

Watch What You Say to Yourself

by Dr. Patrick Cohn

We regularly carry on an inner dialogue with ourselves. This is called self-talk. Your self-talk can be negative and self destructive or it can be positive and helpful.



The key point is that you choose what you say to yourself. What you say probably reflects your thinking and we tend to be or act out what we think.

Self-Criticism

It's easy to forget someone else's criticism of you, but it's not easy to forget your own criticism of yourself. I ask the athletes I work with to monitor what they say to themselves. If you get negative with your own self talk and cut yourself down, you have to recognize this behavior and make an effort to change. When you say to yourself, "I can't do this or that," or "I am the worst skier," or "I suck," you are killing your own confidence. Negative thoughts lead to low self-confidence and negative outcomes. Negative self-talk can lead to a very bad disease of the athlete called "hardening of the attitude" and over time it has become fatal for many athletes.

You Make the Choice

Most athletes don't pay attention to what they say to themselves. Many ski racers, for example, after having a lousy run, jump all over themselves: "You can't ski for at all; you're the worst skier." Can you change your self-talk to help you perform better? Yes! No one can be positive for you but yourself. You have to make the choice to keep your self-talk positive and helpful.

Pay Attention

First, pay attention to what you say to yourself and notice when you begin to get negative and quickly identify your negative self-talk. After you finish a run, go back and think about when you were negative with yourself or your skiing. Write down the negative statements and in what situation they occurred. If you have more negative than positive self-talk during a round, this indicates that you need to work on changing your self-talk.

Practice Changing

The next step is to modify what you say to yourself. Write down the negative self-statements from the previous exercise. Next to each self-statement, change the negative statement to a positive statement. For example, the negative self statement: "I can't believe I fell, I got to be the worst skier in the world," change that to - "everyone wipes out, I know I can do it." It takes practice changing your negative thoughts to positive thoughts. Use paper and pencil first.

Be Positive and Confident

The next time you ski, you will be more aware of what you say to yourself. You will also be able to change your negative self talk into positive self-talk and be your own best friend. Make the choice to keep your self-talk positive and confidence enhancing.