

# Success For A Buck!

## The Most Important Speech You Ever Give

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# The Most Important Speech

## How to Change Your Life by Changing Your Self-Talk

### A Values Coach Special Report

By Joe Tye, America's Values Coach™

“The aphorism, ‘As a man thinketh in his heart so is he,’ not only embraces the whole of the man's being, what is so comprehensive as to reach out to every condition and circumstance of his life. A man is literally *what he thinks*, his character being the complete some of all his thoughts.” (emphasis in original)

James Allen: *As a Man Thinketh*

Chances are you've taken a class in public speaking, participated in Dale Carnegie training, joined Toastmasters, or otherwise worked on your speaking skills. Since the ability to influence others with the spoken word is a core leadership competency, it's a smart thing to do (another smart thing would be to attend the Chamber-sponsored workshop on Executive Speaking Skills – see below). But I'll bet you've never had formal training on the most important speech you ever give – which is the one you give to yourself every day.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said that a man becomes what he thinks about all day

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long. One reason so few people really ever achieve their potential is that all day long, they hear the voice of an inner critic telling them they don't have what it takes, and that in any event they don't deserve to be successful. Most of this negative self-talk occurs below the level of conscious awareness, which makes it all the more insidious. Moreover, most of it is flat-out false. *Learning how to talk to yourself in a positive, constructive, and empowering way is not so much about telling yourself happy little lies as much as it is preventing yourself from falling victim to depressing big lies.*

In his book *The Evolving Self: A Psychology for the New Millennium*, Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi showed that for a variety of evolutionary reasons, the human mind automatically gravitates toward negative, frightening and depressing thoughts. Indeed, we tend to berate ourselves internally in ways that we'd never tolerate from a boss, a spouse, or anyone else ("You idiot! How could you be so stupid? And look at how fat you are!"). As one psychologist put it, we abuse ourselves at 400 words a minute. It's like having a little vandal running around up there in your brain, spray-painting slanderous graffiti on the walls.

*If you are a leader (and if you are a Spark Plug Plus member, you ARE a leader!):* Understanding the power of self-talk, for both good and ill, is important to you in your role as a leader for several reasons (and I define broadly as someone who takes other people to a place they didn't know they wanted to go – meaning anyone in management, anyone in sales, anyone who is a parent). First, you must recognize that your every effort to inform and inspire people is probably being contradicted by invisible critics residing inside the heads of your listeners. As you encourage your associates to be all they can be and to reach for the stars, many of their inner critics are saying that all they can be really isn't very much, and that in any event they're not being paid enough to do the space exploration thing with you. People might smile and nod, but their inner critics are going to win the debate, not you.

As Shad Helmstetter writes in his book *What to Say When You Talk to Yourself*, whether people will accept and act upon what you tell them is directly influenced by their previous conditioning and programming – by their self-talk. One of the best things you can do for your people, and for your organization, is teach them how to rewrite the self-limiting scripts that have been foisted upon them by their inner critics. To assume that this is fluff stuff, or that's it's somehow beneath your dignity to bring it up, is selling short both your people and your organization.

The second reason it's important for you as a leader to understand the power of self-talk is that – perhaps more than any other factor – it will determine the

performance level of your employees and the results achieved by your organization. People will never on a sustained basis exceed their own self-image, and that is substantially determined by their inner dialog. In his book *Creativity in Business*, Stanford professor Michael Ray writes that what he calls “the voice of judgment” is toxic to creative thinking, and that silencing that voice is essential if you wish to achieve innovative breakthroughs.

The third reason it’s important, of course, is that if you’re like most people, you yourself are being harangued by your own inner critic. It just might be that the essential first step for you to move *your organization* “from good to great” is for you to convince *yourself* that you can personally make that leap. Executive coaches I’ve spoken with tell me that, no matter how successful their clients appear to be, the first challenge for them to take the next step in their careers is often rewriting the inner scripts that serve as an invisible ceiling on their self-perceived potential.

“Of all the self-help concepts I have uncovered, the concept of ‘programming’ the brain with a more successful ‘new picture’ of yourself is the most sensible. I am not the first behavioral researcher or author to figure this out. Others have come to the same conclusions as I, that whatever you put into your mind - *in one way or another* - is what you will get back out - *in one way or another*.” (emphasis in original)

Shad Helmstetter: *What to Say When You Talk to Yourself*

For more than 2,000 years, we’ve been warned to watch our thoughts (for example, “as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he” from the Book of Proverbs). Now, however, there is solid evidence of a physiological basis for this advice. It turns out that what the way we think can actually have a physical impact on the wiring of the brain. Dr. Jeffrey Schwartz is a psychiatrist whose research has convinced him that changing our self-talk and using mental visualization can actually bring about hard-wired, physical modifications in the brain’s circuitry. In his book *The Mind and the Brain: Neuroplasticity and the Power of Mental Force* (with Sharon Begley) he writes: “[W]e are seeing evidence of the brain’s ability to remake itself throughout adult life, not only in response to outside stimuli, but even in response to directed mental effort. We are seeing,

in short, the brain's potential to correct its own flaws and enhance its own capabilities."

Here are ten strategies (and a bonus) that will help you do a better job of confronting negative self-talk and replacing it with inner dialog that is positive, affirming, and empowering.

### **Strategy #1: Pay Attention**

Because much of what goes on in our heads goes on below the level of conscious awareness, you must begin by being more vigilant in paying attention to what's going on up there. The first thing you will notice is that virtually all of the inner criticizing ("How could *you* be so stupid!") and complaining ("Can *you* believe what they're asking *us* to do now?") is in the second person. That means it's not really *you* who's talking. Somebody else, perhaps so long ago that you don't even remember it, said something to you that hurt and that stuck. Now what was once a one-time insult has become part of your permanent self-perceived persona.

I once heard someone give this advice: "Be careful who you rent space in your head to." Any time you hear that nattering nabob of negativity (Spiro Agnew's one enduring legacy to the language!) up there in your head, ask yourself this question: "Who's talking?" In other words, who first told you that you were stupid or ugly or whatever? Who first told you that there was something wrong with being an "overachiever" or a "Pollyanna?"

One of the most effective things you can do is get a journal and begin recording all of the things you hear going on up there in the attic of your mind. As in medicine, correct diagnosis is the first half of the cure. It's impossible to fight an enemy you can't see. Being acutely aware of what you're saying to yourself, and whose earlier insults or criticisms you are unconsciously echoing, is the first step to erasing this negative self-abuse.

### **Strategy #2: Confront Your Inner Brat**

You've probably heard people talk about nurturing your inner child, which is all well and good, but you also need to confront your inner brat. You would hope that no parent would ever allow a child to say some of the things that your inner brat says to you (e.g. "You fat pig! How come you never have any willpower?"). Your inner brat doesn't care a whit for the truth; he or she only wants to dominate your inner dialog the way a real-world spoiled brat needs to be the center of attention in any roomful of people.

In the book *Learned Optimism*, Dr. Martin Seligman showed that optimistic people were more successful, more resilient, and healthier than pessimistic people, and that they were less prone to anxiety, depression, or physical illness. *One of the most important differences between optimistic and pessimistic people, Seligman found, was that optimists routinely argue with their inner critic, and dispute self-blaming interpretations of failure or discouragement, while pessimists tend to submissively accept the most self-limiting interpretations.* The good news, Seligman shows with multiple scientific studies, is that somebody can learn how to be more optimistic and that in doing so they can change the results they achieve in life. A key first step is challenging that little brat in your head.

*Try this:* Whenever you catch your inner brat (or one of them – you undoubtedly have more than one) piping up with a criticism or complaint of some sort, shout out, "Halt! Who goes there?" Of course, you probably don't want to shout this out loud if there are other people around. Then analyze what the little brat has been saying. Who first told you that you were stupid or ugly or fat or whatever? Why did it hurt? Why did it sink in and stay? What have you been doing, perhaps inadvertently, to nurture that harmful aspect of your self-image? Why don you continue the little brat space in your head? And now that you've got the brat's attention, say, "I see what you're doing, and I want you to stop it right now. Clear out – you're being evicted!"

### **Strategy #3: Challenge Self-Sabotaging Labels**

*"You're lazy."* That's what I hear my inner critic (the little brat) say to me every time I'm not working on a key priority, or not working on it soon enough or fast enough. Since I have more than one key priority, and since I do make the time for riding my bike, reading things not related to key priorities, and even taking walks (and taking naps), I hear my inner critic make that snide remark a lot. I've heard it so many times that it has really become part of my self-identity. It's not really true (at least not nearly as often as the little brat would like me to believe); it's up to me to challenge and recast that label.

We all carry around labels in our heads that become part of our self-image. Some of them are helpful and empowering, others are destructive and disempowering. Any time you hear your inner brat trying to stick a label on you (e.g. "you're stupid, fat, lazy, whatever"), immediately challenge that label. One thing that I find helpful is to convert a label into a description. For example, when I hear the inner brat call me lazy (a label), I stop and take stock of how I'm feeling and what I'm doing. If I'm working hard or playing hard, I say "that's rubbish" and get back to whatever it was I was doing. If in fact I'm in a low energy state, I acknowledge the fact, then decide whether I'm going to work on firing myself up, or give myself permission to be in recharge mode for a while. I've found the conversion of labels into descriptions to be a powerful antidote to the efforts of the inner brat to make me feel bad about myself.

Even if it appears to be technically true, still challenge the label, then work on changing the underlying facts. If you're stretched out on the sofa watching a reality TV show with a half-eaten box of chocolates on your lap and a cigarette burning in the ashtray, it will be hard to challenge your inner brat's label and convince yourself that you're not lazy. The only way to credibly challenge that label is to turn off the tube, dump the candy and cigarettes in the trash, and go do something productive. There's a bit of chicken-and-egg involved here: what comes first – changing your self-image or changing the behaviors that feed into that self-image? The answer is "Yes." Work on both at once.

*A tough love message:* Low self-esteem (buying into those negative labels) is more often than not just an excuse for laziness and cowardice. If you really believe that the members of a group don't like you, and suspect that it's because you don't deserve to be liked, you won't make much of an effort to become part of the group. If you really believe that you're not capable of making something happen, you probably won't find the courage to try. In either case, you end up creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. That's why I believe that we all have an absolute obligation to challenge self-limiting labels and enhance our own self-image and self-esteem – so that we will have the courage and the energy to make a difference.

**Strategy #4: Take The Pickle Challenge™ and The Pickle Pledge™**

Most people don't think of complaining as negative self-talk, but it is. You might think that when you bitch, moan and whine (the official cheer of the BMW Club!) you're referring to something outside of you – how far away you had to park from the shopping mall, how bad the food is in the employee cafeteria, how childish your children are, whatever. But complaining is really inner-directed. It's your inner brat telling you that you are a victim (poor you!). Think about it. Any time you complain about something – anything – you are really saying three things:

1. Something is bothering you, otherwise you wouldn't be wasting your time and mental energy complaining about it.
2. It's not your fault, otherwise you'd be looking in the mirror instead of pointing a finger (and any time you're complaining about something, you are implicitly pointing a finger at someone else).
3. There's nothing you can do about it, otherwise you'd be working on fixing the problem rather than just whining about it.

Can you think of a better definition of a victim? What happens over time is that your little inner brat, with thousands of episodes of complaining that each



by themselves seem to be insignificant throwaway comments, creates in you a mindset of victim thinking. Psychologists call this “learned helplessness.” Every time you complain, you are implicitly accepting victimhood for all those bad things happening that you complain about, that are someone else’s fault, and that you’re helpless to fix.

The first step to changing your mental framework from victim to winner is to simply recognize your inner complaining for what it is. That’s where *The Pickle Challenge* comes in. For the next 30 days, carry around a pen and a little steno pad. Every time you hear yourself bitch, moan, whine or complain, or hear yourself finger-pointing or rumor-mongering (both variations on the BMW Club cheer), make a mark in your pad. At the end of the month, count it all up. Calculate how much time you’ve spent in the swamp of mental negativity. If you’re like me and everyone I’ve ever worked with on this (*and if you’re really being honest with yourself*) *you will be appalled* at how much complaining you do, most of which is never vocalized outside of your head. All that time and energy is not available for more positive and constructive thinking. And without you even being aware of it, it puts you into victim mindset mode. And the greatest irony is that it’s not even you who’s doing the complaining – it’s your inner little brat!

The second step is to take *The Pickle Pledge*, pasted just below. It’s true that every complaint (every single complaint!) can be turned into a blessing (“My head is killing me – thank God for modern pharmacology!”) or a constructive suggestion (“My head is killing me – I’d better drink a glass of water”). Over time, you will be amazed at how much more positive your thinking becomes, and how effectively you begin to change your self-image from victim to winner.

*Transforming the workplace:* If you could get everyone in your organization to take *The Pickle Pledge*, just imagine how much more pleasant it would be to go to work every day! Imagine: no bitching, moaning and whining; no finger-pointing, no blame-gaming, no rumor-mongering. Now, before you tell me I’m crazy, that it could never happen, let me remind you that not long ago a vast

majority of people believed it would be impossible to achieve a smoke-free society, yet look how far we have come in just the past ten years or so. Toxic emotional negativity is as corrosive to the soul as toxic cigarette smoke is to the body. Why can't we expect our workplaces to be pickle-free the way we now expect them to be smoke-free?



### **Strategy #5: Replace Disempowering Questions with Empowering Questions**

If you want to change the quality of your life, change the quality of your questions. That's the formula of Anthony Robbins (author of *Awaken the Giant Within*) and it can help you transform negative self-talk into positive inner dialog. Negative self-talk often takes the form of questions (e.g. “Why do things like this always happen to me?” or “What did I do to deserve this?”). One way to change the quality of your questions is to take the advice of the great German poet, Rainier Maria Rilke; he told a young poet who was overwhelmed with self-doubt to train that doubt (in his *Letters to a Young Poet*). In other words, to make it ask positive and helpful questions.

In the book *Hope Is Not a Method*, Gordon R. Sullivan describes three questions that can help you train your doubt and transform negative self-talk into something more constructive. Let's look at those questions in the context of a

real-world situation. Let's say that you're a salesperson, and you've just lost a big sale that you were really counting on. Of course, your inner little brat might be having a field day beating you up for having been "rejected." Here are Sullivan's three questions, and how they might apply:

*Question 1 – What's happening?* Well, you've lost a sale. You have not been rejected, your offer was simply not accepted.

*Question 2 – What's not happening?* Losing this sale did not cause you to lose your health, your family, or your friendships. In fact, in the overall scheme of life, it was probably not all that big a deal. That puts a totally different perspective on things, doesn't it?

*Question 3 – What can I do about it?* Now your challenge is to understand why so you can make any necessary changes in your approach and then move on to the next prospect.

Here is another key point, one which applies to each of the other strategies included in this *Values Coach Strategy Letter*: You must act quickly. The second you hear the inner little brat start to berate you for losing the sale (or whatever it is) you need to challenge, confront, and question before those hurtful words start to sink in emotionally.

"[People] can benefit tremendously by learning how to talk to [themselves] constructively: by learning how to intercept automatic negative thoughts before they build up such a head of steam that they become unstoppable; by using logic to generate alternatives to gloom and doom; and then, eventually, by chipping away at the negative self-schema that generates so much of the worry in the first place."

Edward M. Hallowell, M.D.: *Worry: Controlling It and Using It Wisely*

### **Strategy #6: Use Metaphorical Visualization™ and Put The Janitor in Your Attic™ to Work**

You can't change what you cannot see, which is why the emotional barriers that stand in the way of our success and happiness can be so frustratingly difficult to overcome. *Metaphorical Visualization* is a systematic approach for

using metaphors to make the invisible become visible. It is a powerful tool for changing attitudes, managing emotions, changing self-limiting beliefs and expectations, and erasing negative self-talk. With this technique, you consciously choose a metaphor designed to help you bring about a desired change. The key success factors are expectation and repetition – it will work if you think it will work, and if you repeat the visualization frequently.

Here's a Metaphorical Visualization technique that I and many others have found to be especially helpful – *The Janitor in Your Attic*. Negative self-talk is really nothing more than mental graffiti being spray-painted by that gang of little inner brats on the walls of “the attic” of your mind. You need a janitor to clean it up! Every time you hear negative self-talk, picture a friendly janitor coming along, painting out that graffiti, and replacing it with affirmations that are positive and affirming.

For more suggestions on *The Magic of Metaphorical Visualization*, listen to the teleconference on the Spark Plug Plus members-only website:

<http://www.joetye.com/resources/teleconferences.html>



### **Strategy #7: Replace Negative Self-Talk with Positive Affirmations**

You might have heard the old Johnny Mercer song (most popularly performed by Bing Crosby), *Accentuate the Positive*. It included some pretty good advice:

Accentuate the positive / Eliminate the negative / Latch on to the affirmative / Don't mess with Mister In-Between

It also warned of the consequences of not taking that advice:

You've got to spread joy (up to the maximum) / Bring gloom (down) down to the minimum / Otherwise (otherwise) pandemonium / Liable to walk upon the scene

Any time there's pandemonium up there in the attic of your mind, check to see if you don't need to eliminate the negative and replace it with the positive.

Your mind is capable of holding only one thought at a time. You cannot be simultaneously thinking about pink Cadillacs and scary movies. One thought will dominate. One way to make sure that it's the positive thought that dominates is to program yourself with positive affirmations. And most such affirmations are some variation upon these two themes:

- I am capable of (fill in the blank – managing my money, losing weight, overcoming my shyness, whatever).
- I deserve to enjoy the fruits of my success.

If you do not believe those two things – that you are capable of making something happen and that you deserve to succeed at it, chances aren't very good that you'll make it happen. In fact, you're far more likely to engage in self-sabotaging attitudes and behaviors. But once you've convinced yourself that you are capable and deserving (and are taking action – see below) it's just a matter of time before you achieve your goal.

“We found that [athletes'] performances improved dramatically when they stopped the self-abusive feedback, and started thinking about the positive – what they were accomplishing, instead of what they weren't.”

James E. Loeher and Peter McLaughlin: *Mentally Tough*

### **Strategy #8: Reframe Obstacles and Setbacks**

“Thank God Ahead of Time” is a great formula for dealing with obstacles and setbacks. No matter what apparently bad thing happens, chances are that someday you'll look back and say that it was the best thing that could have

happened. Almost everyone who's ever lost a job has had that experience (in fact, I'd go so far as to say that if it weren't for people losing jobs, we'd have about ten percent of the start-up entrepreneurs that we have today!).

In his book *Awaken the Giant Within*, Tony Robbins suggests asking two questions any time some apparently bad thing happens (and yes indeed, to quote the title of Harold Kushner's book, bad things do happen to good people):

Question #1: What's great about this?

Question #2: How can I use this?

If you get into the habit of saying "Thank God" every time you run into a roadblock, and of asking great questions such as those posed by Robbins, you will find that adversity becomes a teacher and a door-opener for you.

*"It's not the events that shape my life that determine how I feel and act, but, rather, it's the way I interpret and evaluate my life experiences. The meaning I that one event will determine the decisions I make, the actions I take, and therefore my ultimate destiny."*

*Anthony Robbins: Awake in the Giant Within*

### **Strategy #9: Make Your Own Motivational Tape or CD**

Would you like to see the world's greatest motivational speaker? Right this minute? If so, go stand in front of a mirror. He or she will be right there, looking back at you. That's because nobody can motivate you but you, and the things that you say to yourself will either do that – they will motivate you – or they will de-motivate you.

*Try this:* Over the next 30 days, start making notes about the things you like about yourself, about your future goals and dreams, and about the things you know you must do in order to become your ideal best self and to achieve those goals and dreams. Then, on a day when you are emotionally flying high, sit down (better yet, stand up) at a microphone and record your own motivational audiotape or CD. You can record a cassette with most tape recorders.

To make a CD, you can record onto your computer with audio-editing software and then load it into an iPod or burn it onto a CD. You can buy a microphone at any electronics shop, and download free audio editing software that's intuitive and easy to use, such as: <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/> .

In my book *Your Dreams Are Too Small*, Terry Robertson – who owned a very successful automobile dealership – had his advertising company record a “sales tape” for each of his salespeople. It was a tape selling them on them. He said that the ones who listened to it every day on the way to work outperformed those who didn't by a large margin. That book is fiction, but like most fiction, it's based on a larger truth.

“You know what selling is, Charlie? Selling is the ultimate test of self esteem. When you get right down to it, you only have one product to sell: yourself. And you really only have one customer to sell to. It's a tough, cynical, ornery, and negative customer: yourself. If you can sell you on yourself, you can sell dirt to a farmer. Until you make that critical first sale, selling you on yourself, business is going to be a struggle for you.”

*Joe Tye: Your Dreams Are Too Small*

### **Strategy #10: Just Do it**

Without action, positive thinking and positive self-talk are little more than good intentions. So whatever empowering questions you ask of yourself, whatever positive affirmations you write for yourself – take action. Just do it, and do it now. That is the secret to taming your inner little brat.

“In order to make a visualization a reality in the world of form, you must be willing to do whatever it takes to make it happen. This is the single most important aspect of visualization and imagery. Everything that you can picture in your mind is already here waiting for you to connect to it. What needs to be added is your state of willingness.”

*Wayne Dyer: You'll See It When You Believe It*

### **And a Closing Thought from One of My Favorite Authors**

“The most pernicious aspect of procrastination is that it can become a habit. We don’t just put off our lives today; we put them off till our deathbed. Never forget: This very moment, we can change our lives. There never was a moment, and never will be, when we are without the power to alter our destiny.

**This second, we can turn the tables on Resistance. This second, we can sit down and do our work.”**



Steven Pressfield: *The War of Art: Winning the Inner Creative Battle*