Resource Board : Self-Talk and Learned Optimism

Self-talk "Monitor and manage'

We all talk to ourselves all the time. It is part of our 'making sense of the world' as we endeavour to develop a sense of personal control and competence. How people explain life's events to themselves is called their 'Explanatory Style'.   Our explanations reflect our deeper beliefs and the assumptions we have made about how the world operates. The word 'style' is used as people tend to develop habitual patterns in the way they think. People vary in their awareness of their 'self-talk ' or explanatory style.

According to psychologist Matin Seligman, self-talk tends to be either generally
*   optimistic and hopeful and result in positive feeling ..or
*   pessimistic and negative and result in negative feeling.

Eg Pessimistic Thinking / Self-Talk
A: event : husband (who says he has given up smoking) , is smoking. His wife sees him.
B: beliefs : self-talk: wife ' you say you will give up smoking , but look at you! You are hopeless!'
C: **consequences :** feelings of resentment, anger, failure, hopelessness, defiance experienced by both people.

Optimistic Thinking / Self-Talk
A : event: child is struggling with long division, despite numerous instances of
    teaching
B : beliefs: self-talk : father " don't worry, Sue, it can take time to learn new
    maths concepts. Keep going, You are showing persistence".
C: consequences: feelings of patience, persistence, progress, hope

The inner self talk you use determines/indicates whether you are an optimist or a pessimist. Three important dimensions relating to your choice of words have been identified. Are the words you use

permanent or temporary . Words that implicate over what period of time something will happen eg 'always, never, every time, on Sundays, this afternoon, right now'

universal or specific words which describe how much of your behavioural repertoire is implicated ie your whole behavioural repertoire (universal), or just a specific aspect eg I (universal) am stupid or My mobile phone skills are not so good (specific).
personalized   If your words attribute the cause of the event to internal resources eg skill, persistence then the 'locus of control' is considered 'internal'. If your words attribute the cause of the event to external sources eg luck, others, the weather then the locus of control is considered 'external'. An individual with an internal locus of control has a

greater sense of personal control in relation to events than an individual with an external locus of control.

Positive and Negative events

The optimistic, resilient individual varies their language depending on whether the event is positive or negative.

'The ART of creating HOPE and OPTIMISM is the art of finding temporary and specific explanations for distressing events and permanent and universal explanations for positive events.'

Turning self-talk that is causing distress into self-talk that is creating a more positive feeling and hope.

The model of learned optimism. Martin Seligman

Adversity (what's happening)	event causing negative feeling
Belief (what I am saying to myself)	what am I saying to myself? What underlying beliefs and attitudes are operating?
Consequences	feeling/s, action/s
Disputation (how can I challenge and change my inner self-talk?)	*evidence:* looking at the facts in a more encouraging way *alternatives* – looking at the situation in a less destructive way *implications* – what does this mean –decatastrophizing *usefulness* – how useful is the belief/ situation to you?
Energization (how do I feel now?)	more hope, energy

Negative feelings can be 'reworked' to create more resilient, hopeful feelings.

Comments
- ❑ When beginning to use this model it may be useful to just focus on just the a, b, c section first. Some people benefit from considerable practice listening to their inner talk, ie becoming much more aware of real underlying beliefs and honest

reflection on what statements are generating strong feeling, and just what the feeling is.

❑ When 'disputing' self-talk it is not always necessary to work through each aspect ie evidence, alternatives, implications, and usefulness, to generate optimism. While working through each aspect develops emotional intelligence more broadly it is possible just to use one eg 'is this useful to feel so angry?', in order to break the pattern and create more optimistic thinking.

Example

Feeling of inadequacy, foreboding *becomes* a feeling of 'balanced approach, supportive teacher and learner, greater hope'.

Adversity   **-**Lack of computer skills

Belief -   "I'm hopeless with computers, I am a technological dummy, I'm going nowhere'
-     "People who are no good with computers are going to get further and further behind at work and in life'
-     "I am such a slow learner"

Consequence Feeling inadequate, panicky, sense of the future is undermined

Disputation   **-EVIDENCE**
"I am not totally computer illiterate, I have made steps over the year. I'm getting these overheads organized. We've got our computer updated at home and I've just got a printer – that's not nothing."
"I'm actually developing more persistence and patience, and initiative when I'm, using the computer. Before I used to 'never get started, and I'd give up after 15 minutes"
"There are lots of other skills besides computing which are and will continue to be important in my work, there's no real need to feel I will get further and further behind."

ALTERNATIVE WAY TO LOOK AT IT
"Hang on, you are in the same position as lot's of other people, learning about the computer. I can learn, albeit slowly, I'm not in a job that relies on top line computing skills."
'I am like anyone else, I've got strengths and weaknesses. I might be a bit slower with technology, but there is no need to make a big deal of it.
The department provides plenty of training and development opportunities in the area of computing, and my line manager would be quite happy for me to go to a course, several if I want"

IMPLICATIONS
"This means I have the challenge of learning computing skills and I need to apply myself to this task. There is always someone at work that can help me…it's a question of my patience and application."

USEFULNESS
"How useful is it to call myself a dummy and put myself down? Not very, it just makes me feel inadequate."

"How useful is it to me to be a panic merchant, and worry unduly about the future? if I'm really that concerned I can always set myself goals and make sure I put the time into learning."

Energization Feel more balanced about it, feel more settled and able to 'plug away at it'
Feel I have been more supportive towards the 'learner within myself', which pleases me and helps me in my role as a self teacher.
Feel encouraged as a problem solver.

For a blank template to help you practice developing more optimistic thinking patterns see the next page.

Template: The model of learned optimism.   Martin Seligman**.**

Adversity event causing negative feeling	
Belief what am I saying to myself? What underlying beliefs and attitudes are operating?	
Consequences feeling/s, action/s	
Disputation *evidence:* looking at the facts in a more encouraging way *alternatives* : looking at the situation in a less destructive way *implications* : what does this mean – decatastrophizing *usefulness* : how useful is the belief/ situation to you?	
Energization more hope, energy	

Activity.
Complete an example with a colleague or share your example with a colleague.   Sharing can help you develop the skill of thinking optimistically.