

Don't let negative self-talk hold you back

BY BRYAN FALCHUK
Inc.

I spent one third of my career as a management consultant. It was a great experience filled with a lot of learning and a lot of tough moments too.

I was paid to find what was wrong, root it out and figure out a better path forward. It made me a great problem-solver, but it had a downside because I was conditioned to point out the negative in everything I saw.

We all do this. Listen to how people talk about their work performance, their bosses, their lack of advancement, the communication breakdown on their teams.

And, if you try to commend someone for doing a good job, he or she often points out what went wrong rather than simply accepting the praise.

I remember giving a big presentation to a client early in my career, and a peer told me afterward that I did a great job. My immediate response was, "No, I totally messed up that section about their growth strategy. Luckily, they forgot about that once we showed them the savings involved." I could not even start by saying thanks before pointing out my failure.

And it's not just in work situations. Next time someone has you over for dinner, compliment him or her on the food and watch what happens. You are likely to hear something like, "Thanks, but I overcooked the meat." Or, "Maybe, but the vegetables needed more salt."

This has become a major focus of my coaching work: helping people get comfortable with being good at things. We are so entrenched in self-deprecation or denying our achievements that we end up framing ourselves with mediocrity at best or incompetence at worst.

How can you possibly be successful if you see yourself as mediocre or worse? The answer is that obviously you can't.

However, you can change the situation. Here is an exercise I



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give people I work with. I call it "Stop the But."

Say something good about yourself or something you did. As soon as you feel the word "but" forming in your mind, stop yourself.

Simply say the good part without moving onto anything to downplay it, take away from it or negate it. Just allow the good.

I worked with a woman who was so caught up in not being smart enough for the job she wanted, she thought the company made a mistake or there was something wrong with the firm when she was offered the job. So I asked her how she did in college. She replied, "I got good grades, but ..."

I jumped in and cut her off,

saying: "Stop. You got good grades. Leave it there."

The point is simply to allow the good thing about you to sit unchallenged. Of course, that good thing may not be relevant in every situation, but why bother naming specific reasons for it to be invalid in any one context?

Another person was having trouble getting along with his boss and was broadening that to a general issue with people and then taking it way farther by deciding that he was unemployable and his career was doomed.

So I asked him, "Do you have friends?"

He said, "Of course I do, but ..."

I cut him off. "You have friends. People who were not born into knowing you actively choose to be

connected to you. Are they close friends or just acquaintances?"

"Good friends. In my circle of friends, I am kind of the go-to person when people are really struggling with problems in their job. They all turn to me."

I said: "So people are specifically turning to you for advice about career issues. People have made a decision based on the kind of person you are to do this. And they want your advice about what you think you are afraid you are not good at. Doesn't that seem disconnected?"

Through this exercise (which we repeated a few times), he stopped seeing himself as doomed and realized there are people he get along with very well and others that may take more

work. And then we focused on doing that work so he could improve, which he has done.

This is something I have people practice daily to start to counteract the years of negative self-talk they have been engaging in throughout their lives, not just their careers.

If you want to be successful, you have to allow for the possibility that you are actually good at things and capable of success.

You cannot discredit every little attempt to bolster you with a verbal pat on the back and expect that you can achieve what you aspire to in your career.

Bryan Falchuk is an author, public speaker and behavior change specialist.

Crossword

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ACROSS

- 1 Evergreen trees
- 5 Stanza
- 10 Part of the foot
- 14 Russia's ___ Mountains
- 15 Island greeting
- 16 Sandwich shop
- 17 Lawmaker
- 19 Lasting mark
- 20 Army attack
- 21 Adolescents
- 23 "___ a yellow ribbon..."
- 24 Vigorous
- 26 Washington's successor
- 28 Baby's toy
- 31 Ducks' home
- 34 Altar promise
- 35 Depress
- 37 ___ Benedict; fancy breakfast
- 40 Praise
- 42 Lowest point
- 43 Swat
- 44 Minstrel's harp
- 45 Up to this time, in poetry
- 47 Cotton gin man
- 48 Closer
- 50 Decrease
- 52 Pitt and Garrett
- 54 Bench board
- 55 Piña colada ingredient

DOWN

- 1 Brynner and his namesakes
- 2 "Able was I ___ saw Elba"
- 3 ___ war; go to battle
- 4 Minor
- 5 Actor Kilmer
- 6 Thrill
- 7 Learn by ___; memorize
- 8 Oxford or loafer
- 9 Deserve; merit
- 10 Commercials
- 11 Geometric shapes
- 12 State one's right to
- 13 Takes on employees
- 18 Barking marine mammals

Solutions

S	N	E	A	M	E	N	E	R	S	I	E	S
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H	O	R	V	E	R	S	E	L	A	S	W	E

22 Droop

25 More slender

27 "Stupid is as stupid ___"

28 Small brook

29 Once ___; every 24 hours

30 Game series that produces a champion

31 More bizarre

32 Harness strap

33 Register

36 Be courageous

38 Powerful wind

39 Twirl

41 Landowner's paper

46 Tired

49 Bit of soot

51 Like tree sap

52 Boasts

53 India's dollar

54 In a ___; sort of

57 Slightly open

58 As ___ as a boil

59 Skinny

61 Weathercock

62 Similar

63 "Why don't we!"

65 ___ Moines, IA

67 Just purchased



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