PATTERNS OF SELF-TALK

PERFORMANCE PSYCHOLOGY
Dr. Saul Petersen
C: 609-335-3668
E: info@petersenfuturesolutions.com
APPT: www.PetersenFutureSolutions.com/Teams

Introduction to Patterns of Self-Talk

Everyone has an inner voice and, in a sporting context, that voice exists as both inside words and as out-loud voice. It often happens as a reaction to when athletes do something amazing but also when they are instantly disappointed in some aspect of your performance. Your self-talk can be your best coach, either quietly or out loud, offering words of encouragement or constructive input on what to do. Your self-talk can often be your worst enemy, either quietly or out loud offering criticism, insults, or predictions of upcoming failure. In other words, self-talk is incredibly powerful.

Self-talk HAPPENS, with OR without your permission and control

Harnessing self-talk and training it to be used productively, as your best in-game coach, during predictable patterns or situations, is critical to you finding pride and joy in your performance more and more often.

"You can't control the outcome of the match BUT you can control your preparation & commitments to how you will coach and encourage yourself during competition"

Athletes' inner voices are often harmful to joy, pride, and performance. It is something that requires constant attention and awareness so it can be manipulated into being a positive and helpful tool to enjoying your sport, learning, and performance.

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Definition of Patterns of Self-Talk

Self-talk is an athlete's inner voice, and Patterns of Self-Talk are common or consistent responses to predictable situations in sport that are spoken as inner thought or out-loud voice, and take place with or without the athlete's deliberate control

As your in-game coach, this voice can be trained to become helpful rather than harmful, to be a trained routine rather than an unconscious and out of control voice.

Patterns of Self-Talk fit into 2 main categories:

1. **Motivational & in the present** - about the next moment, not about the past
2. **Constructive & controllable** – on technique / attitude / effort / focus / gameplan, not on things in the future or on winning

Key Features

Same as with patterns of body language (separate materials), ***Patterns of Self-Talk*** are predetermined and rehearsed until automatic – so they are controlled to be prepared to specific situations in-game, as opposed to reactionary outbursts that are largely out conscious control.

1. The phrases are constructive, positive, and designed to be your best "*in-game (on-court) coach*".
2. They are "next moment" focused, deliberately not focused on past mistakes - Remember, you can't control the past, but you can control your approach to the next point.
3. They use the fewest words possible (3 or less is ideal)
4. They are trained to be used at predictable, regular in-game situations

NOTE: There will be times you feel no need for it at all, when you are quiet but completely calm and confident – and you just play in your perfect ZONE!

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How do I Successfully Develop Patterns of Self-Talk?

You may be able to develop these yourself but, should you prefer, there are tools such as the Athlete Performance & Mental Skills Profile to help tease out your routines and triggers. You can also try and work with a coach, or with Dr. Petersen as a specialized Performance Psychologist and teaching pro, to support the process.

1. Create in your **journal**, "*I commit to saying these things to myself a. before points, when I need to hear them, b. after points, when I need to hear them*", and then list them out

2. Have a package of self-talk phrases

3. **Visualize** using your self-talk patterns in situations, for example in tennis, a) before a break point, b) serving for set, c) after opponent hits a winner
- a. Visualize situations: what do you hear, how do you feel, in the present?

4. **Trigger** yourself away from negative self-talk by catching it and replacing it with one from your list. Smile and forgive – it's part of learning – "***next moment***" focused

5. **Journal** the progress and your feelings – right there during/after practice

6. For now (less as it develops and matures under your control), some of your self-talk can be used to reinforce your ***Patterns of Body Language*** – ***"Feet" / "strings up" / "bouncing" / "all connected"***

7. Journal the experience – success measured by your progress with USING self-talk / triggers / champions table (see those training lessons)

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How do I Measure my Progress with Using Patterns of Self-Talk ?

It is critical that you allow a period of time to first learn, then put into use, these new tools like Patterns of Self-Talk. Here is an overview of planning for success:

1. It can take several weeks to figure out your scenarios where trained and predictable moments for key phrases of self-talk would be helpful, using journaling and memory to develop

2. It then takes some time to actively rehearse self-talk using visualization

3. Practicing patterns of self-talk in low-pressure situations means you can focus more on the scenarios and process of implementation, without worrying about failing or losing
- a. Use your journal to document the self-talk phrases that come more naturally and those that feel awkward or difficult to implement. This helps you tweak your process without a high pressure situation

4. Then, finally, you can test your Patterns of Self-Talk in a match, with pressure, to learn how they stand up under pressure
- a. Use your journal to document the phrases and how well they worked in specific situations

5. Build your profile of Patterns of Self-Talk that are suited to a variety of pressure situations

GOOD LUCK ! if you need assistance, please email me at info@petersenfuturesolutions.com

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