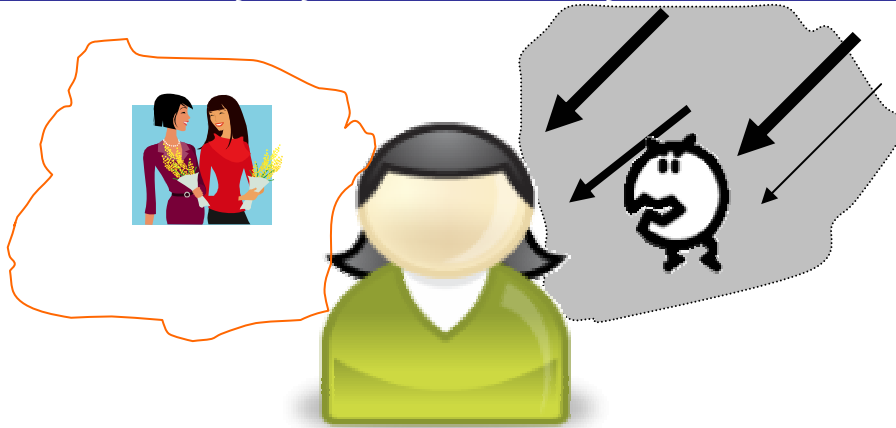


## Are you your Best Friend or your Chief Critic?



Are you aware of what you are telling yourself?

That “chatter” in your head (our thoughts about ourselves) or as I prefer to call it, your “self talk” has a HUGE influence on what we think of ourselves. And what we think of ourselves can impact on our behaviour and how we act towards other people. How other people perceive our behaviour may or may not re-enforce what we think of ourselves.....and so we can set up a system that most likely supports how we think of ourselves!!

When I became aware of “self-talk” many years ago, I was shocked at how critical I was of myself. Now, talking with clients I realise how common it is for people to be very harsh in their self-talk. I ask people what they say to themselves, and often the self talk starts with “you” rather than “I”, as if it was another person talking to them.

- “You are really, really stupid; no wonder that didn’t work out.....”
- “You are so fat and ugly, no wonder you haven’t any friends.....”
- “Those people wont want to talk to you....so ignore them.”

And so the Chief Critic develops a strong hold on the self-talk in our head! I actually picture my “Chief Critic” sitting on my right shoulder. As soon as I become aware of this critical voice that is not supporting me in any way, I say “S-T-O-P!!!!”, and then listen to the “Best Friend” voice that sits on my left shoulder. Developing the “Best Friend” voice took some time, however the following plan is working for many of my clients who also developed a very harsh critical voice.

### **Step 1: Awareness**

- Be aware of your self-talk in different situations

### **Step 2: Identify the common themes / phrases**

- Take note of any common words you say –especially if they are critical, harsh words.

### **Step 3: Stop the negative talk!**

- If the self-talk is not supporting you, then say “STOP” to yourself – this interrupts your pattern of thoughts

### **Step 4: Listen to your “Best Friend”**

- You know what you need to hear to support yourself. Do you need encouragement / reassurance / compassion? What ever it is that you need, say that to yourself in a positive way
- Say this to yourself and experiment to see how that works for you for a few days.
- Another option is to say the opposite to what you heard your critical voice saying....e.g.  
 “You are really, really stupid...” becomes “***I am capable of handling this situation***”  
  
 “You are so fat and ugly...” becomes “***I am learning to eat more healthily***”  
  
 “Those people will not want to talk to me....” becomes “***Those people may want to talk to me***, I will say hello to them and ask them a question to start a conversation.....”

**Step 5: Develop a supportive phrase**

If you are aware that you say similar negative things to yourself, write them down and then select a word that means the opposite – or how you would like to be. e.g

<b>Chief Critic</b>	<b>Best Friend</b>
You are <i>anxious again</i>	You are <b><i>calm</i></b>
You are <i>stupid</i>	You are <b><i>capable</i></b>
I am <i>shy</i>	I am <b><i>confident</i></b>
I am <i>terrible</i>	I am <b><i>caring</i></b>

A supportive phrase from this example could be: “***I am a calm, capable, confident, and caring person***”

**Step 6: Use the knowledge you have gained!**

- Now that you have a supportive phrase, use it.
- Say it to yourself when you wake up in the morning; going to bed at night; while brushing your teeth or walking up stairs! Don’t worry if your Chief Critic turns up and attempts to sabotage your phrase....just say your supportive phrase more often and louder to drown out the Chief Critic!
- When you are next aware of saying one of your favourite critical phrases, just say “STOP” and repeat your supportive phrase.

***We have to live with ourselves 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Isn’t it time to become one of our own best friends?***

**Know Yourself Fieldwork**

- Identify the common words or phrases that your Chief Critic says to you
- Go through the 6 steps in this article and develop a supportive phrase
- Play around with the suggestion and find out what works for you and what you need to change
- Please adapt and adopt these ideas and make them your own!

I'd love to know what you thought of this article. Please email your comments to [lizholland@xtra.co.nz](mailto:lizholland@xtra.co.nz)

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