

The Top 10 Things to Know About Your Self-Talk

When you consider that you spend infinitely more time with your "self" -- listening to your internal dialogue -- than you do to any other person in your life, it pays to have it on a leash!

1. Our self-talk is constant.

What you say to yourself in your head goes on 24/7. When you think about it, this is tremendously more input into your life than any other person could possibly have.

2. Our self-talk takes place in real time.

It's a running commentary. If it's good self-talk, that's the best 'friend' you can have. If it's the 'idiot in the house' instead, you're stuck with crazy, negative, self-defeating statements going on all day long: "I could never do math," "I'm too fat," "Men can't stand me," "All women are bitches," "Everyone's smarter than me," "I'll never make any money," "I'll never be a stock broker," etc. (And of course such statements tend to become self-fulfilling.)

3. Our bodies react as if our self-talk were real.

What we say to ourselves in our head has physiological outcomes, i.e., when we think "This proposition is horrible and they're going to laugh me out of the room, and when I get back without the contract, I'll get fired, and then we'll lose the house..." our palms sweat, our hearts beat faster, adrenalin clouds our thinking and we function less well and put our bodies under tremendous stress. This makes it difficult for us at the moment, and then creates habitual thought patterns that kick up in the future, and there's a cumulative stress.

4. Our self-talk is heavily influenced by our locus-of-control.

According to Dr. Phil, it's influenced by our sense of "locus-of-control"--what we attribute things to. There are basically 3 choices -- everything's my fault; everything's someone else's fault; or it happened because of chance or luck.

5. It's fascist.

It's so powerful, it overwhelms other input, including reality. For instance your self-talk tells you that women don't like to date you, and your head's so full of that at the cocktail party that you fail to even notice the rather shy but extremely appealing young woman who does her best to get your attention and initiate a conversation.

6. Negative self-talk gets the loudest when you need it the least.

When the pressure's on, we revert to default mode. For instance, everyone has one side of the brain dominant, and can and does use both hemispheres, but when learning something new, which is stressful, we all default to the dominant hemisphere. By the same token, when feeling stressed we hype up the negative self-talk, which is -- to say the least -- self-defeating. We're bringing in the negative self-talk because we think we can't do something, then it tells us we can't do something, and then we make sure we can't!

7. Self-talk can be a major life force.

Self-talk is relentless and ever-present. That's one reason we say in EQ, "be adamantly and relentlessly self-forgiving." Most of us just don't reach adulthood with self-talk that goes "I'm very good at selling and sell best under pressure," or "Most women like me and I have always dated lovely women though some of the relationships didn't work out." In at least one area, most of us have some really negative self-talk tapes running.

8. You talk to your self in ways you would never think of talking to someone else.

If you walked up to someone else and said "You're a stupid, worthless son-of-a-bitch" they would recoil in horror and pain, or lash back at you with verbal or physical abuse. However, it's not uncommon to have that kind of self-talk going on. You know in your heart that if you talked to someone else this way, it would exacerbate the situation, and not solve anything, as well as being unkind and possibly untrue; and yet we sometimes talk that way to ourselves.

9. Ultimately if you have negative self-talk you create a toxic internal environment.

Considering that self-talk goes on 24/7 and also that many people aren't consciously aware of it -- or aware that it isn't a "given" and can be changed -- as the months and years go by, you create a sort of closed-loop toxic waste area. In the worst-case scenario, every time you dip in, you pull up something negative and self-defeating, and defeat yourself, and then throw that back into the, well, cesspool. It can get pretty bad.

10. You need to listen to your body because it for darn sure listens to you.

Such a toxic inner environment is what causes headaches, pain, depression, anxiety, poor functioning, and a self-defeating spiral into self-defeat. Any degree of negativity from yourself to yourself is more than you need. It's like your authentic self crying "Help me! Get me out of here!"

Your 'real' self knows that you're competent, intelligent, motivated, prepared... and it's trying to function with negative self-talk. This creates tension.