

## How Do You Talk to Yourself When Things Don't Go Your Way?

### **BIG PICTURE: An Emotional Edge Comes From Knowing How to Control Emotions.**

Emotional intelligence is an essential aspect of general intelligence. It includes self-awareness, impulse control, persistence, self-motivation, empathy and the ability to relate to others. A vital aspect of self-awareness is being mindful of how you talk to yourself when things don't go right.

You've no doubt seen athletes explode during crucial moments and coaches come unglued when a player makes a costly mistake. In both cases, athlete and coach have temporarily lost control. They've gone beyond the boundaries of good behavior and will likely suffer both temporary and long-term consequences from their fleeting negative actions—however small and seemingly insignificant.

Individuals with a developed sense of awareness of their emotions do things to help control feelings of frustration and overwhelm and work to avoid moments where they lose emotional control. The ability to monitor and adjust feelings and emotions from incident to event, or better yet in the heat of the moment, separates the emotionally intelligent from the emotionally confused.

### **SHARPEN YOUR FOCUS: Making a Bad Situation Better.**

No matter how much you are in control of your life, you will encounter events which don't go right. Your knee collides with a teammate's shin. You get a flat tire on the way to practice. Your car gets banged while in the mall parking lot. Someone in your family gets very sick. Let's face it; there is a wide range of "bad" things that can happen to you on a daily basis. There is also a wide range of ways you can react to these negative events in your life. How you react is crucial.

A vital part of your reaction to a negative incident or event is how you think or talk to yourself about it. For example, someone carelessly backs into your nearly new car in the parking lot and puts a large dent in your fender. How will you react? You could become very angry and think and talk in catastrophic terms such as, "I hate the idiot who hit my car. I love that car. Even if they fix it perfectly, I'll know it has been wrecked and I'll never enjoy it again."

A relatively simple and easily remedied dent in the car is made into a tragedy by the way you think about it. Not only is the event blown out of proportion, but it is also stated in an absolutely and eternally negative form. If you think this way, you might despise your car for as long as you keep it, regardless of how well it's repaired. If you make this catastrophic type of thinking a habit, you'll be in for a lot's of miserable times.

An emotional edge comes from knowing how to control emotions. The following represent the kinds of thinking that you would be doing if you were thinking in the catastrophic or realistic modes.

#### **Catastrophic Self-Talk**

This is horrible!  
My life is ruined!  
Things will never be right!  
I'm completely overwhelmed!  
I give up!

#### **Realistic Self-Talk**

It's unfortunate...  
It's inconvenient...  
It's a temporary setback...  
It'll be more difficult than I expected..  
It's unpleasant but...

Realistic thinking accepts an undesirable situation as unfortunate but temporary, employs a perspective of realistic optimism, emphasizes that life will go on, and that the predicament can get better.

### **Point to Ponder**

Catastrophic thinking is characterized by over-reaction, overly negative perspective, and negative finality. How we mentally talk to ourselves in undesirable situations can be the difference between anxiety, fear of failure, and immobility on one hand, and purposeful action, composure and hope on the other. Who do you know that has a habit of catastrophic self-talk?

### **Reflection Question:**

Think back on a time when you squandered an opportunity because you chose to use catastrophic self-talk. How do you think things might have been different if you would have chosen realistic self-talk?

### **Discussion Questions:**

What do you see as being wrong with catastrophic self-talk? What are the main differences between a catastrophic reaction to a "bad" event and a realistic reaction to the same negative event?