

## Self-Talk: Are You Talking to Me?

Dawn Brown

Yes, you're talking to you... all the time! We're not aware of it but we think approximately 50,000 thoughts daily, over half of them are about ourselves, and approximately 80% of those thoughts are negative. They are thoughts about what we should have done or failed to do - thoughts in a tone that is critical, nagging, sarcastic, bullying. They provide an ongoing commentary on every move we make, on everything we say, think or feel. If our friends talked to us like that we'd find it abusive and they'd soon be our ex-friends. And yet we permit this abuser- our inner critic - to live in our head.

Much has been said and written about our self-talk. However if we're not aware of our self-talk there's not much we can do about it. More often than not all we're aware of is a general sense of not feeling good about ourselves. This subtle river of misery, discontent, emptiness flows into a general feeling of unhappiness, making it difficult to identify a specific cause. If our self-defeating thoughts lead to full-blown depression it can alert us that something is seriously wrong and we can get help. We can do something about it. But our internal critic is smart enough to stay just below the radar line; a low murmur, like the volume on the radio turned down low and as a result we don't even notice that we're under attack.

For instance, your boss comments that the project you worked on was great. The voice murmurs, "He told Jack and Sandra that their project was excellent - isn't that better than great? You know you'd have had excellent too if you hadn't left out a couple of points that could have been important." And we all do that! Some say we're hard wired to notice what's not working. Maybe but it is certainly not productive now to endure a steady litany of destructive criticisms.

This brings me to another point. Our self-talk can work to help us feel good - if we let it. All too often the volume on the supportive voice is turned down much lower than that for the critical, faultfinding one and we don't hear it. We need to give ourselves a chance to listen to the wise internal friend that talks to us in a tone that is supportive and gentle. Even if mistakes are noted, that voice invites us to try again as opposed subjecting us to a tirade of negativity. If we made a mistake or failed a test there's no point in telling ourselves we did great. Our compassionate self-talk can say we did our best, and then start problem solving to find other ways of tackling the situation. So self-talk that *seems* critical can be constructive, promoting our personal growth. Therefore our first step is to increase our awareness of the two voices: one that is compassionate and one that is destructive. The aim is not to be rid of our self-talk but to let our wise internal friend do the talking. Habits and old patterns can be changed. The choice is ours.

Dawn Brown is a psychotherapist, international speaker, and author (*That Perception Thing!* and *Expert Women Who Speak...Speak Out!*). Her new book: ***Been There, Done That... Now What?*** is available in bookstores and at [www.perceptionshift.com](http://www.perceptionshift.com).