

THE LEADERSHIP CHOICE

9 Strategies For Managing Your Self-Talk

By David A. O'Brien, WorkChoice Solutions

“Most folks are about as happy as they want to be.” This observation by Abraham Lincoln offers a multitude of reminders for each of us as we make our way through the accelerating demands of our busy lives. At its most basic level, the observation reminds us that when it comes to our happiness, we do in fact have a choice. At an even deeper level, it reminds us as leaders that the choices we make especially about our outlook and attitude have a far reaching impact not just on our lives but on the lives of those we are called to lead.

Few leaders I’ve met over my career are immune to the almost daily barrage of negative self-talk. Even the most optimistic leaders I know are quick to acknowledge that they have moments of self-doubt often fueled by negative self-talk. While this is a reality that few of us can escape, highly effective leaders make a deliberate effort to manage their self-talk. They intentionally choose to feed their minds positive thoughts that in turn not only help to keep their self-doubt in check but also help them and their teams to see a broader range of possibilities.

Consider the *Story of the Two Wolves*. The story is told of a young boy who was frequently angry and upset. One day he went to visit his Native American grandfather for advice. After listening to the boy for nearly an hour, the grandfather replied, “like you my child, I have two wolves inside my heart. One of them is kind and hopeful. He lives in harmony and peace and is filled with compassion. The other wolf is negative and filled with fear. He rages, but his anger changes nothing. The two wolves fight inside me every day to see which is more powerful.” A bit perplexed, the boy asked his grandfather which wolf would win the fight in his heart, to which the grandfather replied, “the one I feed.”

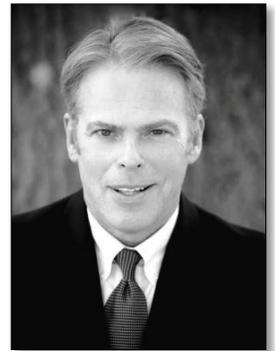
The truth is that every one of us fights the *two wolves* battle most days. What allows us to win the battle is an intentional effort to feed the right wolf. A meaningful first step in the process is to examine our self-talk and acknowledge that our attitude and corresponding happiness are in fact a choice. The following are nine strategies for managing your self-talk:

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1. **Count Your Blessings More Frequently** - Think more about what you have and can do *versus* what you don't have or can't do. Develop a deeper sense of gratitude.
2. **Challenge Negative Thoughts When They Occur** - When you have a negative thought, ask yourself, Do I have all the facts? Am I jumping to conclusions? What's the cost of buying-in to this belief?
3. **Choose Your Words** - Make a habit of speaking positively to yourself and others. Make an effort to remove self-limiting words such as; *never, always, can't* or *won't* from your self-talk.
4. **Surround Yourself With Positive People** - Spend time with positive people. Don't let negative people take up your time or rent space in your head for free.
5. **Accept, Don't Judge** - Strive to accept others as they are (yourself too). Similarities and differences should be valued equally.
6. **Limit Complaints** - Instead of complaining, take constructive action. Recognize that whining rarely allows for progress and almost always drains your energy.
7. **Reflect On Your Accomplishments** - Consider your strengths or successes and remember that you have more to accomplish. Also acknowledge that your best work is likely to come from a positive mind set.
8. **Read (or listen) to Motivational Books** - Invest the time to feed your head a steady diet of motivational or inspirational material. Even one article or chapter per week can make a big difference.
9. **Own Your Choices** - Be mindful and deliberate about your choices. No one can influence your happiness or attitude unless you let them.

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About David A. O'Brien



David is President of CT based WorkChoice Solutions, a trusted provider of leadership and team effectiveness training, coaching and consulting services that was founded in 2000. He works with a wide range of corporate, nonprofit and public sector clients to help bring about sustainable improvements in organizational effectiveness. His first book, *The Navigator's Handbook, 101 Leadership Lessons for Work & Life* is available on-line and in bookstores nationwide. His second book, *The Navigator's Compass 101 Steps Toward Leadership Excellence* will be released in June of 2014. To learn more about the scope of David's work in helping leaders and teams to be more effective or to arrange for David to speak at your next conference or other special event, please visit WorkChoice Solutions on line at: www.workchoicesolutions.com or call him directly at 860.242.1070