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A comprehensive study on self-talk in sportsman and its effect on competitive sports

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Abstract

Self-talk is something which naturally done throughout waking hours. People are becoming more aware that positive self-talk is a powerful tool for increasing self-confidence and curbing negative emotions. People who can master positive self-talk are thought to be more confident, motivated, and productive. Self-talk plays an important role in sports. It serves as a powerful learning tool and self-regulatory strategy that players can use to facilitate the learning of new motor skills and enhance performance. Self-talk is the internal dialogue. It is influenced by subconscious mind, and it reveals thoughts, beliefs, questions, and ideas. Positive self-talk relates to the ability to overcome negative thinking. Those who practice positive self-talk are more likely not to suffer from negative thoughts. Positive self-talk allows performers to be more relaxed and focused. Negative thoughts will increase anxiety levels. In reverse, positive self-talk creates happiness and excitement that lead to successful performance. This study is focused on the role of self-talk in sports and performance enhancement.

Keywords: Benefits, course of action, performance, positive self-talk

Introduction

If you want to become a career success, you need to react positively to the people and events you encounter – especially the negative people and events. Self-talk is the process, of which an individual may guide him/herself to accomplish a goal. Whether or not the goals are specific or broad, all goals are important to keep in realistic, attainable, measurable, and specific. Self-talk has been studied from the earliest days of research in the experimental psychology. In sport psychology, the cognitive revolution of the 1970s led researchers and practitioners to explore the ways in which self-talk affects performance. Recently, a clear definition of self-talk that distinguishes self-talk from related phenomena such as imagery and gestures and describes self-talk has emerged. Selftalk is defined as the expression of a syntactically recognizable internal position, in which the sender of the message is also the intended receiver. Self-talk may be expressed internally or out loud and has expressive, interpretive, and self-regulatory functions. Various categories of self-talk such as self-talk valence, overtness, demands on working memory, and grammatical form have all been explored.

Self-talk has been studied scientifically for almost as long as experimental psychology has been in existence, with researchers in the 1880s taking an interest in understanding the nature and function of inner speech and the things people say to themselves (Reed, 1916)^[2]. (Vygotsky's, 1986)^[5] cultural-historical psychology was one of the earliest theories in which inner speech/self-talk played a prominent role. He suggested that inner speech develops and becomes the medium of consciousness as children internalize culture and meaning in the form of language. Vygotsky asserted that the capacity for inner speech is necessary for purposeful and independent thinking and action (Yasnitsky *et al.*, 2014)^[7].

In recent years, goal setting has shown to be one of the key components in athletic performance. This has been backed by both athletes themselves and more recently, sport scientific research. While knowing goals are important and setting them is a good first step, it is the more complex foundation of how that goal was developed which determines the outcome. Perhaps one of the most overlooked aspects of goal setting is the attitude of which one approaches a goal.

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Positive Self-Talk

Self-talk is the internal narrative that holds about themselves. It generally thought to be a mix of conscious and unconscious beliefs and biases that we hold about ourselves and the world generally. Self-talk can be positive or negative and paying attention to which you most often sway toward and help start making proactive changes. Positive self-talk sees our internal narrative switching to ideas like “I can do better next time” or “I choose to learn from my mistakes, not be held back by them.” Positive self-talk is about blocking negative thoughts. For example, develop awareness of how well you perform and praise yourself accordingly. Assess the impact of positive benefits to yourself both for mind and body.

One of the most prevalent hypotheses in the applied self-talk literature is that self-talk with a positive valence is best for sport performance (Tod *et al.*, 2011) [3]. The underlying idea behind this hypothesis is that positive self-talk is linked to cognitive, motivational, behavioral, and affective mechanisms such that athletes who use positive self-talk are likely to decrease anxiety, improve concentration and focus, and perform better. Research testing the role of positive self-talk indicates that positive selftalk is effective in many circumstances but may not be ideal for everyone. Wood *et al.*, 2009 [6], found that participants with low self-esteem felt worse when using positive self-talk. Harvey, found that positive self-talk was correlated with worse golf putting accuracy. Van Raalte *et al.*, 2000 [4], studied competitive adult tennis players during tournament matches and found that only 1 player performed better after using positive self-talk, 2 players performed worse, and 15 players' point outcomes were unaffected by their self-talk.

Conroy and Metzler, 2004 [9], explored the ways self-talk impacts cognitive anxiety in sports performance. They looked at state specific self-talk, so the way athletes spoke to themselves while failing, while succeeding, while wishing for success, and while fearing failure. They measured these alongside expressions of situation-specific trait performance anxiety; fear of failure, fear of success, and sport anxiety. They found the strongest results for self-talk associated with fear of failure and sports anxiety, essentially the athlete's experienced higher anxiety when using negative self-talk. Kendall and Treadwell, 2007 [1], also explored the ways self-talk effects anxiety. They investigated self-talk as a predictor for anxiety in children with and without a diagnosis of an anxiety disorder. They found that reducing negative self-talk mediated substantial treatment gains in the children with a diagnosis.

Negative Self-Talk

Unlike positive self-talk, negative self-talk is the use of negative words such as “cannot,” “will not,” “could have,” and “should have.” All of these phrases cast doubt and have shown to create increased somatic (physical) and cognitive anxiety (Hatzigeorgiadis and Biddle, 2011) [10]. Anxiety such as this creates debilitating performance systems such as increased heart rate, irregular breathing, self-doubt, and lack of focus.

Keys to Develop Positive Self-Talk

Choose A Mantra

To get started with creating more positive self-talk, choose one of two mantras you can use during your training. This could be a simple affirmation, such as “I feel strong,” or the mantra “Go, Go, Go,” or another simple, positive phrase you can repeat over and over.

Practice Multiple Scenarios

Once you have developed the habit of repeating this phrase during practice to the point where it is automatic, start expanding the dialog so that you have familiar and comfortable statements for a variety of situations during your sport. For example, if you are cycling and reach a hill, you might say, “I'm a great hill climber,” or “I've done this before and it's doable.” If you get dropped from the pack you can say, “Anything can happen, and I'm definitely not out of this. Don't let up.”

Create A Positive Mental Image or Visualization

The phrases and words you choose should be those that you can immediately call up and create a visual picture of yourself doing exactly what you say. The image along with the words is a powerful combination that creates a positive message tied to a belief.

Some Examples of Positive and Negative Self-talk

- Negative Statement – “I'll never be able to do this.” Positive Statement – “I can and will accomplish anything I choose to do.”
- Negative Statement – “I'm afraid I can't do this, so I won't even try.” Positive Statement – “I will look my fears in the eye and do something. I will conquer them.”
- Negative Statement – “I am stuck where I'm at.” Positive Statement – “I have lots of choices. I can decide what I want.”
- Negative Statement – “I'm afraid.” Positive Statement – “I'm courageous and confident.”
- Negative Statement – “I'm mad.” Positive Statement – “I'm calm and determined.”
- Negative Statement – “I'm pessimistic and hopeless.” Positive Statement – “I'm optimistic and hopeful.”
- Negative Statement – “I'm resentful over what I've lost or don't have.” Positive Statement – “I'm grateful for what I do have.”
- Negative Statement – “I don't care.” Positive Statement – “I'm curious.”
- Negative Statement – “No one will help me.” Positive Statement – “Other people are supportive and will help me.”
- Negative Statement – “I don't deserve to become a career success.” Positive Statement – “I deserve to become a career success.”

Conclusion

While there has been an extensive amount of research conducted surrounding positive versus negative self-talk, this review is meant to assist in familiarizing oneself with the importance of performance related talk. Positive self-talk has shown to improve performance not only during and after activity but also has shown to be a positive predictor of future performance satisfaction. On the other hand, negative self-talk has shown to increase anxiety and serves as a detriment to overall performance. The general benefits of positive self-talk have been demonstrated, but further research is needed to help clarify under what circumstances and for whom positive selftalk is most effective. The general benefits of positive self-talk have been demonstrated, but further research is needed to help clarify under what circumstances and for whom positive selftalk is most effective.

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