

Getting Rid of Trash Talk

By Ilene Bergelson

Why is it that we tell ourselves things which we would never tolerate from anyone else? Self-evaluation and constructive criticism are essential tools for fostering our own growth. But criticism can be a double-edged sword. Remaining honest with ourselves and keeping both feet on the ground can take us very far throughout life's challenges, but it's a short distance from honesty to self-abuse.

In facing risks and accomplishing what matters to you, is your self-talk the problem or the solution? If it's the former, we have two primary options:

1. Change the circumstances of the situation
2. Change our perspective of the situation

Is there anything about changing the situation which will help you progress? Examples of circumstance change would be the environment you choose to accomplish your goal or the company involved. Sometimes it's as easy as hiring a coach or choosing a different class to guide us through the experience. There are many resources to help us develop confidence and competence.

Shifting to a Supportive Perspective

When you are looking to disable disempowering self-speak, ask yourself how the message you are hearing will:

- help you achieve your desired goal (versus what you think you *should* accomplish) or
- protect you from actual threats to your wellbeing

The answer will surprise you. Most of our naysaying only leads to avoiding a situation, not succeeding in it.

Write Yourself New Rules

Once you start shifting your perspective to help you meet the challenges you face, be on the lookout for old trash talk's sneaky returns. If it's not helpful in either of the two ways listed above, switch gears: interrupt what's working against you and replace with a new paradigm that can help power you toward your goal.

For instance, when I first took clown class at acting conservatory (yes, you read that right, classical acting training programs often include clown class), I thought, "Oh, boy, I am going to be awful at this. This is going to be painful." I found myself dreading it. I envisioned embarrassing myself in front of my classmates. I imagined the judgment and humiliation. I felt I did not have a natural ability with clowning. I believed that because I was the one in the class with the most professional stage experience, I should therefore be more accomplished and adept at everything we studied.

Then I realized that none of these beliefs were going to help me get anything out of the class, let alone enjoy it. If I had gone in with that perspective, not only would I fail: I would waste my time and energy, and miss out on gaining something that would help me be a better actor.

It turned out that what made me feel safe was to give myself permission to be bad; to be worst in the class, to be exact. I reframed the concept of success so that it was based on my effort, my willingness to take risks and seek fun. Failure was no longer an issue. Even if the teacher gave up on me and every exercise was like banging my head against a wall, I was going to show up in the class, do everything, have as much fun as possible and not care how it turned out. I didn't have to progress the entire time, I just had to do my best and glean as much joy as I could.

Suddenly, I was uplifted by the idea of coming to class with no strings attached. Dread was replaced with mild anticipation. Here was a place where I could practice not caring what others thought, and push my limits without judgment. I could practice being silly and experiment with

every crazy idea that came up. Without repercussions! I vowed to accept the outcome, whatever it would be. Turns out, I learned a ton, improved throughout the class and had a ball.

This and many similar experiences shape my workshops and have a profound influence on me in general. We've got enough places in life where we have to leave our warts at the door and ignore the wonder of mistakes. Let's get involved, support each other, and explore with gusto! The take-away is usually better when we do and is always, a heck of a lot more fun.

Wayne Gretzky says it best; "You miss 100 percent of the shots you never take."