

Our Powerful Self-Talk Track

Invest time researching the research on what we know about our inner thoughts, and it feels safe to generalize two key points:

We have a lot of unique thoughts every day, with the operative word being "unique." One study suggests¹ this number is around 6,000. Others go much higher.

A lot of our thoughts are negative. One study² suggests the ratio of negative to positive thoughts is in the area of 80:20. That's 80 on the negative side and 20 to the positive.

If that number is even in the zip code of accurate, the biggest adversary we face in our lives is staring back at us in the mirror.

What Does Your Self-Talk Track Say About You?

Do your research and monitor your self-talk track over a few days. Keep a journal log. How much of the narrative in your mind is negative versus positive? How does this feel? Does it support your success?

I perceive myself as a positive person, and my negative thoughts were still the majority when I did this.

What's your self-talk track saying about you?

"Much of our life is the mind. So, what happens we slip away? We talk to ourselves. And we listen to what we say."

Leaders Aren't Immune from Negative Self-Talk

While you might imagine those in leadership roles are imbued with a robust positive talk track, many individuals struggle with just the opposite. The incredible number of pressures in our world plus a strong sense of responsibility for those around them combine to create too much negative chatter in their minds. I hear some variation of these comments regularly in coaching sessions:

- I don't know the right direction, and I'm afraid I'll pick the wrong one.
- I'm as lost as everyone else; I can't show it.
- What if they figure out I'm not up to this job?
- I can't sleep. I'm too busy worrying.
- I don't know why they picked me for this job. I don't feel up to it.

Newsflash: leaders are humans and struggle with all of the same worries and doubts as the rest of us. However, effective leaders learn to funnel the doubts and fears into something more constructive. They use a variation of the Active Reset Process outlined below.

Derail Your Negative Self-Talk Train with an Active Reset

Seizing control of your self-talk track and learning to stop negative thoughts before they gain too much momentum takes discipline and repetition. I employ an Active Reset Approach when the negative thought train starts rolling. (Note: this is my variation of the great guidance provided by many with Dr. in their title.)

- 1) Stop and Acknowledge—" Stop it! This is negative thinking. "
- 2) Question—" Why am I thinking this way. What evidence do I have that supports the negative? "
- 3) Reframe—" How can I reposition this issue and look for the opportunity? "
- 4) Act—" Here's what I'll do. "
- 5) And, the step that grooves this into our brain and makes this a repeatable behavior:
- 6) Reflect—" What did I learn from turning my negative thought into a positive opportunity?"

In working with clients for this process, the most challenging parts have been recognizing the negative thought and then sticking with the reflection process. Those who work diligently for a few weeks report this shift from negative to positive to become reflex-like in their daily activities.

A Case Study in Active Reset

When I first chatted with Karin (name changed/case shared with permission), a newly minted vice-president, she was fresh out of a board meeting where she perceived she had bumbled through her presentation. The CEO's feedback: "That didn't go so well," didn't help Karin's mood.

When Karin reached out to me, I asked her what she was thinking about that experience. Her response was telling: "I realized I wasn't ready for this job or those types of situations. I'm not sure I'm in the right role. I think they promoted the wrong person."

I taught her the Active Reset Process outlined above, and we practiced applying it to her negative thoughts about presenting to the board. Karin developed this reframe: "Board presentations are a great opportunity to show how much I care about our business and customers. Yes, they're pressure-packed, but with additional preparation and practice, I can help our firm by succeeding in those moments."

As the time for the next board presentation grew near, Karin not only reiterated the positive frame but practiced her presentation, including q/a. Her presentation was a success.

Armed with a successful outcome, we worked together to help her incorporate the Active Reset Process in real-time. Karin was recently promoted to senior vice-president, and she credits his comfort and growing confidence to shift the negatives to opportunities.

Positive Self-Talk or Positive Self-Trickery?

Occasionally, someone will point out the process is not much more than playing a trick on our brain. I prefer to call it a "hack," and I'm good with anything we can do to get that organ working for us and not against us. Call it what you will; if it works for you, embrace it.

The Bottom-Line for Now:

Fear, self-doubt, and the tendency to catastrophize situations are your adversaries as a leader. The essence of life is overcoming challenges. Instead of allowing your negative emotions to rule you, engage in a bit of self-trickery and reset and reframe the negatives to positives. There's one great reason to shift your thinking toward the positive: it improves your odds of success.

¹ [Humans Have Around 6,200 Thoughts in a Single Day, Shows New Study](#)

² [Mind Matters: How To Effortlessly Have More Positive Thoughts](#)