

Which voice are you listening to?

We all have an orchestra playing in our head, an orchestra made up of many voices. Some of our voices are loud and commanding, others criticise, some bully, yet others are couch potatoes, some are joyful and positive and there are those that are quiet and possibly shy, insecure or fearful. Which voice are you listening to? Which voice dominates you? Which voice runs your life and work?

It can serve us well to take control of our internal dialogue and become aware of which voice we are listening to because these voices, our self talk, have such a huge impact on us. Self talk is the constant chatter in our heads and we may or may not be aware of it. It's a running commentary that we've got going all the time - in the shower, cooking the dinner, driving, sitting in the traffic, sitting in a meeting. What are you saying to yourself, about your self, your work, your life?

Often, our self talk is on automatic and we are barely aware of what we are saying to ourselves. The reality is, however, that our self talk has a dramatic impact on how we feel, how we perform and what we achieve. The voice you are listening to can either be an incredibly motivating, inspiring internal coach who builds your self-confidence or an abusive critic who bullies and undermines you constantly. Not only do we have a range of voices talking internally – often they are having conflicting conversations with each other. You know how it goes: "I'd like to go on holiday"..."oh no, I can't afford

to do that"..."I need to get away for a break"..."oh no, I certainly can't take off any time right now"..."I'd love to sit on a beach for a week"..."oh get back to work!"

Positive self talk is an extremely important tool for building self-esteem, self confidence, achievement and success. We all have to manage roadblocks and obstacles – they are part of life. How much better would it feel to be listening to a powerful voice of self-belief and optimism, determination and persistence?

Researchers estimate that a healthy relationship that survives the long term requires a ratio of positive to negative comments of five to one. We're taught that it's not wise to let others put us down but often, the person eroding our sense of self-worth and limiting our potential and performance is us! That's right, our self talk, or the words our inner dialogue uses when we think, can increase our stress levels, diminish our well-being and sense of self, limit our potential and color our experience negatively.

I recently worked with an executive coaching client who spent a great deal of time telling themselves that they weren't climbing through the ranks fast enough, that they were squandering opportunity and that they were disappointing people higher up in the food chain than them. This only served to undermine their chances of achieving the outcomes they truly wished for.

“ A most energising and motivating program. Increased self understanding which is the only way to modify one's behaviour. ”

Lindy Clifton
Head Teacher
TAFE NSW



Be Brave – Take Action!

Change your mind and turn self-sabotage into self-mastery. Use your mind to boost your productivity and self-esteem. It will have a dramatic impact. There are three steps you can take to monitor and change your self-talk so that it builds you and supports your potential, performance and wellbeing:

1. Become aware: notice your self-talk patterns.

Our internal dialogue is so habitual that we are unaware that it's going on. You probably don't realise how often you say negative things in your head or how much it affects your experience. If you choose to change your self-talk, conscious awareness of these thoughts as they occur is the first step. Take some time to notice the things you say to yourself during your day.

2. Assess your self-talk: is it negative or positive? If it is negative, ask yourself these questions:

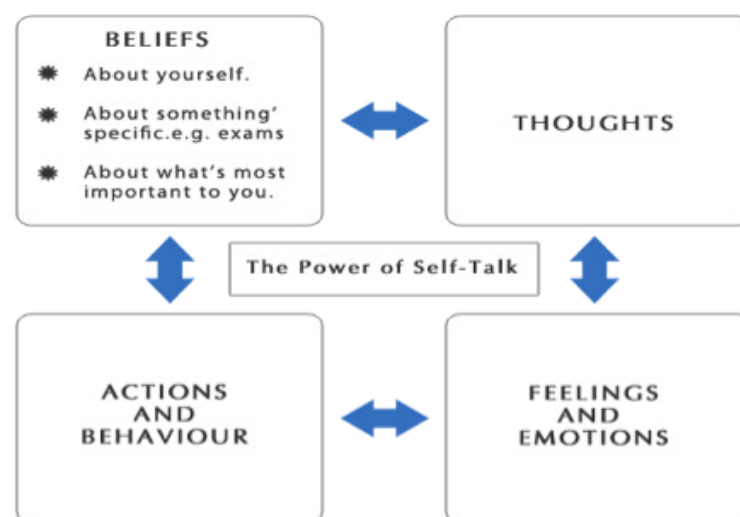
- Is there any evidence for this thought?
- Is there any evidence against it?
- Is this the way I would talk to a friend who was in my position?
- Are there any more positive ways of viewing this situation?
- Am I keeping things in perspective?
- Even if there is some validity to this thought, is it useful spending your energy thinking about it?
- What's the *How Question* I could ask here?

3. Change your self-talk:

If you decide that your self-talk is unhelpful, replace the negative thoughts with a more positive alternative. One of the most helpful ways to do this is to change self-limiting statements to questions. Self-limiting statements like "I can't manage this!" or "This is impossible!" are particularly damaging because they increase your stress in a given situation and they stop you from searching for solutions.

The next time you find yourself thinking something that limits the possibilities of a given situation, turn it into a *How Question* - "How could I manage this?" or "How could this be possible?" are much more helpful and open up your imagination to new possibilities.

Becoming aware of your internal dialogue and shifting it to possibility and optimism takes time and practice because our ways of thinking are so ingrained. You will probably need to keep working on the three step process for some time before it becomes second nature.



Be Brave – Take Action

- On a scale of 1–10, where 1 = soul destroying, catastrophic self talk and 10 = inspiring, optimistic self-talk, where are you? Where would you like to be? What will you do to get there?
- Utilise things like post-it notes, a reminder in your calendar or an alarm on your computer to remind yourself to become consciously aware of your self-talk.
- What steps could you take to become aware of your self talk?
- What steps could you take to change your self talk? Begin to notice how you feel in response to your self talk.

I would love to hear of your experience with your own self talk. It would be great to hear the self talk stories.

Virginia Baker Woolf
Principal