

How to Ruin Your Life: Eight Effortless Ways to Let Your Self-Talk Defeat You

By Tony Stoltzfus

One major roadblock to change is what coaches call self-talk: the messages we habitually or unconsciously tell ourselves about who we are and how life works. Below are eight common self-talk messages. Maybe one is stymieing you!

1. Believe in Your Limitations

Nothing protects you from disappointment more than your belief in your limitations. Why expend all that effort exercising self-control or building a new habit when you know you'll fail in the end anyway? Just let yourself go: you've been living with the consequences already, so why not just let it slide for another year? Don't expect so much of yourself, and you won't feel so bad when you don't get it.

2. Keep Being Driven

You've accomplished a lot. But in your darker moments, it still feels empty. You find yourself striving for more, even though what you have attained hasn't turned out as satisfying as you thought it would be. Don't stop pushing! The things that seem just out of reach -- your father's approval, business success, recognition, the sense of pleasing God -- they're just around the corner! Being driven has gotten you this far, so now is not the time to change. You just need to try a little bit harder. If anyone can make this work, you can. And when you do, it will prove to the whole world how worthwhile you are.

3. Waste Your Life

Life is tough. In fact, it is so tough that just thinking about it is a downer sometimes. Making friends or getting involved in church might some add spice to life, but relating to people is so much...*work*. So keep distracting yourself! TV is a reliable way to get some instant enjoyment without having to invest energy in people. Or stay up late playing computer games -- it always feels good to beat the computer. Or get lost on the internet! Jumping from one link to another can let you avoid an odious task for hours. And porn is a great option if you feel down and need some cheap gratification. You'll probably feel even worse when you're done, but those few moments where you feel good may be the highlight of your day.

4. It's Not Your Fault

Maybe this is the year the people around you will finally change. I know, I know, conflict is always a two way street. But your side is a bike path and their side is like rush hour on I-80. I mean, the things you have to put up with! It's amazing you are as gracious as you are. So stick to your guns: after all, you're in the right. If they apologize first, you'll make the same gesture. And if not, keep letting them know they have a problem. It may be that the shaming, the sulking, the anger, or the passive-aggressive behavior they deserve (and are getting) from you is the thing that will finally lead them to repentance.

5. You Don't Need Help

All your life you've lived by the law of self-sufficiency: "I can do it, and I don't need help." You're the prototypical American, the rugged individualist, the can-do leader. Asking for help is for sissies. Just because your marriage is lifeless, the kids are drifting away or the debt is mounting doesn't mean you should go running to your small group for help. This kind of stuff can happen to anybody- just

tough it out and things will eventually turn around. You aren't any worse than anyone else. As long as you can hold things together on the outside, there's no need to admit how weak you feel sometimes.

6. **Nobody Understands You**

If people really knew your heart, they'd get off your back. People somehow develop these overblown expectations of you, when all you are doing is trying to help. And then when they get disappointed, for some reason it's all *your* fault! I mean, you did as well as anyone could given the circumstances. Things changed, and there was really no reasonable way to give them exactly what you promised. How about a little flexibility?!? Clearly they don't understand you or the demands on your life. It's best to just ignore that kind of off-base criticism and move on. They just don't understand your heart.

7. **Put Up or Shut Up**

You are facing some tough issues in life: problems at home, conflicts in the workplace, and more. But you're a survivor. Probably God is just using this to teach you patience. So just put your head down and keep on going. Don't think too much about what your situation means, or how to change it: that's a distraction you can't afford. And that nagging sense that maybe it's your problem? If you start paying attention to self-doubts, they just drag you down. This isn't a learning experience, no matter what anyone else says: it's about survival. If you just keep on slogging ahead, you can put up with almost anything.

8. **Do It Right**

There's a right way and a wrong way to do everything, and you are committed to excellence; to doing it *right*! Why do people have such a hard time with this simple concept? For instance, every problem has a best solution. Every decision takes you down a right or a wrong path. If you make the right choice, God will bless you. If you choose wrong...well, you'll just get to eat the fruit of that poor decision. The consequences of doing it wrong are so high, it is no wonder you feel fearful and get all tied up in knots whenever you face a major decision. You'd look like a big, fat failure if you did something wrong -- at least to yourself. The safest course of action is to analyze everything exhaustively before you do anything, minimize risk, and above all, make certain you do it right.

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The Coach Asks:

Sound familiar? Here are some things to ponder.

- Where does this kind of thinking come from in your life?
- When did it start?
- What lies are underneath this kind of thinking pattern?
- What would be a good first step to begin changing your way of thinking? When will you take that step?

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