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'Self Talk: When Talking to Yourself, the Way You Do It Makes a Difference - WSJ.com



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BONDS

'Self Talk': When Talking to Yourself, the Way You Do It Makes a Difference

Experts in sports psychology say self-talk should be supportive, not negative; say 'you' instead of 'I'

By ELIZABETH BERNSTEIN



May 5, 2014 6:53 p.m. ET

There are two ways to "self talk" to yourself, and each one can have a positive or negative effect. Elizabeth Bernstein joins Lunch Break to discuss. Photo: Getty.

Do you ever talk to yourself?

Be honest.

Researchers say talking to yourself, out loud, is more common than many of us might care to admit. Psychologists call it "self talk" and say how we do it makes a big difference in both our mood and our behavior.

Most people engage in self-talk, experts say, though some do it louder and more often than others. Whe asked, I heard from people who talk to themselves in the basement, in their cubicle at work and at the ur in the men's room. One woman turns the car radio down so she can hear herself better.

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Self-talk is what happens when you make yourself the target of your own comments, advice or reminder Experts consider it a subset of thinking. You're having a conversation with yourself.

The Wall Street Journal: Self-talk στη διεθνούς φήμης εφημερίδα με τον Α. Χατζηγεωργιάδη Τελευταία Ενημέρωση Πέμπτη, 12 Νοέμβριος 2015 09:26

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Tell it Like it is | it's OK to talk to yourself, with honest feedback and encouragement, experts say. Kyle T. Webster

Sometimes self-talk is automatic. Other times we do it deliberately to influence our own behavior. "What happ with self-talk is you stimulate your action, direct your act and evaluate your action," says Antonis Hatzigeorgiadis associate professor at the University of Thessaly in Tri Greece, who studies self-talk and the psychology of sp performance.

Motivational self-talk includes what we say to psych ourselves up: "Come on!" "Let's go!" "You can do this! Instructional self-talk walks us through a specific task, are driving, you might tell yourself to turn right at the ne light, and then you do it. "It sounds simple, but you get correct reaction," says Dr. Hatzigeorgiadis.

Instructional self-talk is helpful when learning or practic new sport or task, he says. For example, a swimmer of

remind himself to keep his elbow high during freestyle. Before giving a speech, someone might tell he "Speak slower" and "Make eye contact."

It is important to be short, precise—and consistent. "You have to sustain it," Dr. Hatzigeorgiadis says. instruct yourself until it becomes automatic."

WSJ Radio

Gordon Deal talks to Elizabeth Bernstein about the results of talking to yourself.

00:00

The way you address yourself matters, too. Research published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology in February found people who spoke to themselves as another person would—using their own or the pronoun "you"—performed better under stress the people who used the word "I."

In one study, University of Michigan researchers induced stress in participants by telling them they ha prepare a speech to give to a panel of judges about their qualifications for a dream job. They were give minutes to prepare and told they couldn't use notes.

Half the participants were instructed to work through their anxiety using the first-person pronoun ("Wh nervous?"). The other half were told to address themselves by name or the pronoun "you" ("Why are prevous?"). Afterward, each participant was asked to estimate how much shame he or she experience right after the speech, and how much subsequent ruminating they did.

The results were consistent: People whose self-talk used their names or "you" reported less shame a ruminated less than the ones who used "I." The judges found the performances of those using "you" to more confident, less nervous and more persuasive.

When people think of themselves as another person, "it allows them to give themselves objective, helfeedback," says Ethan Kross, associate professor of psychology and director of the Self-Control and Emotion Laboratory at the University of Michigan.

Don Ingraham, a 77-year-old retired chief executive of a chemical distribution company, has been talk

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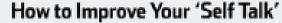
"Good job!" he said to himself. "You took the time to make it right." Sometimes, he scolds himself. H it's his conscience speaking. While cleaning up tree branches after an ice storm this winter, he acci jabbed a sharp stick into his arm. "I used some barnyard words that follow the word 'dumb,' " he say

Both positive and negative words can influence us in positive and negative ways. Say to yourself, "T interview is going to be a cakewalk," and you might not get pumped up enough to ace it. Conversely yourself, "You just lost that match, you need to focus harder," and it could spur you to do better in th future.

With critical self-talk, identify why you are being negative and focus on making it better. Don't say: "I bombed that presentation." Say: "That wasn't your best effort. You need to buckle down now and try harder."

Kathy Gruver, a 44-year-old alternative-medicine practitioner in Santa Barbara, Calif., once made he cry while talking to herself about what to say to her then-boyfriend, who hadn't called when he said h would.

Since then, she has learned to speak to herself positively. She repeats daily affirmations, coaches h on handling difficult clients and walks through the steps of her flying-trapeze workout. "I think it's hea talk to yourself," she says. "Throw your Bluetooth in, so people think you're on the phone, and let it a



It is perfectly OK to talk to yourself, as long as your words are encouraging and not berating, experts say. Think of yourself as a life-long best friend who is honest and direct but most of all supportive.



BEFORE A JOB INTERVIEW Remind yourself of the desired outcome, so you don't wander off point. Examples: 'This company needs more leaders who are good at listening." I am a problem-solver" I can bring a new perspective here."

> Build your confidence by reminding. yourself of all the positives.

Examples: 'You are well prepared.' 'You have the skills."

DURING COMPETITION

BEFORE PUBLIC SPEAKING



Repeat the specific directions that you know help you perform better. Examples: 'Don't rush.' 'Pause for emphasis.' 'Make eye contact.'

Take a step back and talk to yourself in a calming tone that is slightly

Examples: 'Relax.' 'You look fine, stop worrying, 'Remember to listen.'



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