

QUIETENING NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

Do you live with a consistently negative, nagging voice inside of your head? One that questions your abilities, chastises you for every little mistake and downplays your accomplishments? Or one that gently persuades you that its best to do nothing, stay put, stay safe? Do you even have a couple of these voices - so if you do something to please one, then you upset the other one, so you can't win either way?

If you don't, then count yourself blessed, because the Inner Critic or The Gremlin (a phrase coined by Richard Carson in his book Taming Your Gremlin) is a cross-cultural psychological phenomenon. It seems we all have one (or more). One of their intents is to keep us safe, stop us from getting hurt or failing, maintain the status quo. Though it often appears to protect us, and really can sound oh so plausible, the Inner Critic can in fact keep us from moving forward and getting what we truly want in life. Listening to it day after day drains us of our energy and our self-confidence. It also creates a self-fulfilling prophesy. When we engage with our Inner Critic, it can grab all our attention and so we don't act, and so we often believe ourselves worthy of all the negative self-talk that started it all..

We may all have Gremlins, but some people seem to have quietened theirs so effectively that their impact on their life is mercifully limited. Here are some strategies for quietening your Gremlin.

Awareness is curative. The better we get at recognising the voice, naming it for what it is and then considering our options, the less we are paralysed in inaction. So get to know your Gremlins intimately.

- Carson suggests drawing a humorous picture of your Gremlin , giving this character a funny name (for example, Nagging Nelly,) and having it speak in a funny cartoon-character voice.
- List the most common statements your Gremlin makes- when you mentally scold yourself, what are you typically telling yourself?
- Identify the different areas where your Gremlin has the most power over you. Is it in your role as a mother? A wife? A daughter? A business-woman? Is it about your looks? The way you act?
- In what situation does your Gremlin show up most often? Is it when you have to promote yourself to build your business? Make a decision that will upset someone else? Choose your needs over the needs of others? Choose the needs of others over your own?
- Count the number of times your Gremlin shows up in a given week. Be aware of when it speaks.

Choice is critical. The Gremlin may always be with us, but we can always choose what are actions are going to be. " Yes, I hear what you're saying, Nagging Nelly, and I choose not to listen to you right now and instead, I choose to make the call." Or as Vincent Van Gogh once said "If you hear a voice within you saying, 'You are not a painter'...then by all means paint....and that voice will be silenced". Choosing action, as opposed to dwelling on the Gremlin's message is critical. Remember, engaging with the Gremlin can create a vicious circle as we are what we think we are.

Surround yourself with the cheerleaders. Let's be honest - when you were drawing your Gremlin, didn't you take your inspiration from real life? Family members, former bosses, Fifth Grade teachers? There are people out there who are more than happy to support and encourage our Gremlin. Make sure you have people in your support network who will support you and hold a bigger and better vision of who you are.

Create a Champion. If there aren't enough cheerleaders out there for you, then create your own Champion to engage in battle with the Gremlin. In the same way you named your Gremlins and their statements, give your Champion a name, a face, a voice. Make a list of the positive and affirming statements that the Champion makes to support you and help you believe in yourself. When you find yourself having a conversation with your Gremlin, invite your Champion in. Let its affirming statements become your mantras.

Use powerful questions. When you find yourself having a conversation with your Gremlin, ask yourself a question. For example, "What one word best describes the step I need to take next?" Don't over-analyze and go with your gut answer to move you forward.

Focus on the truth and make it productive. There can be grains of truth in negative self-talk. In all its negativity, what is the truth the Gremlin is confronting us with? Instead of engaging with the Gremlin and getting bogged down in the criticism, extract the lesson and act to counter it. If you lack the skills, but not the desire, then do something about acquiring the skills. If you lack the desire, re-connect with what it is that you truly do desire.

Know who you are, what you're good at and what you want. Powerful commitments and a sense of purpose can be an effective counter-balance to the Gremlin's attempts to have us play small. When you have a clear purpose, linked to your values and personal strengths, you have a compelling reason for acting. You are inspired to make your fullest contribution to the world. Your emphasis shifts from your fear about your possible shortcomings to doing your best to act on purpose.

Wear an elastic band around your wrist. Every time you start to think negative thoughts, literally just snap yourself out of it, and replace the negative thought with a positive one.