

## **Stop sabotaging your success – Today!**

*by Dragan Milicevic on February 1, 2018*

*"It's not what we say out loud that really determines our lives. It's what we whisper to ourselves that has the most power."*

*-unknown*

Susan is an aspiring partner at a prestigious law firm. She has been seamlessly promoted up the ranks ever since she joined the firm after graduating from law school. A year before she would be promoted to partner, she started experiencing massive self-doubts. The story she was hearing from within was: "I am not good enough." This inner voice of hers had been around for a long time but had become more pervasive – and was impacting her performance and putting her promotion at grave risk. At this critical point in her career she decided to seek help and came to see me for coaching.



### **Negative self-talk – our biggest enemy**

In my 15 years as an executive coach and practicing licensed psychologist, I have encountered people in various critical life situations. Over time, I have realized one important thing: The reason people experience trouble at work or in life and cannot achieve their goals is not because they lack the necessary skills. Whether or not we succeed at achieving a goal is largely determined in our heads by the things we say to ourselves about ourselves – our so called “inner self-talk”.

We humans have an amazing and unique ability to talk to ourselves. When I wake up in the morning and walk to the bathroom thinking “It’s gonna be another bad day”, then it is likely to turn out that way. Our self-talk can be positive, neutral or negative. Positive self-talk propels us forward, while negative self-talk sabotages us. Unfortunately, most of our self-talk is negative, making us our own biggest enemies - not the overly demanding boss, not the obnoxious client, not the competitive and manipulative colleague. Here are some voices we hear in negative self-talk:

**Catastrophizing voice** – “If I say something critical in the meeting, I will get fired”

**Perfectionist voice** – “I am not good enough”

**Competitive voice** – “She can do this better than me”

**Blaming voice** – “It’s my fault again”

**Self-doubt voice** – “I am just an imposture. People will find out”

All of these voices have one thing in common: they reduce our sense of self-worth. As long as we continue listening to our negative self-talk voices, we won’t be able to access our skills and resources fully, and will feel trapped. If 50% of our energy is tied up by negative self-talk, imagine what we could achieve by refocusing that energy on achieving our goals.

### **How to stop the negative self-talk – “Free the Limbic®”**

Psychology offers a number of techniques for reducing negative self-talk. Over the years I have tried many of them - with mediocre success. Traditional techniques reframe negative self-talk into a more realistic and objectively accurate belief. However, every negative self-talk has a negative emotion attached to it that is not addressed by reframing. Applying the reframing technique to Susan, she would understand at some point the irrationality of thinking that she is “not good enough”. However, the problem is that her emotions contradict this rational understanding.

A more successful approach, called “Free the Limbic®”, is a revolutionary coaching technique developed by a German therapist couple. It can help us change irrational beliefs by also addressing the negative emotion at the source, the amygdala. The amygdala is an almond shaped part of the limbic system and the emotional center of our brain. Negative emotions trigger amygdala activity in fight, flight, or freeze responses to perceived danger. Once triggered, it becomes very difficult to calm amygdala down. Language-based attempts are useless, since neuroscience has shown that the amygdala is unaffected by language. Have you ever tried to convince a super nervous person to not be nervous before a presentation?

It has been shown that the amygdala only responds to so-called cues. Based on this fact, “Free the Limbic®” can dissolve the negative emotions attached to negative self-talk by working with cues the amygdala can understand. Such cues include eye induction, tapping, breath, and slow body movements. The power of these cues to dissolve negative emotions and calm the amygdala has been demonstrated by numerous studies involving trauma patients.

In just a few “Free the Limbic®” sessions, Susan not only understood the source of her negative self-talk, but also dissolved the negative emotions connected with it. As a result, she has regained faith in her own actions and the future, trusts her

strengths more than before, and can focus most of her energy on reaching her goals: the partner promotion.