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FEBRUARY 2008 No.33


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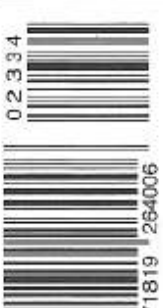
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Change your
thoughts
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Women are successful in all spheres of life, yet many of us are secretly crippled by low self-esteem. Leanne Feris spoke to three experts to find out how we can get out of its debilitating grip.

*'Human beings,
by changing the
inner attitudes of
their minds, can
change the outer
aspects of their
lives.'*

William James
American Pragmatist philosopher
& psychologist (1842 - 1910)

If you've ever had an 'I've never thought about it like that' moment, you'll know how powerful a mind shift can be. But how and why do we fall into negative self-talk in the first place? And, even more importantly, how do we stop it?

'Remember that whatever you tell yourself is your truth, and that the more you repeat it, the stronger your belief will become... and that you will keep proving yourself right,' says clinical psychologist and Mind Over Fatter founder Cari Corbett-Owen. She warns that you probably won't change old, ingrained beliefs about yourself overnight.

'How you feel about yourself is often a reflection of your earliest childhood memories and messages you've internalised about your self-worth and abilities. What was conveyed to you about your worth by significant people in your life often follows you for a lifetime,' says Cari.

Cape Town psychologist Daphne Cooper agrees: 'We often get trapped by either-or thinking. For example, 'I'm a bad mother'. That thinking assumes you're either a good or a bad mother. It's unlikely that any mother could be wholly good or wholly bad, so it may be more helpful to look at specific behaviours and thoughts that support good mothering – and to aim for more of those,' she says.

Donna McCallum, managing director of Fairy Godmother Inc, a business that inspires people to live their dreams, calls such beliefs and thought patterns 'the blueprint you've

created for yourself,' saying limiting beliefs will set the boundaries of what is possible for you. She recommends we practise the following self-management tools:

Beware your inner talk

Notice what your inner voice says to you and take note of what you say about yourself to others. This will highlight the beliefs you hold about yourself that you need to change. Catch yourself whenever you say or think something negative about yourself – and stop it.

Turn it around

Use affirmations to help improve your self-image. It's important that you don't only change a negative thought into a positive one; you have to phrase it differently. For example, don't simply change 'I can't say no' to 'I can say no'. Instead, change 'I can't say no' to a positive 'I clearly and lovingly set my boundaries'. Likewise, change 'I always eat too much' to its positive: 'I eat well and I look after my body'.

Say your new affirmation out loud to yourself and imagine being that way. Ignore the little inner voice that backchats and your reality will soon begin to change.

Visualise

If you feel bad about, for example, your mothering skills, spend five minutes every day in silence, relaxed, and with your eyes closed.

Now imagine being a good mother and experience it with all five of your senses. See your children, hear their chatter, hear your own voice talking to them, and imagine feeling loving and being proud of being such a good mother. You may even hear your kids saying how much they love you. Imagine feeling them hugging you, smelling their skin and tasting the orange juice you are all drinking. Feel at peace. Do this for a month and see how your outlook changes.

If your problem is saying no to your boss, do the same exercise: imagine a specific future incident where you stand your ground and say no.

For more details on these experts and their work, go to www.mindoverfatter.co.za, www.insideoutsidein.co.za, and www.fairygodmotherinc.com.

Good ideas

- 'Wear your watch on a different wrist when you're trying to change negative self-talk,' says Cari. 'It will act as a constant reminder to be vigilant about what you tell yourself.'
- Daphne suggests you ask yourself what the payoff is for procrastinating or being scatterbrained. Perhaps subconsciously you believe people won't expect too much of you while you create the impression that, if only you could get it together, you would be spectacular.
- Learn to talk to yourself as you would to a cherished friend. ■

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