



Your Most Critical Communication - Self-Talk

By Sue Johnston

I'll admit it. I talk to myself. I, you, and billions of other humans, have lively internal dialogues taking place nearly all the time. It's as if we have invisible companions whispering in our ears in all our waking moments. When we talk to ourselves, repeating and re-repeating messages, we are like hypnotists making suggestions to our subconscious minds. What are you programming your mind to believe?

What do you say when you talk to yourself? If you're like most people, it's usually not along the lines of, "Wow. That was great. I'm really learning something here." It's more likely to come in the form of a judgment.

- "Ouch. That was so stupid."
- "You are such a loser."
- "You just can't do anything right."
- "This is never going to work."

Originally, we may have heard these or similar statements from others, who were trying to help us by making us conform or improve, or hurt us by pointing out our flaws. But today, the voice that carries the "No!" message is our own.

Perhaps the most important messages you will ever communicate are the ones you send to yourself. After all, what we believe influences our actions and, ultimately, our lives.

In the sports world, [research](#) has suggested that self-talk has a significant impact on athletic performance. I've paddled on teams that, based on our physical condition, should have been eliminated in the first heats. But, as a team, we won the psychological race against our nay-saying inner gremlins, and that took us to the finals on the water.

As a singer and public speaker, I've seen similar results in my performance when my self-talk sounds like, "I'm well prepared," "I'm ready," and "This is going to be fun."

Over the past few months, I've been working to stop sending myself negative messages in my life and my business. I'm trying to erase years of programming and replace it with thoughts that will help me. When that gremlin in my head starts whispering ideas that don't serve me, I take a moment to acknowledge the thought and ask, "Is this true?" Then I look at the evidence, which is usually nonexistent or, at best, circumstantial.

This process hasn't made me an enlightened being, but I have lightened up. Without the nagging, doubting, negative messages from my nay-saying inner voice, I can put something more positive into my head, for example, the truth of the situation. And my brain has the intellectual and emotional clarity to make better decisions.

So how do we reprogram ourselves? I've heard a few people suggest wearing an elastic band around your wrist and snapping it (Ouch!) every time you have a negative thought. I seem to be able to shut the negative argument off without the pain. I think about the pleasure of being able to work with a functioning brain, one not cluttered with fictional tales that send me back to a mythical territory of strife, struggle, bad luck, and bad hair days.

Some people claim that simply saying positive words can make a difference, whether or not you believe them. For me, replacing negative self-talk doesn't mean chanting empty phrases, such as "My greatness is amazing," or "I'm a money magnet." It means substituting a positive idea the mind can accept as possible, if not already true, such as, "I'm discovering greatness in me," and "I offer services people value and pay for." Some motivational speakers might accuse me of "playing small" with this tactic, but at least I'm playing.

Positive self-talk means:

- **You build a better relationship with yourself** when you ease up on the negative self-talk and substitute positive messages. Why would it be any different from a relationship with someone else? We prefer to be with folks who make us feel good, not those who consistently tear us down.
- **You change your mental environment** when you inject positive, believable thoughts. You just cannot stay in Loserville when your brain is willing to entertain that there might be something fabulous about you. (Dare I say "great"?)
- **You communicate more effectively with other people** when you're feeling better about yourself. Plus you're thinking clearly when the inner voice isn't shouting abuse at you. You may actually be a nicer person.

So how should we talk to ourselves? My reading suggests the following key elements.

- Make it a habit to **notice when the "No" voice is talking** to you. (You might even thank it for its input and tell it you'll consider the matter later.)
- **Examine the facts** of the case. What is really true? Turn that into a statement.
- **Start the talk with "I,"** not "you." This lets your brain know you are in control of yourself.
- **Use the present tense** - "I am" and "I do" and "I have." (Evidently, if you speak of positive things happening in the future, that programming leads your brain to keep them in the future.)

So talk to yourself. And enjoy the conversation. It may just lead you somewhere interesting - like precisely where you are trying to go.