DON'T LISTEN TO YOURSELF

I was watching a webinar recently and the speaker was discussing the mentality of a double ironman athlete (a guy who does TWO ironman races over two days). When asked what helps him the most while he is competing he responded, "I learned to talk to myself rather than listen to myself." Think about it- how often do you just let your brain ramble (often in a not-so-helpful-way) rather than stopping those thoughts and creating more productive thoughts for yourself? How often are you negative or mean to yourself? How often are you super peppy and cheerleadery towards yourself? Do you even know what's in your own head?

A few years ago, I worked with a golfer who was negative and self-destructive but never realized it until his round was already ruined. He would let one bad shot impact his performance because he didn't recognize it was his thoughts, not his swing, that were hurting his score. To teach him to be more aware of his thoughts I had him fill one pocket with pennies. When he had a negative or not-present thought he had to remove one penny and put it in the other pocket. He lasted about 6 holes before he ran out of coins. Try it. *Sit still with just your thoughts for 10 minutes and a stack of pennies in front of you. If you have a negative thought or a thought about the past or future, move a penny to another stack. How many pennies do you move?*

You can't change thoughts if you don't even know what you're thinking about. Have you ever had the radio on in the car with your kids (or your mom) and your favorite, *inappropriate*, old-school rap song comes on? You're not aware of it because you're used to listening to it, but everyone else quickly recognizes that's not a tune that should be playing as loudly as it is. My point is, you need to be mindful of what you're listening to, especially when it comes to negative thoughts because no one is around to remind you to turn them off.

Now, unless you're a meditative guru and can completely clear your mind, you're going to have thoughts. A thought is just a group of words. It's not good or bad, it's just a thought. However, when you devote mental energy to it, the thought begins to grow, and when it grows it starts to impact you. Once you're aware of your thinking, it's important to work on controlling your self-talk so that you're the DJ of the mental channel you're listening to. The great thing about your mind is that you do control it, there are no Jedi mind tricks, **you CHOOSE your thoughts.**

Personally, I'm not a "glass half full" or a "glass half empty" person, I'm more of a "there's water in the glass" realist. What matters isn't so much how you're wired, it's knowing that regardless of how much water you see in the glass, you can grab a pitcher and fill it up. If you're feeling stressed, pissed, or just unproductive, check in with your brain. If you're not appropriately focused, stop and fix your thoughts. One of the best analogies to help with this is to have a mental traffic light. If your brain is ==positive and helpful== continue to cruise. If you're getting ==frustrated==, ==thinking of the past or too far into the future==, slow down and reset. If your thoughts are ==destructive, if you're overwhelmed, or if you're anxious==, then stop the thoughts and control the traffic. Once you hit red or yellow, change the thoughts. Instead of "We will never be out of quarantine. I won't survive without seeing my coworkers soon!" you can think "This is going to be a long road, but I'll get to see them again. I'll plan a virtual happy hour tonight." (realistic) or "I'm learning a different way of interacting with people and know I can adapt. Everything will seem easy after this!" (optimistic). Put in the effort to change the negatives to positives, either in your head or written out.

- **Green:** composed, optimistic, confident, focused, determined, communicating, encouraging, positive body language, aggressive, energetic.
- **Yellow:** frustrated, questioning, doubts, negative, blaming/making excuses, distant, tentative, distracted, confused, rattled.
- **Red:** angry, pessimistic, overwhelmed, out of control, apathetic, hopeless, negative body language, scared, emotional, flat, unapproachable.

Another way to change the light from red to green is to tell yourself two positive or hopeful things for every negative thought. Get the people you often speak with to engage too. Anytime someone says something critical, negative, or pessimistic, stop them (or make them stop you) and provide two positive statements. The statements can be about anything (ex: "I don't mind your beard and I am smart enough to figure this out.") but they have to be true. You'll see how easy it becomes to stop the destructive self-talk and spin it into something more positive or, at the very least, neutral.

Self Talk Tips
- Be your own best friend
- Don't think anything to you wouldn't let others say to you
- Align expectations with reality
- Be realistic and keep it simple
- Focus on what you control

Einstein noted how important our thoughts are when he said, "*The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking.*" While our thoughts may not change the state of the world right now, they will influence how well we handle everything. Lincoln said it best, "*Most folks are about as happy as they make their minds up to be.*"

Make it Great!

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