

Taming your Worst Critic

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In my leadership classes I always ask the group, “Who is your worst critic”? It is no surprise that nearly 100% of the people say, “Myself.” Only once did I find someone with a large enough disconnect to blurt out immediately, “My Wife!” Even he had to agree that he is also pretty hard on himself.

When we engage in negative self talk, even at the unconscious level, it often undermines our self esteem and can lead to physical and mental ailments. It is good to be realistic about our shortcomings so we can improve performance as we learn and grow, but it is not a healthy thing to constantly beat up on ourselves for not being perfect.

If you are 48 years old, you have likely spent 48 years forming a habit of negative self talk that limits your performance and may even shorten your life. The good news is that we humans have a remarkable ability to retrain the brain in a short period of time to form new habits. Research has shown it takes less than a month of conscious effort to permanently change a lifelong habit. Here is a simple three step process that can quickly change the quality of your life if you give it an honest try.

Step 1 – Catch it

My mental image here is that we all have a kind of beehive of thoughts about ourselves in our subconscious mind. Most of these thoughts are negative. This mass of energy is whizzing around all the time, and we are not even aware of it. Every once in a while, often for no reason we can identify, one of these negative thoughts about us jumps up into our conscious mind. We are aware of our inadequacy and thinking about it.

For most of our lives these thoughts have made us feel kind of sick as we muse on why we are not more perfect. Finally the thought is supplanted by some other thought or a phone call or something, and the episode is over. But what if we decided to be proactive and actually catch the thought when we are first aware of it? My mental image here is one of reaching up with a catcher’s mitt and catching the thought – plop – there it is. We have it firmly in hand now. Step one is completed.

The fascinating part of step one is that by simply reading this piece, you will have increased your ability to catch the thought while you are having it (that is the key) . In essence, this article is giving you that catcher’s mitt. As of now, if you start a stopwatch it

will be less than one hour until you have caught your first negative thought using this procedure. By the time you go to bed today you will have caught from 3 to 12 of these in your mitt. Wow, that is 3 to 12 opportunities to go on to step 2!

Step 2 – Reject it

Here I use the mental image of hitting the thought with a tennis racket back into my subconscious mind. I reject the thought just like a tennis player serves the ball over the net. As many tennis players do, I often grunt while doing this using the words “No! I am not doing that any more!” Of course I only utter the words verbally when I am alone, like in the car or out mowing the lawn. If I am with people, I utter the words silently, but I actually use the words just the same. This has a profound effect because I am training my mind to form a different thought pattern.

Step 3 – Reward yourself

This is the most important part of the approach because this one gives you the impetus to do more of it in the future. Think to yourself, “Hey, that was a good thing. I am actually growing here in my capacity to think more positively. That feels great!”

That is all there is to this simple method of self improvement. Now you just wait for the next negative thought to come along and repeat the process.

The impact of doing this

At first, this will feel awkward or hokey. Do it anyway because you have absolutely nothing to lose and everything to gain. If you can do it for one day, that will give you enough momentum to do it on day 2. Similarly, by the end of day 2 you will feel some exhilaration as you praise yourself and continue through day three. By day 4 it will be pretty easy to keep doing it. If you persist using this method for 28 days, you will have permanently changed your thought pattern about yourself. You will use this method instinctively for the rest of your life.

Here is my guarantee to you. If you can do this for 28 days, sometime during that process someone you love or work with will say something like this, “You have changed. I can’t put my finger on what is different, but you really are a changed individual and you wear it well.” If you are like me, several people in your life will notice a difference.

Of course the most important person to notice a difference in you is yourself. You feel better because you really are better. You have beaten a life long habit of thinking negative thoughts about yourself. Yet you still maintain the ability to see your true flaws accurately and learn from your mistakes. It is just that you have stopped punishing yourself over and over for not being good enough. What a burden lifted.

I urge you to try this simple three step approach. Look at it this way, it takes almost no time to do this, it is uplifting and fun, it improves the quality of your life, it is easy to do, and you can do it privately so nobody else has to know. So, for no expenditure of cash or even effort, you will be shaping yourself into a new person. Once you see the benefits of this method, don't hoard it for yourself. Teach others the wonderful relief of this technique, for as you help others you also help yourself.

*The preceding information was adapted from the book **The TRUST Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals**, by Robert Whipple. It is available on*

www.leadergrow.com.

*Robert Whipple is also the author of **Leading with Trust is like Sailing Downwind** and, **Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online**. Bob consults and speaks on these and other leadership topics. He is CEO of Leadergrow Inc. a company dedicated to growing leaders. Contact Bob at bwhipple@leadergrow.com or 585-392-7763.*

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The logo features the word "The" in a small, black, sans-serif font above the word "TRUST" in a large, bold, blue, sans-serif font. The letter "U" in "TRUST" is stylized to resemble a metal hook or a keyhole. Below "TRUST" is the word "Ambassador" in a bold, black, sans-serif font.