



15 Things You Should Know About Your Inner Critic & Self-sabotage

and

**5 Steps You Can Take Today
to Break the Cycle**



Our brains are hard-wired to make sense of our world. We assess risks. We assess our abilities to face challenges and changes in our environments and relationships. We interpret, analyze, and self-talk multiple times every day. Day after day we are faced with situations where we tell ourselves things to make sense of what is happening in our lives, in our relationships, in our jobs, with our personal development.



If we are hardwired to critique our abilities and competencies, to understand ourselves better, why do so many of us judge our behavior or let our negative thoughts prevent us from taking action we really want? Why are we so hard on ourselves? Where do these voices come from? Why do we choose to tell ourselves we are somehow lacking, that we are not good enough, smart enough, haven't accomplished enough, etc.?

Negative thoughts can occur in a variety of situations in a typical day. This white paper focuses on the inner dialogue of negative self-talk that can interfere with us living healthy, fulfilling lives. What dialogue are we talking about? It's the kind of narrative that limits our belief in ourselves. It is the inner critic that develops into the self-saboteur—the voice that ultimately lowers our confidence and keeps us stuck—unable to find contentment, balance or achieve our goals.

This white paper will present the:

- ❖ 5 Classic Inner Critic Conversations
- ❖ 5 Truths about your Inner Critic
- ❖ 5 Signs of Self Sabotage
- ❖ 5 Steps to Breaking the Cycle

The purpose of this document is to educate and inform the reader on the disempowering nature of the inner critic, and to provide specific steps to break the cycle of the more developed self-saboteur.

5 CLASSIC INNER-CRITIC CONVERSATIONS

We all have an inner critic. That voice inside our head that shows up to criticize, frustrate or demean our behavior, our actions, or our decisions. It's the voice that makes us hesitate, second guess ourselves and question our competency. It's the voice that reminds us we may be rejected if we do what we want to do. Whether it's: "I should have...", "I never do anything right...", "Why did (didn't) I...?", "What's the matter with me?", "What's my problem?" "Who do I think I am?"

Here are some classic inner critic conversations that occur in all types and styles of people—professionals, students, stay-at-home-parents, teachers, doctors, lawyers—and probably your next door neighbor or colleague. Becoming familiar with the classic inner critic and its predictable conversations helps us to limit the extent and duration of the dialogue. The inner critic is a powerful force. Which of the below are all too familiar?

1. *"I'm not qualified. I haven't had enough training or experience."*
2. *People won't like me if I do what I want or say what I really think. I should just be quiet.*
3. *No one respects what I have to say. My opinion doesn't really matter.*
4. *I'm not smart enough. I have no chance to succeed. Why bother?"*
5. *"I should have known things wouldn't work out. What was I thinking?"*

5 TRUTHS ABOUT YOUR INNER CRITIC

The occasional negative thoughts are important to notice. The trouble starts when we can't let go of those negative interpretations—when the monologue alters our perception of who we really are and what we are capable of. We get on the not-so-merry-go-round of negative inner thinking—a cycle that ends up impacting our self-esteem, confidence and decisions. In these instances knowing the 5 truths about your inner critic will keep it from developing into something more detrimental.

1. We all have an inner critic. That negative voice is a normal, learned behavior—a result of negative messages from that past that we have learned to internalize.
2. It's healthy to express disappointment, regret or anger with ourselves when we don't perform or produce the results we want.
3. Our inner critic sends us messages that promote anxiety and shame that serves to block motivation and interfere with our attempts to improve our lives, careers and relationships. Left unchecked, the inner voice can be self-destructive. Temporary feelings become repetitive or excessive, creating a negative cycle of negative thoughts that impact our confidence by creating a distorted self-perception.
4. It's not unusual for negative inner dialogue to manifest as full-blown self-sabotage – arising from focusing on mistakes, failures, what's not working, what's missing – and placing disproportionate attention on what's 'wrong'.
5. Can we get past the preaching's of our inner critic? Yes and no. You don't get past it, but you learn how to side step it when it shows up. The negative thoughts still intrude, but instead of repressing or denying them, you can learn how to invite them in. You defeat the inner critic not by pushing it away; you defeat it by embracing it. By accepting it, taming it, working with it and even transforming those negative thoughts into a useful ally in your quest to find peace, fulfillment, and achievement.

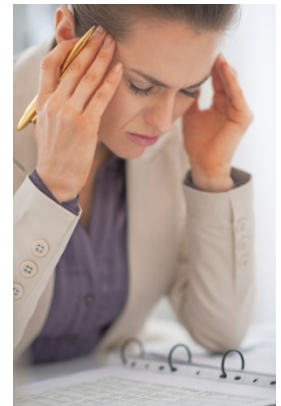
5 SIGNS OF SELF SABOTAGE

What's really troubling is the insidious nature of negative self-talk. Our inner critic often slips past our guard when our defenses are at their lowest – when we're tired, sick, hungry, frustrated or stressed out. It is so stealthy we hardly notice it's even happening until it is too late. Left unchecked, the inner critic will develop into the more sophisticated self-saboteur. Self-talk

then turns into real interference with our goals and dreams.

Do you find yourself chronically delaying things you really want to do? Do you obsess with the past or the future at the expense of the present? Do you know what you need to do to get through a personal or professional obstacle, but feel scared, paralyzed even, and choose to avoid taking action? Do you find yourself trying to numb negative feelings? Or move too fast, or forge ahead without thinking/planning or feel the need to be perfect? These acts may offer a temporary distraction and drown out the emotional pain, but they are all self-sabotaging techniques and ultimately we use them to unconsciously undermine ourselves.

To eliminate the stress that comes from anxiety and shame we avoid the situations, people and experiences that make us feel bad. We also naturally look for comfort to get us through the stress of anxiety and shame. How do we find comfort? Often by withdrawing, chronically procrastinating, turning down social engagements, spending too much time with unhealthy habits (excessive television, internet, constantly checking electronic devices, over drinking/eating, binge shopping, excessive rumination, etc.). Though these behaviors provide distraction they too are self-sabotaging technics that are ultimately, self-defeating.



Certain behaviors and thinking serve as signposts for self-sabotage. A regular review of your behaviors and thinking patterns will support a healthy, empowered view of yourself and your capabilities. Following is a list of 5 signs of self-sabotage to check in with how you are doing.

1. **Being Obsessed With the Past.** Whether it's ruminating on past failures or romanticizing past successes, focusing on the past means missing out on the here and now. It's difficult to discover new

- opportunities and plan our future when we're stuck looking in the rear view mirror. Learning from the past is different than being a prisoner to it. Acknowledge the past – the painful experiences along with the triumphs – then let it go in order to move forward.
2. **Predicting a Negative Future.** Convinced that pain in your hip means you'll need months of physical therapy or hip replacement? Fixated on the mistake you made at work and certain you'll be fired? Obsessing about negative events that may or may not happen in the future is a sure sign of self-sabotage. The past can be a great teacher, but we can't change what has happened. Similarly, fixating on the future won't do anything to alter it. Only our actions in the present moment can do that.
 3. **Playing it Safe or Settling.** Being comfortable feels safe (and avoids fear), but that comfort zone can easily become a rut. When you're not living up to your true potential, when you isolate yourself and feel unfulfilled with your results you may be playing it safe. Similarly, when we underperform and are content with less than we know we deserve we are settling. Settling for less than we'd hoped also comes down to fear – fear of rejection, disappointment, failure, and success – and that fear can lead to career, relationships and physical and mental health stagnation. Is it time to shake things up? Even small victories can boost confidence. What smart risk could you take to nudge you out of your comfort zone?
 4. **Blame Shifting.** When things don't go our way it's easy to shift the blame elsewhere. We blame the economy, our parents, the school system, the weather or Mercury in Retrograde. This creates apathy that, in turn, feeds our inaction and sabotages our efforts. We are responsible for our successes and our failures, our disappointments and our happiness. When we convince ourselves that our results are out of our hands we give away our power. We become empowered by accepting 100% responsibility for all of our outcomes.

5. **Comparing Ourselves to Others.** Comparing ourselves to others can be a helpful habit when it motivates us to become better people. But when we compare ourselves to others and beat ourselves up for 'not measuring up', that's a self-sabotage red flag. The next time you're tempted to compare yourself to someone try the 5-10-15 approach. It works like this, write down the: 5 accomplishments you're most proud of; 10 skills you like the most about yourself, and; 15 adjectives describing your best qualities. Post it somewhere visible and use it as a reminder to keep focused on our own efforts and achievements instead of the accomplishments of others.

5 STEPS TO BREAKING THE CYCLE

Negative thoughts are like weeds and any gardener will tell you, if you don't tend the weeds your garden will



soon be overrun with them. The other truth about weeds is, regardless of how diligently you pull those weeds you can never fully eradicate them. Think of any paved parking lot with even a solitary weed poking its head up. The weeds will find a crack to poke through.

The next time you are faced with that nagging inner critic or the more advanced self-saboteur, use this 5-step process to break up the disempowering cycle.

Step #1

Notice the Negative Message

Our negative self-talk can be so commonplace that we don't even consciously notice when we're doing it.

To become more aware of your inner critic's voice notice when your mood or energy takes you into negative thinking when there hasn't been an incident to cause such a shift. If you notice a change, go back and ask yourself what you were just thinking about. You will often find that you have been engaging in negative self-talk without even realizing it.

Step #2

Stop It in Its Tracks

Even if the negative thoughts are true, they are not healthy or empowering. So stop them immediately. You can use this simple technique from Prentice Mulford, a prominent thought pioneer from the 1800's. He said that we must deny access to those thoughts we don't want. He created a "thought refusal" statement:

"I refuse this thought and the mental condition it has brought on me which affects my body."

Step #3

Question the Thought for Its Truth

We often accept our negative self-criticisms as truth without questioning their validity. The next time you become aware of a negative thought challenge it. Ask yourself if it's true or not. Is it an interpretation, or a fact? Pitting our negative thoughts against what is actually true can be a simple yet powerful exercise and a step towards shattering our negative misbelief.

Step #4

Correct the Inner Critic by Telling It What is True

Now that you've acknowledged and challenged your inner critic it's time to replace the inaccurate assessments with the more accurate, empathetic and empowered truth. Instead of, "You're not advancing as fast as some of your colleagues. You'll never succeed," try, "I am not perfect. I can honestly say I tried my best. My future success is in my hands." Reframe the negative thoughts so they more accurately reflect the truth.

Step #5

Reframe the Negative "You" Thought to a Positive "I" Statement

"I" statements help us assert what we really believe by connecting us to what we're feeling. For example, the internal dialogue would shift from, "You never do anything right," to, "I feel frustrated and angry when the results don't reflect my efforts." Replacing "you statements" with "I statements" takes the negative charge out of our inner dialogue and removes ourselves from the victim role.

These private conversations that you have with yourself are powerful predictors of behavior and success. They can pull you up out of the mud when you fall down or be the boot that pins you to the ground. They can be the difference between busting through our personal barriers and giving up and settling for less.

Going through this process gives you an opportunity to challenge distorted inaccurate thoughts and replace them with truthful, positive, responsible, and empowering thoughts.

"If you hear a voice within you that says, 'You cannot paint,' then by all means paint and that voice will be silenced."

- Vincent van Gogh

A PERSONAL MESSAGE

It is my sincere hope that after reading this white paper, you will be more aware of your own self-sabotaging behaviors, and are better able to silence your inner critic and give voice to your internal champion.



Lisa Carpenter, President, Emerald Quest Coaching

Lisa Carpenter is a trained coach, mediator, and facilitator specializing in job and career transition. She is especially adept in helping clients prepare for new responsibilities, or identifying their next best move – whether in line with their current career path, or an entirely new one. Prior to becoming a coach, Lisa's professional experience included nearly 20 years in the engineering and environmental industries at companies including HDR Engineering, Surface Water Resources and Resource Management International.

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