

The Things You Say

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The race is about to start, all the athletes are ready, in position, focused on the finish line, eyes narrowed, breathing steadily, muscles flex, body tightens, all sounds are blocked, crowds blur; the only sound the runners are waiting for is the sound of the gun, signaling the start of the race.

In that moment, all the runners are telling themselves one thing, just one thing: you can do it! Don't give up, you will do it, you are the best. A few, for more motivation, might be visualising holding the winner's trophy but that's also a way of telling yourself you can win this. If you ever hear the winner's speech no matter which sport it is, no matter what field of life it is, they all say the same thing, "I kept telling myself..."



This is how the story starts; what do you say to yourself? How do you talk to yourself? Which words echo in your head? Which movie plays in your mind over and over again? We all have an internal map through which we work subconsciously and express ourselves to the world. Our behaviours, our emotions, our efficiency, dreams desires, goals everything is based on the conversations we have with ourselves.

Self-talk is an important leadership skill. According to Erika Anderson, founding partner of Proteus, a firm focused on leadership development and author of three books: *Leading So People Will Follow*, *Being Strategic*, and *Growing Great Employees* says:

“Listening and mastering Self-talk are critical skills for leaders.”

Self-talk which is pulling you down is definitely something to be avoided.

She says, two of the most important skills to have as a leader are listening and managing self-talk. It's a powerful tool to be able to recognise and shift negative self-talk into positive and constructive talk about yourself and your circumstances. It allows you to be in much more control over how you respond to what happens within you and around you.

So, how do you talk to yourself? What story or excuse do you give to justify not showing up or rising to the occasion?

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These are a few ways in which we can become our own best friend through good conversations:

1. **Watch the 'Thinker':** Be mindful of what you are thinking. Most of us are addicted to thinking because that's how we identify ourselves. Remember Descartes, "I think; therefore, I am." I'm sure what Descartes would want to tell us now is having the ability to think just proves we exist and not that we go on overdrive! When you hear a voice in your head talking to you, telling you, you messed up or you could've done something in a better way or you're no good, don't pay much attention to it, try listening to it impartially. Try and free yourself from your mind.

2. **Clarifying Beliefs:** Beliefs are assumptions which we hold as true. They can be limiting or empowering but they determine how we show up in the world and how we interact. For instance, one of the limiting beliefs maybe 'I am not good at meeting deadlines.' Now check, if this belief is justified. Ask yourself this, has there ever been a time in your life when you did meet a deadline (could be a deadline outside of your office/in personal life or college or school)? If yes, then it means it's a limiting belief and you need to rid yourself of it. If, by any chance, it's a belief based on your past experiences, then what you need is a calendar and some discipline!
3. **Stay in the 'Now':** In his book 'The Power of Now,' Eckhart Tolle, German-born spiritual teacher, has beautifully explained the concept of 'now.' He explains that time is a delusion and our mind is trapped in this delusion. It brings about a compulsion to live in either our past or future. We miss the whole point of 'the present' moment. It creates a preoccupation which we find difficult to let go of. An interesting point made in the book is, if you ever find yourself sad or depressed, check your thoughts and they would be of the past. Similarly, if you find yourself stressed, or excited; your thoughts would be of the future. The train of such thoughts leads to unwanted chatter in the mind. Staying in the 'present' is difficult but trying to make a conscious effort will slowly help. A simple way to experience 'Now' is to notice your surroundings, listen to the different sounds around you, smell the air, and notice your breathing. Bring your attention to yourself.
4. **A little kindness goes a long way:** We've always been told to be kind to others, but what about ourselves? The one who deserves the most kindness is 'you.' If you're kind towards yourself, it will radiate outwards and encompass others too, without much effort. Think about all the things you say to yourself. Would you say them to your friend? Would you use the same tone? Talk to yourself as if you would to a friend.
5. **Failure is feedback:** Don't be afraid to make mistakes. You only learn if you make mistakes. There is no such thing as failure, take it as feedback and try doing it better the next time round. Allow yourself to fail/to fall. No one got to the top without falling down a couple of times. Fear of failure stops us from making mistakes and hinders our personal growth. This same fear feeds negative thoughts in our mind. Don't say "I can't do this," technically, you can do anything you want; the question would be, do you want to or not? So, always try saying, "I don't" instead of "I can't."

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6. **Me-time:** Taking a timeout from everything is very important. Unwind yourself mentally and physically. Everyday take some time for you. Choose a time of day where you know no one will disturb you. For successful people, mostly early mornings are their preferred time. Do some exercise or meditate, spend time with you.
7. **Let it out:** Be aware of feeding yourself positive thoughts. One way of ridding yourself from negativity is writing down your negative

thoughts on a paper. This is one way of dissociating yourself from those negative thoughts. They will feel less a part of you once they are out on the paper. Once out on paper, you can then decide how to change these words into something positive, which would hold true for you. Change your 'I can't's' into 'I don't.' Then think, why are they 'I don't' and is there a way to change it into an 'I can'. For example, instead of saying "I can't wake up early in the morning" say, "I don't want to wake up early in the morning." See the shift in perspective after this switch.

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Reprogramming your thought processes won't be easy but slowly, steadily and by being mindful of what goes on inside your head, it will change. Once the shift has been made, you'll realise it'll even help in changing lifelong mental patterns; such as being distrustful, making unnecessary negative judgements on people and situations and even with having limiting beliefs about yourself and your capabilities.

As a leader in any organisation, changing your self-talk in a positive way, will help you lead in a better way. It will allow you to be mentally and emotionally available for your team and a high payoff learner who can even thrive through change and along the way support their people to do that too.



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