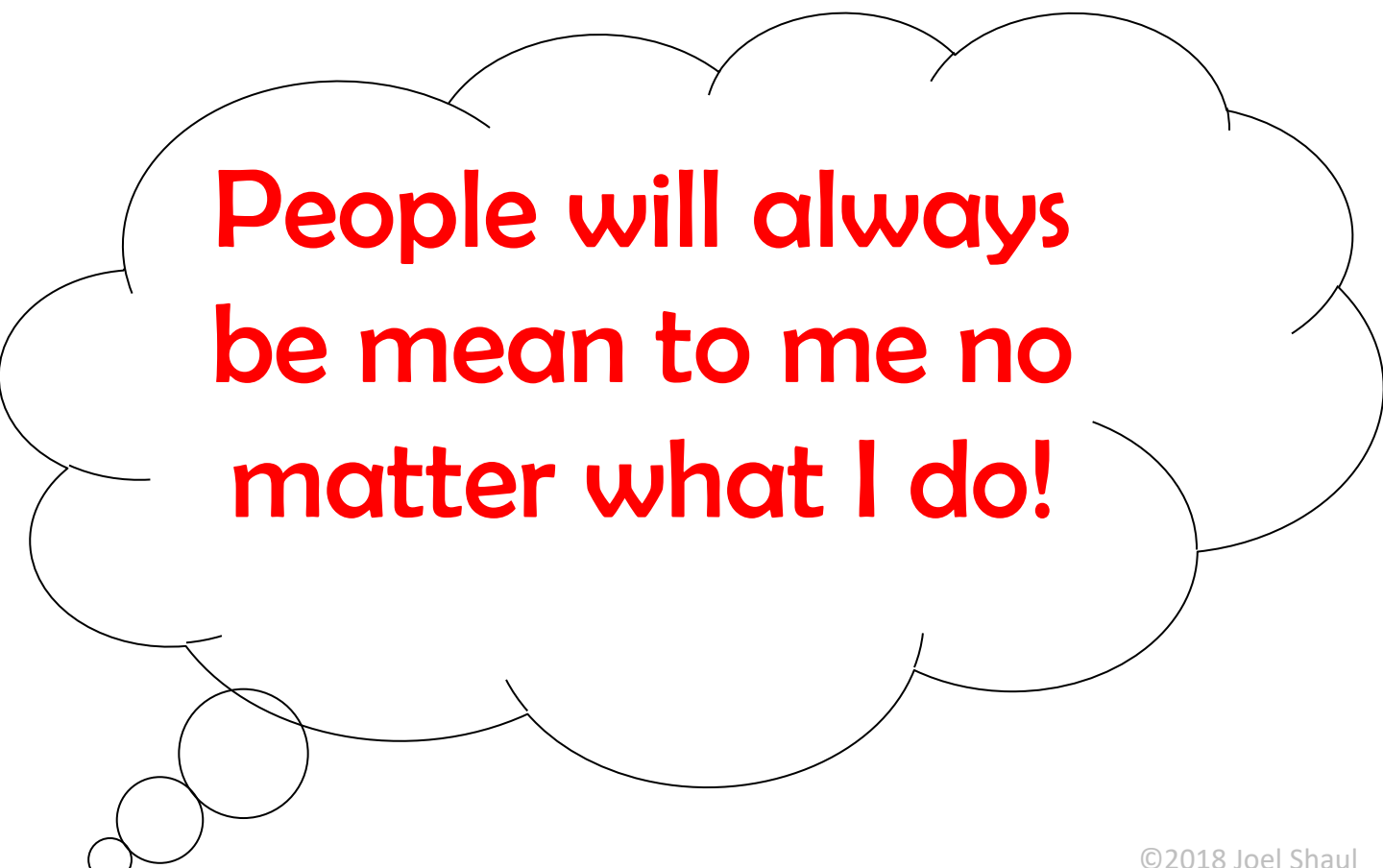
If someone hurt me or made me mad, I need to ask myself: Was it on purpose?
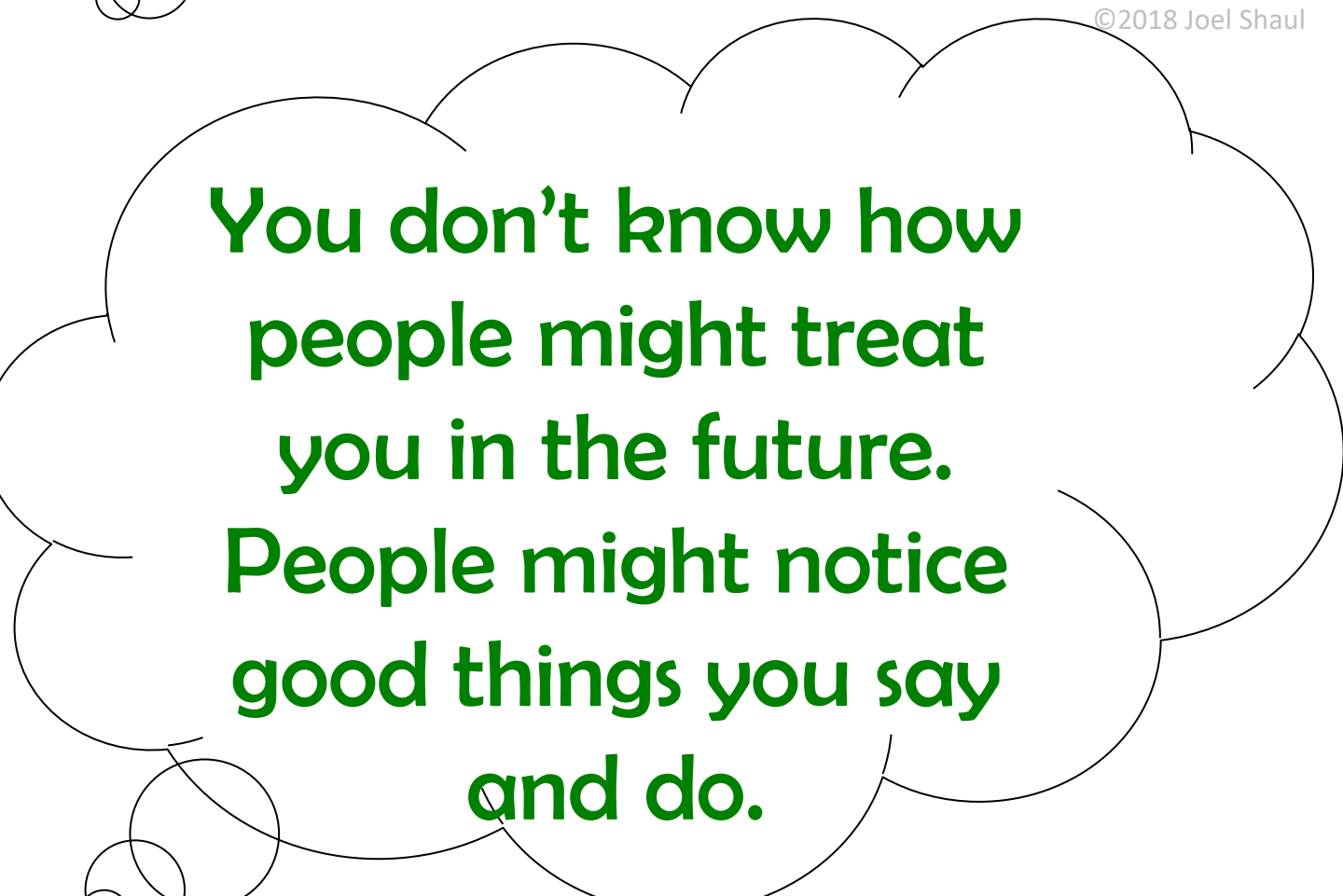
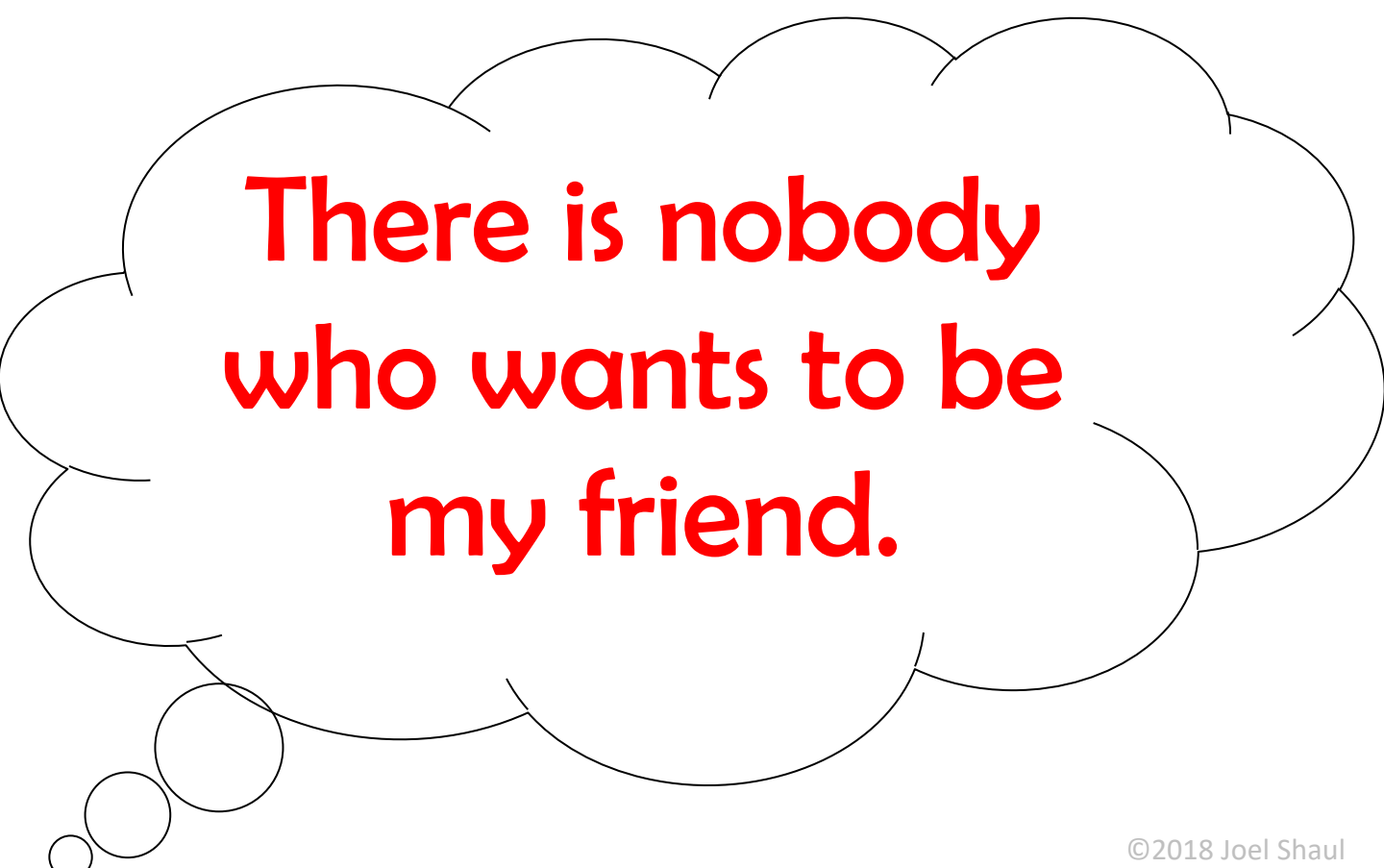I must be bad, ugly or stupid.

People will always be mean to me no matter what I do!

there are things about me that are good and smart.

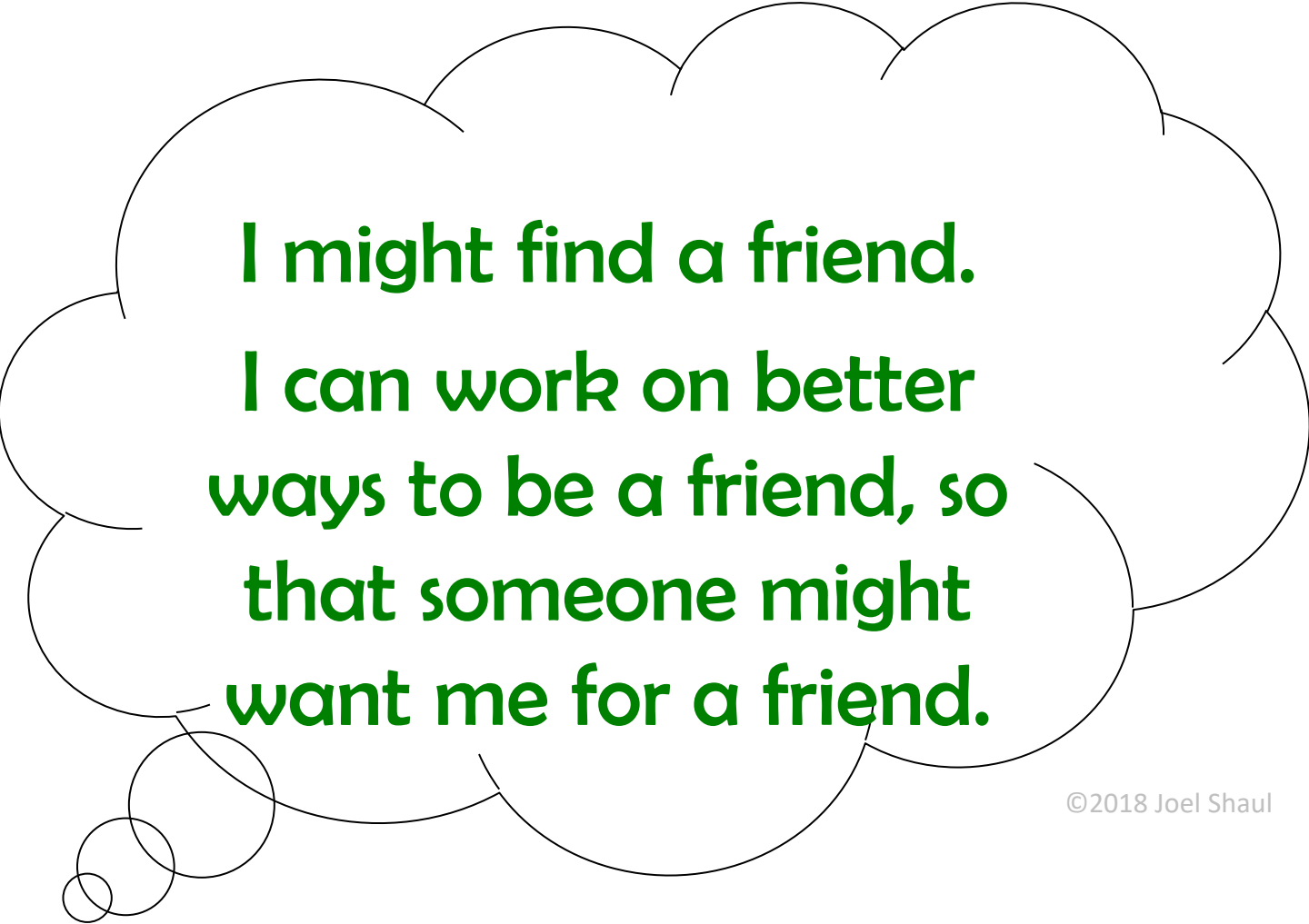You don't know how people might treat you in the future. People might notice good things you say and do.

There is nobody who wants to be my friend.
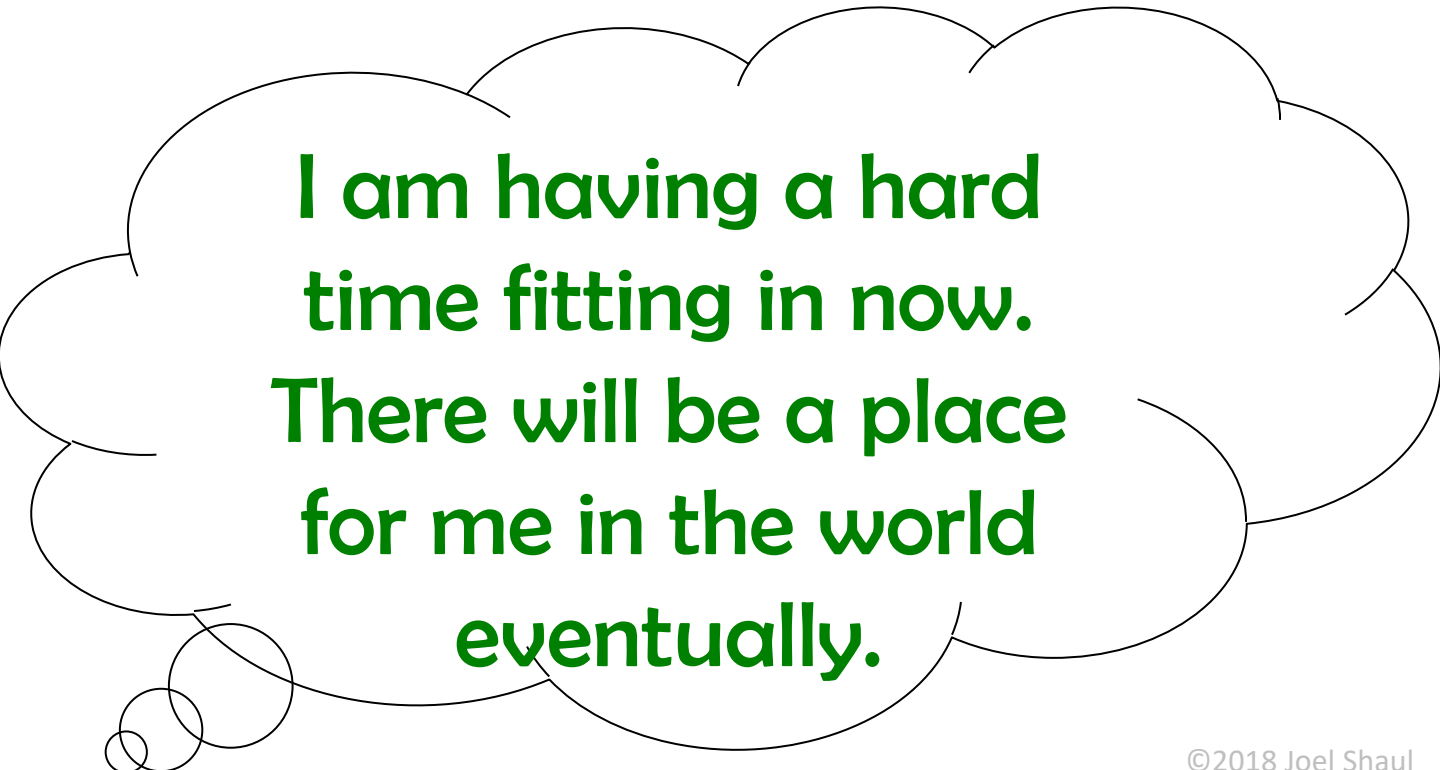
I don't fit in and I never will.

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I might find a friend.
I can work on better ways to be a friend, so that someone might want me for a friend.

I am having a hard time fitting in now. There will be a place for me in the world eventually.

I have to get back at people for being mean!
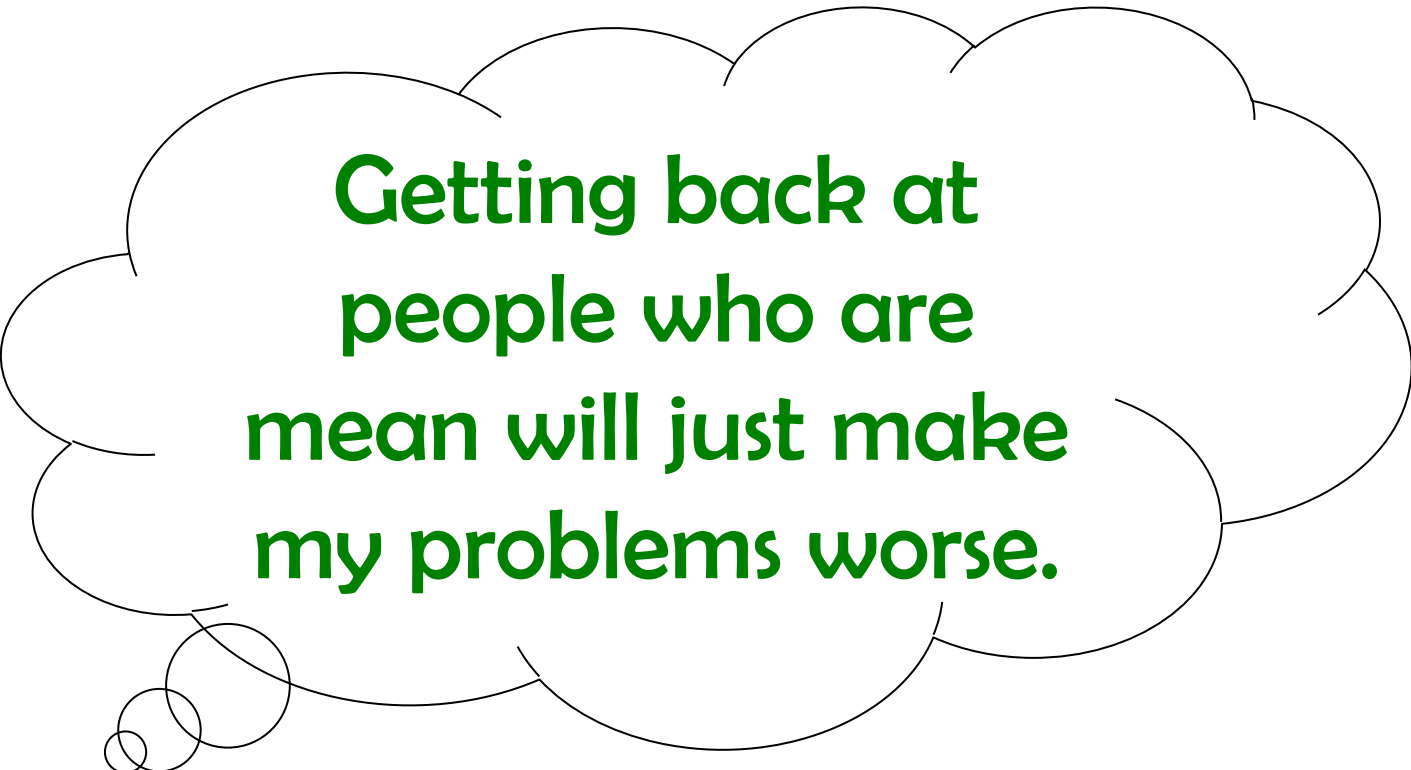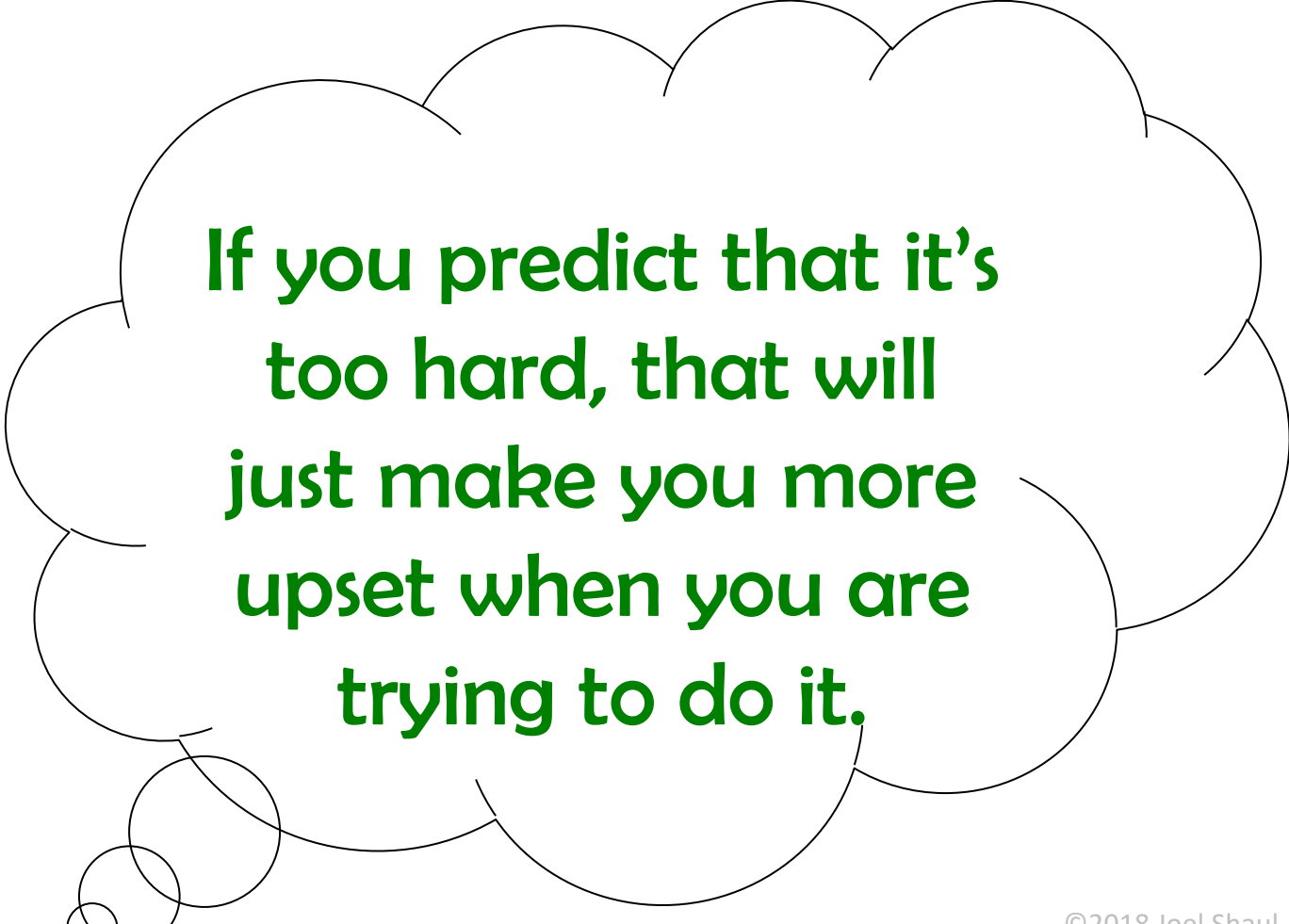
What if it's too hard or I get too upset?

Getting back at people who are mean will just make my problems worse.

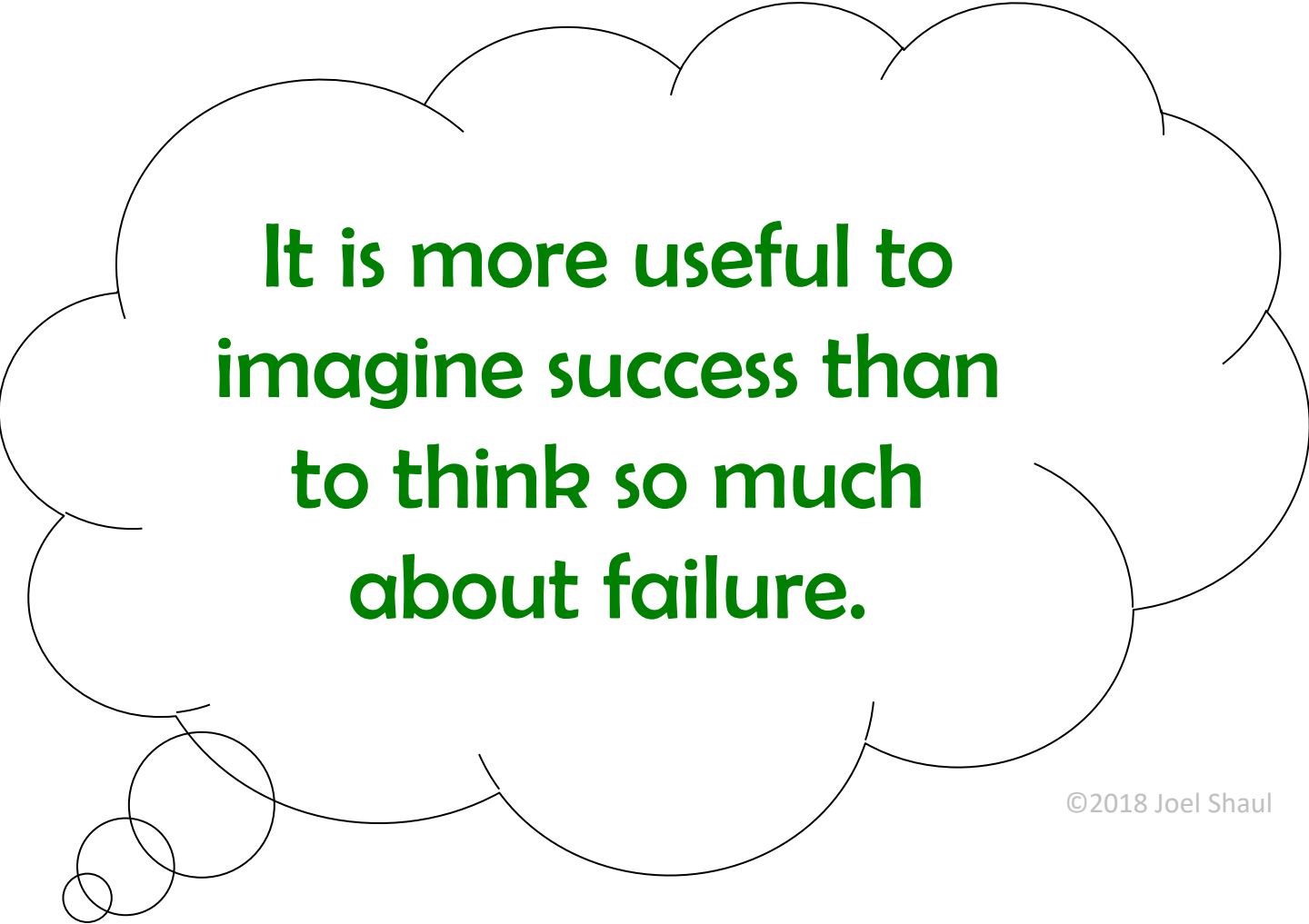If you predict that it's too hard, that will just make you more upset when you are trying to do it.
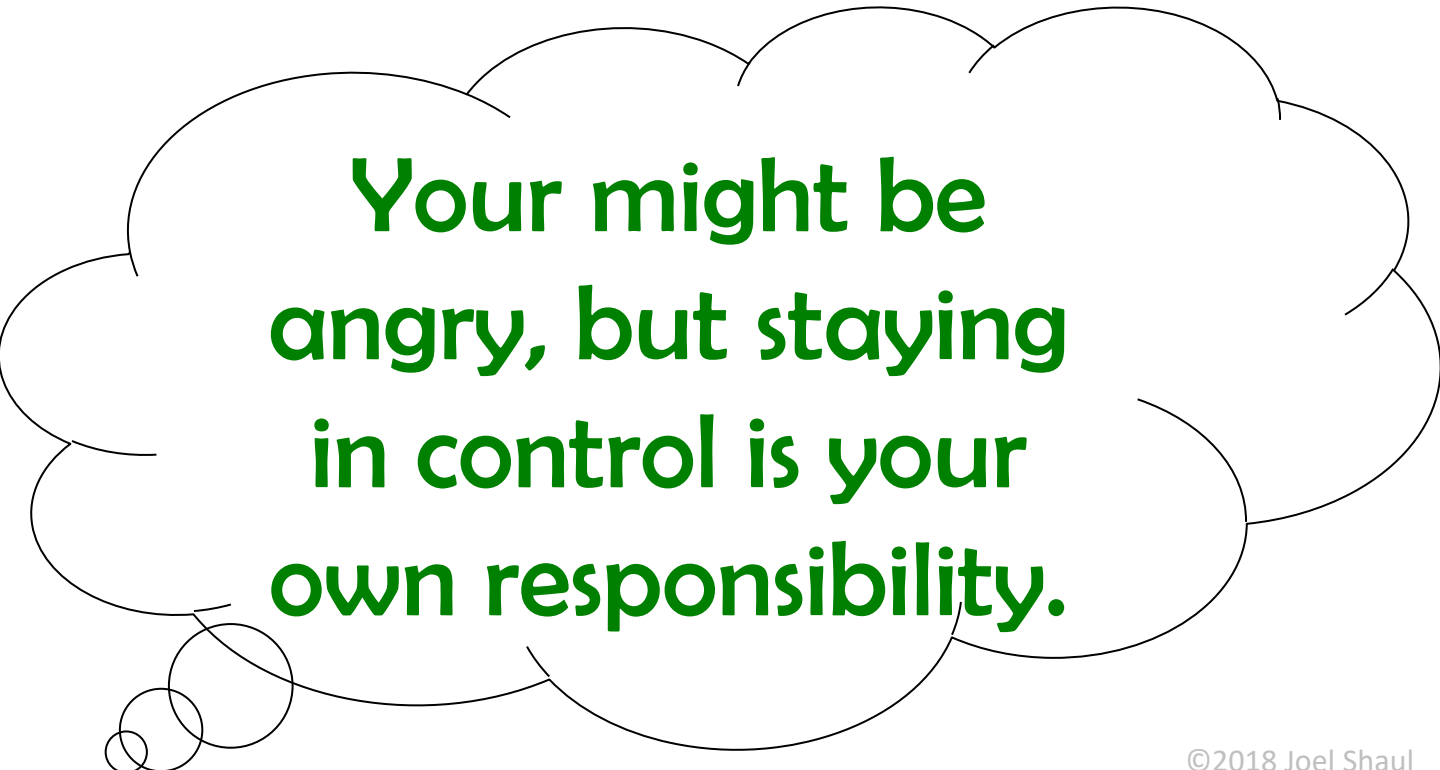
What if I fail?

People are making me lose my temper!

It is more useful to imagine success than to think so much about failure.

Your might be angry, but staying in control is your own responsibility.

Being alone is always better and less bother.

I am different and that is bad.
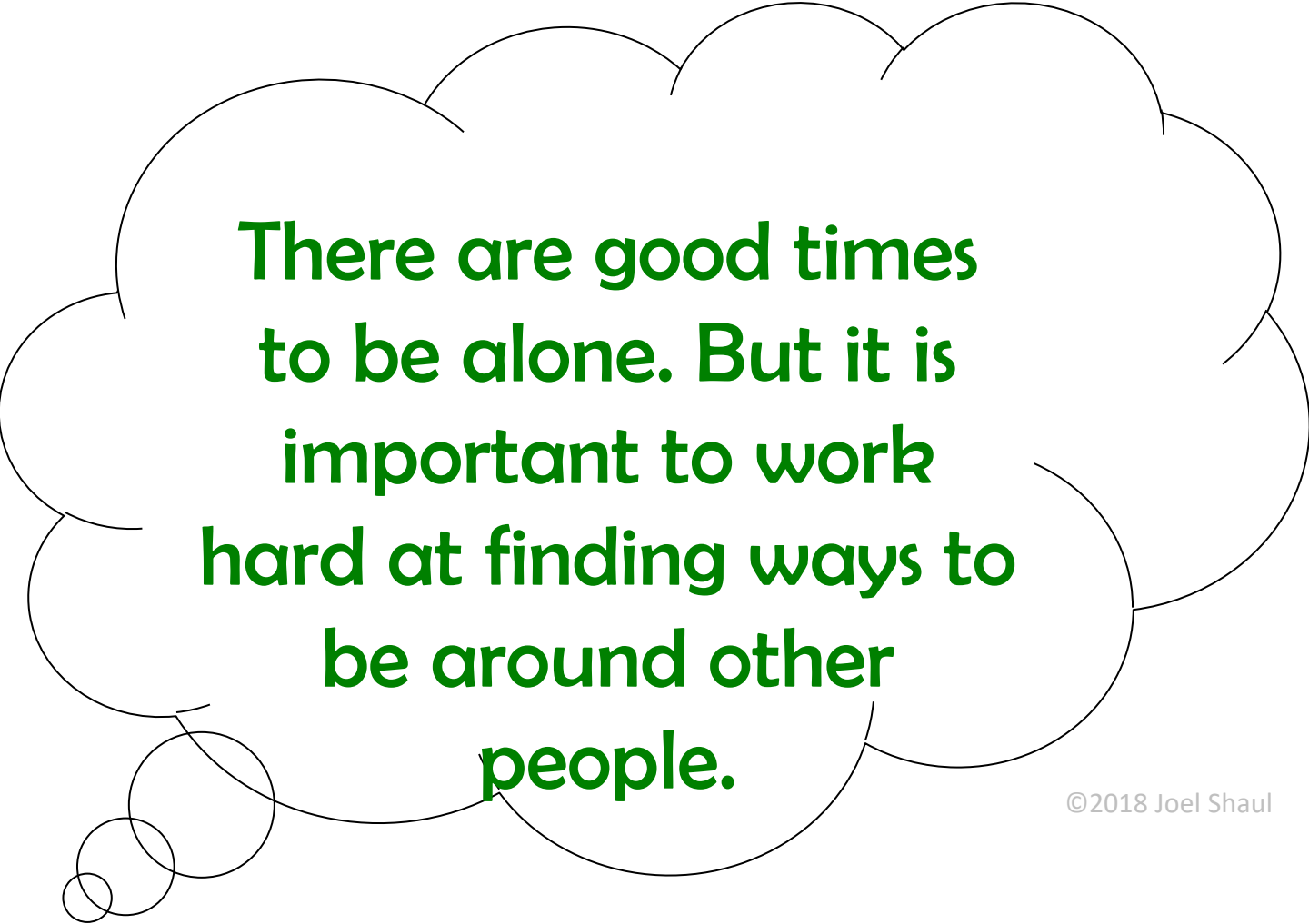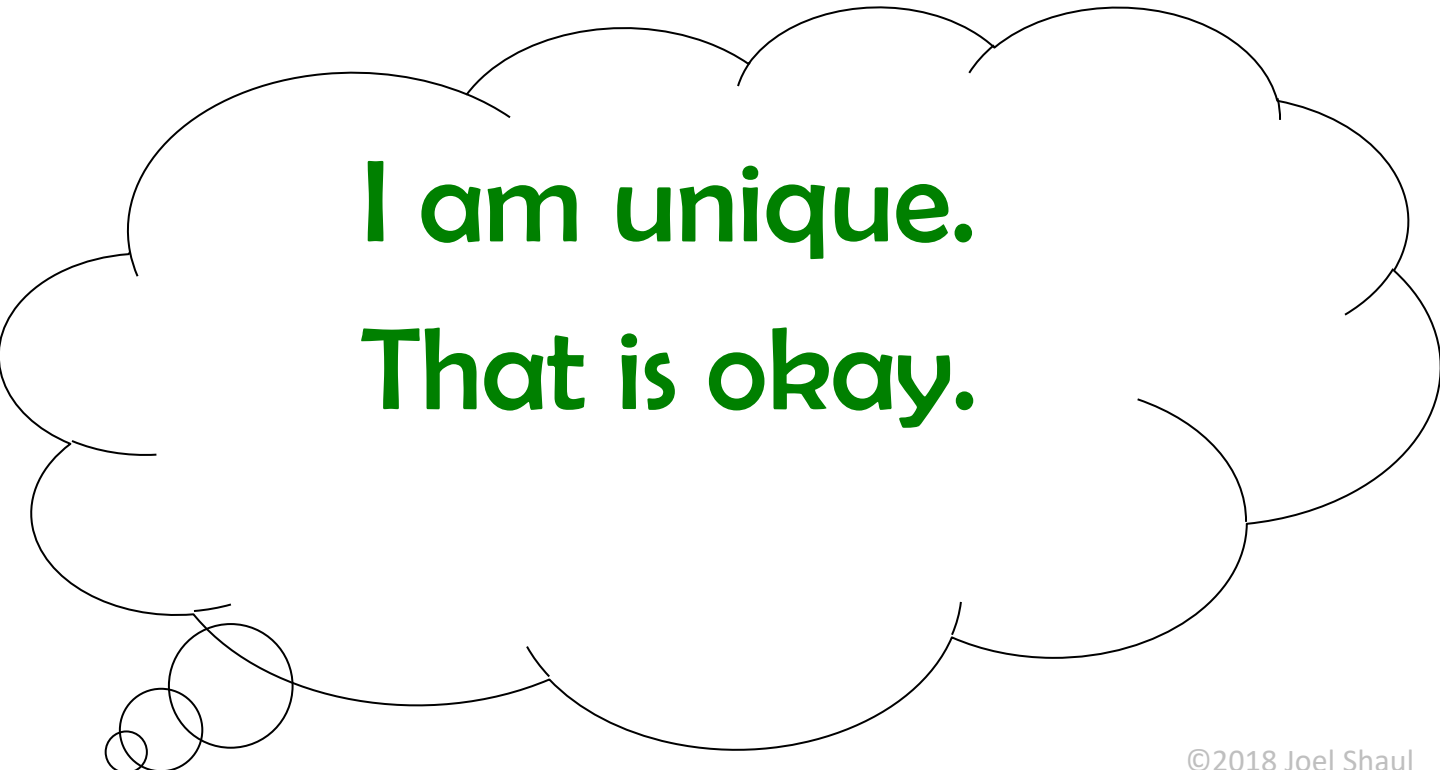
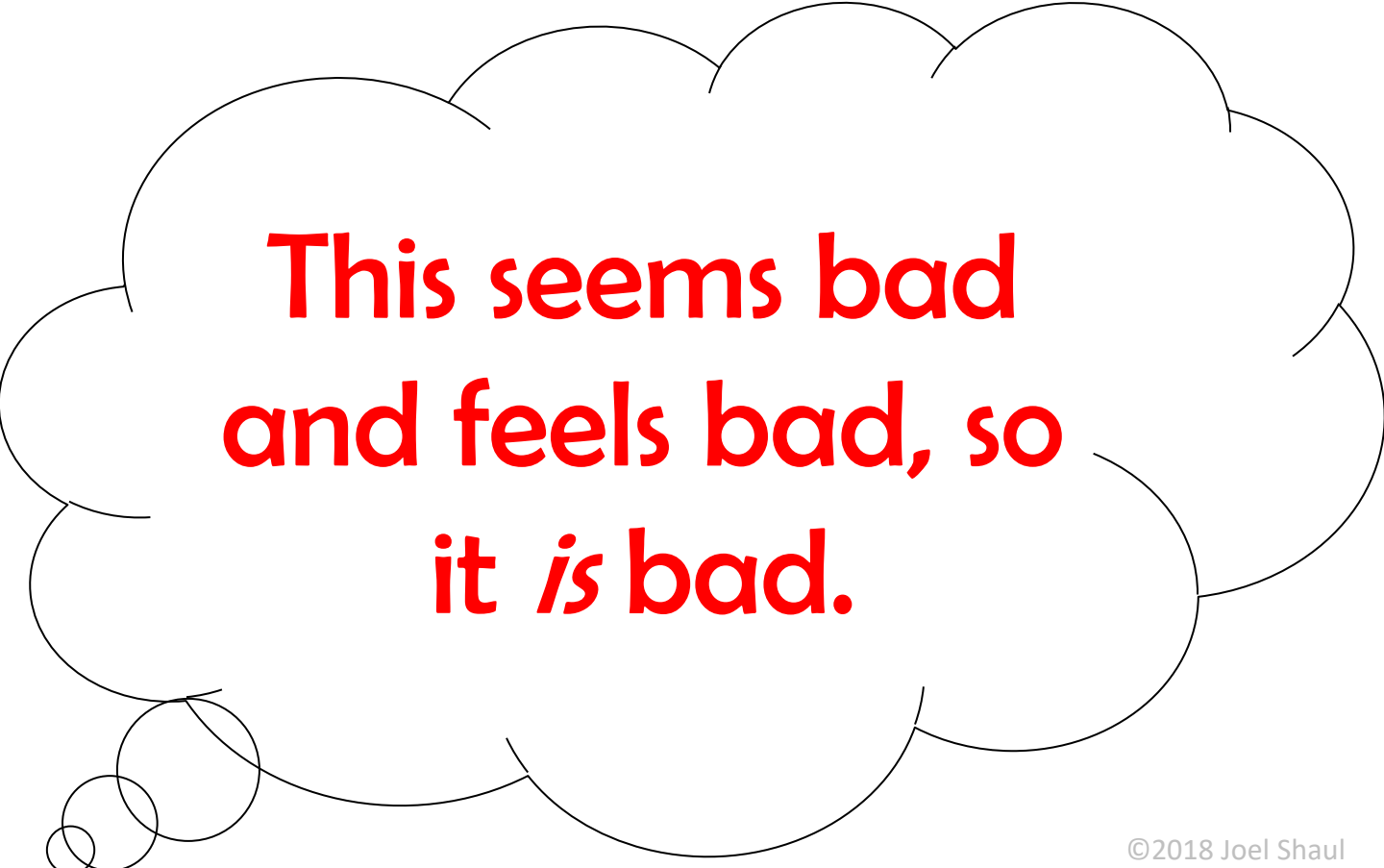There are good times to be alone. But it is important to work hard at finding ways to be around other people.
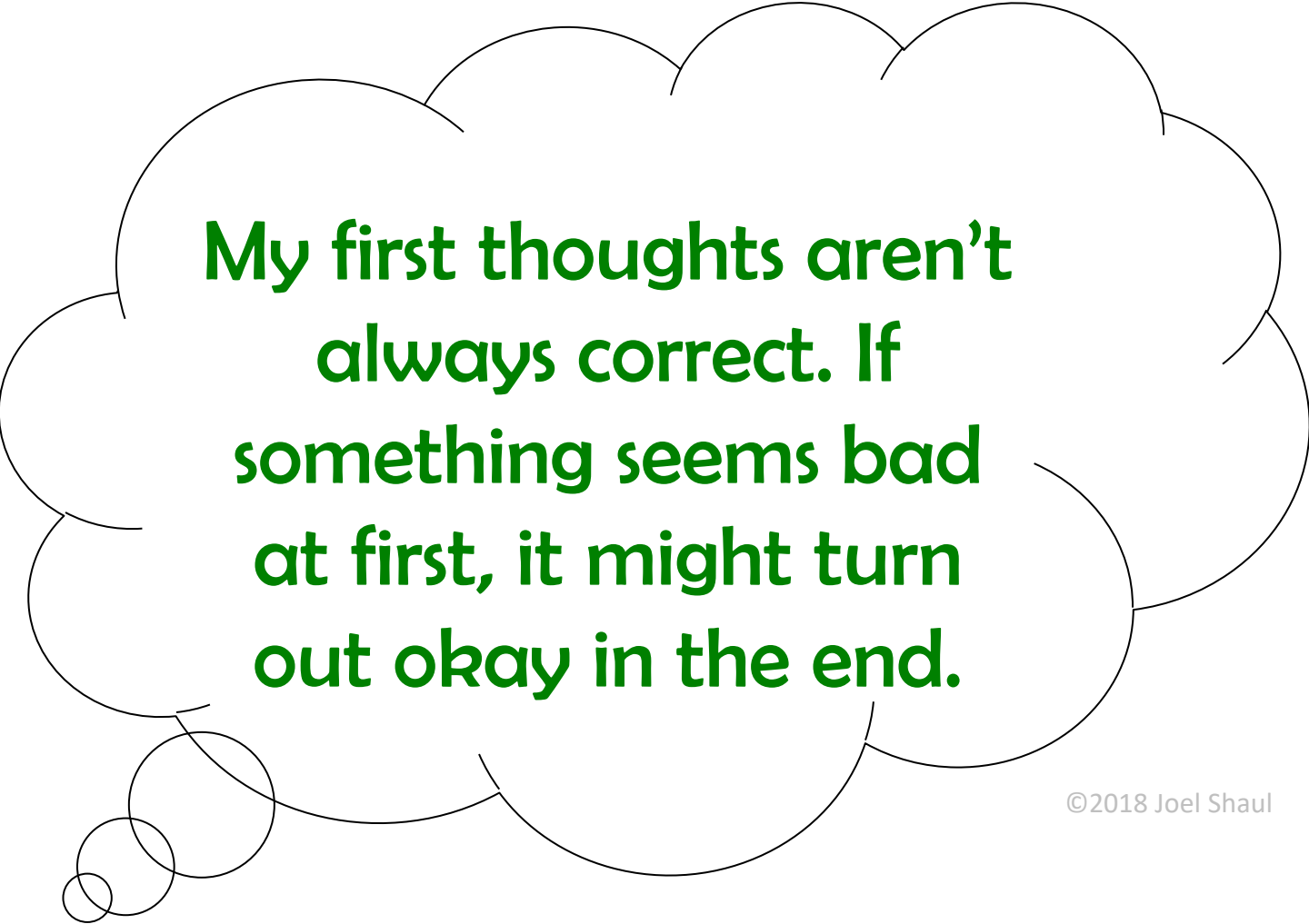
I am unique.
That is okay.

This seems bad and feels bad, so it *is* bad.
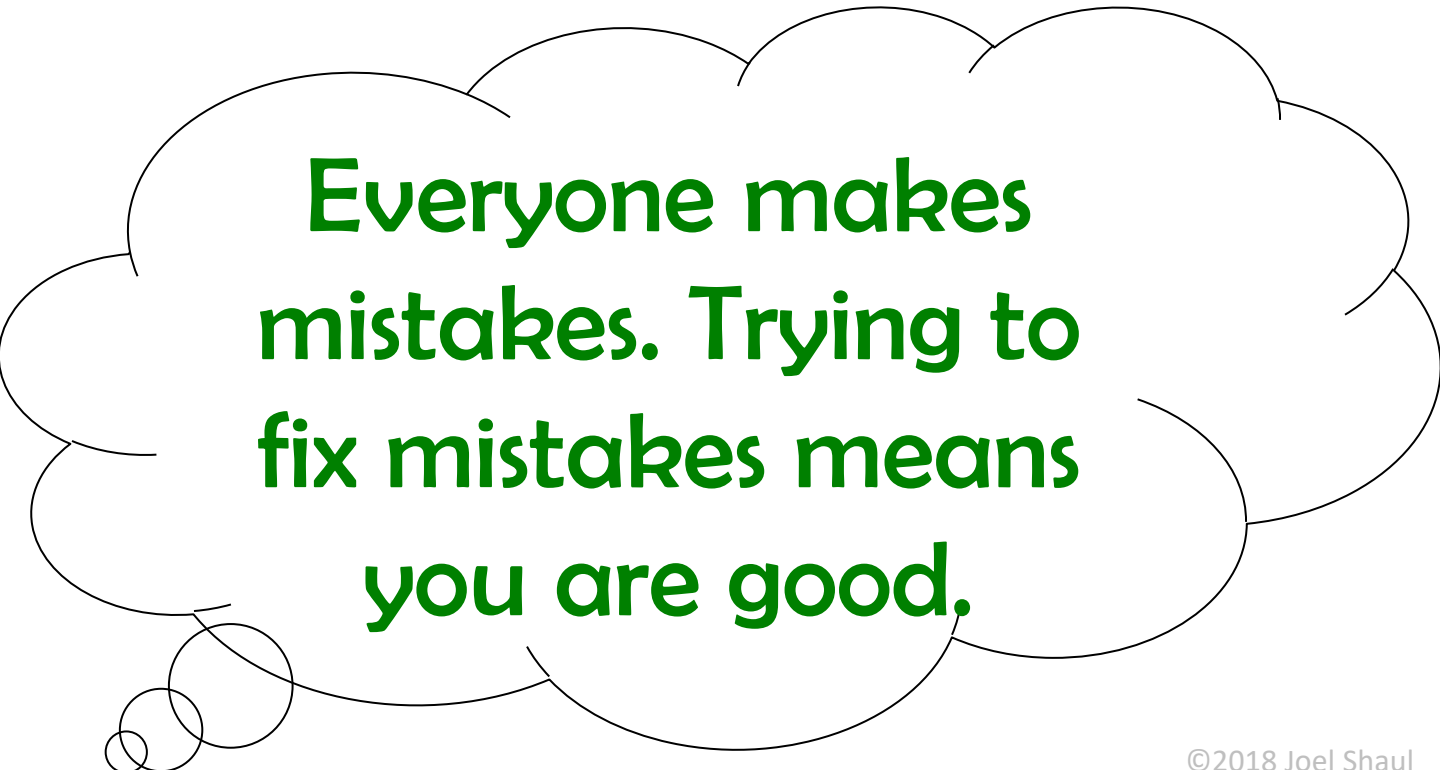
If I make mistakes, I am a loser and a failure.

My first thoughts aren't always correct. If something seems bad at first, it might turn out okay in the end.

Everyone makes mistakes. Trying to fix mistakes means you are good.