



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

Article from:

The Stepping Stone

October 2005 – Issue No. 20

You Are What You Speak

by Melanie J. Davis

A traditional Indian folk tale tells of a water bearer who carried two large pots on a pole slung across his neck. One pot was perfect, while the other was cracked and leaked half its water during the long walk from the stream to the master's house.

The cracked pot was ashamed of its imperfection and apologized to the water bearer, saying, "For the past two years, I have leaked water all the way back to your master's house. Because of my flaws, you have to work harder to carry all the water you need," explained the pot.

The water bearer felt sorry for the cracked pot and pointed out the flowers flourishing along the path to the master's house. He said, "Do you notice that the flowers only grow on your side of the path? I knew about your flaw and took advantage of it by planting flower seeds. Every day, you watered the seeds for me while we walked, and thanks to you, I have been able to give my master lovely flowers. Without you being just the way you are, he would not have had this beauty to grace his house."

Like that cracked pot, a lot of people spend time focused on their flaws, lest someone beat them to it. This tendency to self denigrate is true of anyone who has responded to a compliment with, "Thanks, but I didn't do anything special—everyone else did all the work." Or who says, "Really? This old suit? I bought it on sale years ago." What about those who let a personal insult just hang in the air and feel unjustly treated, yet don't complain or demand to be taken seriously?

The truth is that if you don't respect your own worth, no one else will. It may be difficult to tune out that little voice that whispers, "I'm

not good enough," but once you learn how, you are likely to enjoy greater professional and personal success.

The first step toward addressing the problem is to understand that before you can honor your own value, you must acknowledge that you do, in fact, have value. You may find it helpful to speak to yourself using language that is honest, but not brutally so. Use language that encourages you to think positively, without being a Pollyanna, and which helps you appreciate your unique talents and gifts.

Research has shown that we all have a running monologue going on in our heads that silently comments on situations, feelings and moments in our day, and a great deal of that self-talk is negative. The rate at which the monologue runs is an astounding 500 words per minute, which is five times the rate at which most people speak out loud. That means that at a speed of 500 words a minute, you may be telling yourself you're not good enough!

This is where the new language of self-talk comes in, and I'll share a few tips with you:

1. **Use caution with the word "too" in front of statements about yourself.** We tend to use the word "too" only when we're complaining. After all, whoever says, "I'm too handsome" or "I'm too happy"?
2. **Treat yourself as you would treat others.** When you make a negative comment to yourself, ask the following questions:
 - a. Is this statement really true?
 - b. Would I say this to a friend or colleague?
 - c. If I wouldn't say this to someone else, why am I saying it to myself?

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explain to me why that would be a great thing, and then wanted to talk to my fiancée to convince her why this would be a terrific move for my career. Needless to say, I removed that recruiting firm from my Rolodex!

Many recruiters will also seek to interview you, and you should take this as seriously as any job interview. The recruiter is performing an initial screening of you as a potential candidate. The better job you do of presenting yourself, the greater the chance of the recruiter presenting you to an employer and the more effective they will be at 'pre-selling' you to a hiring manager. And be prepared to explain your salary requirements, as they will almost always expect this information before they are willing to work with you.²

2) You should do your own research on the market value of your desired position. A good recruiter can also be quite helpful in validating this.

Often a recruiter is asked to "source" potential candidates to establish their fit to potential assignments. You should make sure that your references know about any recruiters with whom you have chosen to work, and what sort of position they might present you for. This way they will be sure to accept the recruiter's calls, and will be in the best position to present your greatest strengths to the recruiter relative to that type of position.

And finally, now that you have agreed to work with the recruiter, do so ethically—don't try to figure out what company the position is with and then try to get to the company directly. If I as a hiring manager get a sense that you aren't dealing ethically with a recruiter, how am I going to trust you to deal ethically with me? ☐

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3. **Be honest.** Observe areas that need improvement, but don't denigrate yourself. Once you acknowledge your flaws, you can choose to live with them or work to change them.
4. **Reject unrealistic ideals.** Self talk is often negative because people measure themselves against inappropriate ideals. They berate themselves for not attaining the ideal, and their self-esteem slides lower and lower. Whether the ideal relates to professional success, interpersonal relationships or physical beauty or abilities, you may need to reject the ideal rather than yourself.
5. **Override negative self talk with affirmative messages.** Self talk often stems from old tapes in your head that repeat negative comments and messages you've gotten over the course of your life. You can't tune

them out entirely, but you can turn up the volume on the positive talk.

Once you get used to speaking positively to yourself, you will find it easier to use similar language aloud so everyone around you realizes your value, too. ☐

