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Make Peace with Your Inner Critic

by Melanie Davis

An ancient Indian story tells of a water carrier who each day fills two clay pots with water for his master. One pot consistently leaks water, for which the pot apologizes profusely. The servant replies, "I planted seeds along your side of the path, and every day, you dripped water on the seeds until they grew into beautiful flowers. Thanks to your 'flaw,' my master has fresh flowers to grace his house every day."

Most people are like the cracked pot—we fail to appreciate our unique value because we focus on our flaws. We can turn flaws into assets if we make a conscious choice to see them in their best light.

We all have a running monologue in our minds, an Inner Critic who comments on situations, feelings and moments in our day. We talk to ourselves at a rate of up to 500 words per minute—five times the rate we speak aloud. A lot of that self-talk is negative commentary from our Inner Critic, which means that at a speed of 500 words a minute, we may be telling ourselves we're not good enough. Turning that perspective around requires a new way of speaking best described in the following four rules of speech.

1. The Rule of Too

Use caution when saying "too" in front of a statement about yourself because it usually signals a negative message, e.g., "My hair is too thin," "I give too little to charity," "I'm too opinionated," "I have too many wrinkles."

The word "too" is your Inner Critic complaining. After all, who says, "I'm too handsome" or "I'm too happy" or "I'm too generous"? Next time you use the word "too," reconsider your choice of words, and cut yourself a break.

2. The Rule of Rejection

Body image is another area where negative self talk hurts. Rarely do people look in a mirror without complaining about one body part or another. Why? Partly because everyone is so bombarded by input relating to how we should look that we fail to honor or even realistically see our natural beauty.

When you're faced with an impossible ideal, whether it relates to lifetime accomplishments, interpersonal relationships or physical beauty or ability, reject the ideal, not yourself.

3. The Twisted Golden Rule

This rule states, "Do unto yourself as you would do unto others." When your Inner Critic makes a snide remark, ask:

- Is this statement really true?
- Would I say this to someone else?
- If I wouldn't say this to someone else, why am I saying it to myself?

It's OK to observe areas that need improvement; after all, you need to be honest in order to grow. But there's a fine line between honesty and self-denigration. Acknowledge flaws and then choose to live with them or work to change them. You can also rethink how you define your flaws.



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Think about the word scar, which tends to have negative connotations. We say someone is “scarred for life by a traumatic event” or “that wound will leave a nasty scar.” Everyone has scars of one type or another, scars on the body and on the heart. But scars can be beautiful reminders that you are not only a survivor, but a hero in your own life. It’s all in how you choose to see them.

You can start calming your Inner Critic by thinking more positive thoughts. Your mind can’t tell the difference between what’s real and what’s imagined, so tell yourself that you are a strong, confident, capable person until your Inner Critic has no choice but to believe it.

4. The Rule of Dilution

It would be unrealistic to think you could get rid of every negative thought about yourself, but you can work around them. Business performance speaker and consultant Mark Green

(performance-dynamics.net) came up with this nifty way to illustrate the Rule of Dilution: Imagine that you have put too much sugar into a cup of tea. It’s too sweet, but you can’t remove the sugar because it has already dissolved. What’s the solution? Dilution! You can dilute the sweetness by adding more tea.

Now, imagine that your negative thoughts are represented by the sugar. You can’t get rid of them, but you can dilute them by putting them into context and counterbalancing them with positive messages.

Remember the story about the water carrier and the flowers? We are all cracked pots; we are all imperfect. But rather than decreasing our worth, imperfections can enhance it. When we value our true selves, when we acknowledge and honor our flaws, we gain the confidence and strength to embrace all that life has to offer. □

