

The FAST Pathways® Academy – No More Self-Critical



The way you speak to yourself profoundly affects the way you feel; and many of us tend to be more critical than supportive of ourselves. You might not even be aware of it – it can be so natural (and constant!) that you might have started to think of it as just who you are, rather than something that you're doing. So the first step is to recognise that it's another mind-habit – and as you know, mind-habits can be changed.

It might be one of those mind-habits you learned from the adults around you as you were growing up – whether they were the kind of people to make themselves feel better at others' expense; or more well-meaning, hoping to boost your performance, or protect you, by pointing out your shortcomings.

Maybe you fear becoming arrogant or complacent, and an inner commentary on your deficiencies and short falls stops that from happening. But the good news, is that like any other mind-habit, you don't have to have a clue where it came from, to change it.


Of course, a little self-criticism can have its place – if you really screwed up, it's important to learn from the mistake so that you can act to minimise the damage, and avoid repeating it. When that critical mind-voice is just nagging away, serving no useful purpose, this technique can help you to create space for something more pleasant and helpful.

As well as changing the voice itself, you can add a sound track to your thinking. So if you've already started to make that unhelpful voice sound ridiculous, add a little circus music, or the kind of inane, plinkety tunes they play sometimes when you're on hold on the phone, or in a lift.

Or if that voice in your mind is over-dramatising, you could give it an over-dramatic backing track (Carmina Burana's a good one, or the opening to Beethoven's 5th – just Google them if you're not sure what they sound like. You're bound to recognise them). Give it even more drama, so that the words themselves sound insubstantial alongside the music, and don't seem to matter any more.

One of the ladies who I helped to stop smoking had made amazing progress – after just one session she'd stopped completely, and she wasn't giving cigarettes a second thought when she was out with her still-smoking friends (which she'd expected to be the biggest struggle). But she was still finding it a little difficult when she was alone at home, and bored.

She'd quit after a health scare, so after a little discussion, she decided it would help to be reminded of that if she started to wobble. So she imagined the Death March – and every time she thought of a cigarette it started to play in her mind, loud and dramatic, drowning out any thoughts of 'just one...' which might have been lurking.



It sounded a bit ridiculous, but it was enough to give her resolve that last little boost that she needed. So within a week or so, she'd stopped even thinking of cigarettes, and the tune went away too – its purpose served.

But it's not all about switching off unhelpful inner dialogue. How much better would it feel if instead, that voice were supportive and encouraging? Perhaps there's someone who you know, who really believes in you (however misguided your inner sceptic might think they are). How would it be to hear their voice in your mind every once in a while?

That voice can be your inner best friend – the way your deeper intuition communicates with your awareness, the bridge between the parts of your thinking, enabling them to work at their best together. The way you can talk yourself through your options and make good decisions; and give yourself the recognition you deserve when things go well.

Building that better relationship with your inner voice needn't focus on trying to change what it's saying. That's what most people do – and it's a great way to lose a whole lot of time and energy, often fuelling the inner conflict instead of resolving it. The words it's using often have less impact than the tone, speed, volume....

So making those adjustment, little and often, can be far more effective. And the more you get used to noticing the voice itself, rather than just its effects; the more adept you can become at giving your attention and energy only to what's helpful. Because each and every thought is just that. Just thought. Nothing without your energy. You choose which ones get that energy and attention, which to engage with.