


# Perfecting Your Life Commentary

**Relevant to:** Depression:  Anxiety:  Irritability/Anger:  General emotional control: 

**'Negative self-talk' can spoil an otherwise rewarding day. Conversely, 'Positive self-talk' can be a major life-enhancer.**

I have a brother who is pathologically cheerful. When you go out to a restaurant with him he will say 'Isn't this a wonderful restaurant', 'Look at the view out of the window', 'Don't you think the food here is terrific' and so on, interspersing the regular flow of conversation.

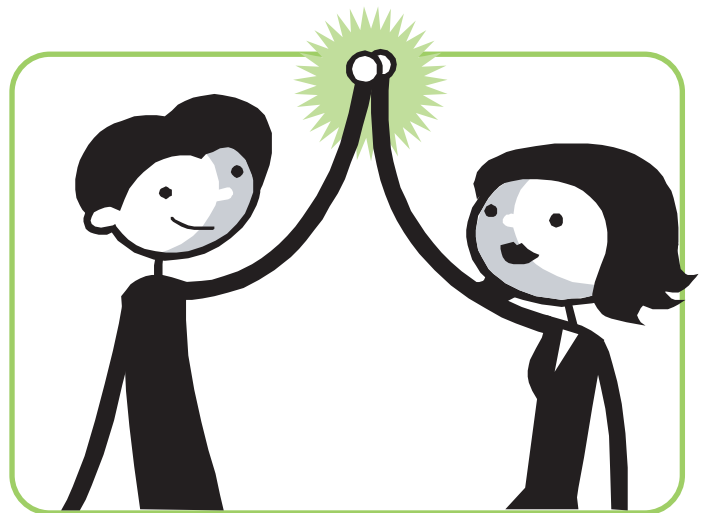
I also know people who, when you go out to a restaurant with them will say things like 'You would think they would be busier on a Tuesday night wouldn't you?', 'The music's a bit loud isn't it', 'I'm surprised they haven't got more fish dishes on the menu, aren't you?', and so on.

## Who do you think I would rather be with?

It is not a difficult question to answer, is it? Now, the funny thing is, that my brother behaves exactly the same every time I have bought a new car. He will say 'What a terrific car, doesn't it look wonderful', 'These seats are terrific', 'Does it really do 40 miles to the gallon, that's incredible!' and so on. But I have also had

people who will say 'Why did you choose to buy that make of car?' as though this is an interesting question to ask. Or 'Do you not think this is going to be a bit difficult to park in town?' Or 'Do you think this colour suits the car?' (implying it doesn't) and so on.

The same question again: who do you think I enjoy showing my car off to or prefer to be with?



And there are all sorts of variations on this theme. For example, I know people who will insist on leaving much too early to get to the restaurant and then, as we are driving there, will be asking 'do you think we are going to be on time, what if the traffic is blocked?' and so on. And then, when we get to the restaurant and are shown to our table, will say 'Can we have a different table, I don't think this one is suitable for us?' And then, when we are at our new table, will say 'Do you know, I'm not sure if the original table was a better one?' and then, when they eventually receive their chicken will show a frown to others on the table asking 'Do you think this is cooked thoroughly enough?', 'Do you think I should send it back?', and so on. And then, when the meal is finished, they will be worried about how we are going to settle up, and whether they will pay more than their fair share, or whether someone else will pay more than their fair share. Or whether we should leave a tip. And how much tip it should be, we don't want to appear mean, or to appear flashy.



You can see what they are doing. In essence, they are providing worrying self-talk on the whole of their own lives. You know what is going to happen in walking from the restaurant to the car, they are going to wonder if the car has been vandalised. And then, when in the car, they are going to wonder whether their house has been broken into, and so on. The point is that this kind of talk may be quite depressing or quite irritating for those around them, but, worse still, it is much worse for the person doing it! Imagine if you can, listening to a constantly dejecting or worrying commentary about your own life.

The point here is that **such self-talk is just a matter of habit**. There is no reason why one shouldn't learn to have a relaxed and upbeat commentary to one's life.

So if you are someone who carries a depressing or worrying commentary around with you, it would be great if you could break that habit, and learn to give yourself upbeat and more relaxed self-talk. It is more energising, and more productive, the point being that simply worrying about whether the car has been vandalised (for example) has no bearing on whether it will be or not.

### Why do people give themselves 'negative self-talk'?

Who knows, but the most likely explanation is that they feel it will protect them against bad things happening in some way, whereas in fact we can see this won't be the case.

### How do you develop the habit of 'positive self talk'?

The first step is to be aware of your self-talk. The second step is to change it. One of the best things you can do is to give your commentary out loud, as though you are talking to someone else. (But be careful who else is around!) This is the best way of becoming aware of just what you are saying to yourself, and changing it. After that, it's pretty much a matter of habit: keep doing it until it is second-nature.

**Tip:** One way you can liberate yourself to give an anxiety-free commentary on your own life is by having a worry period, where you set aside perhaps 5 minutes per day to worry. In that short period you can look for things that might be worrying, and worry about them - or resolve them.

### Mythbuster:

**It's no use being positive - you have to be realistic. Not True.**

The reason this is wrong is that for most things there is no objective reality - you might as well like a car colour as dislike it. Similarly there is no objective reality about what the future will hold - you might as well take a realistically positive view because, many times, it becomes a 'self-fulfilling prophecy'.

### In session discussion:

What would the (a) negative and (b) positive self-talk be for the following situations? What would the effect of each be on the person?

1. Someone who's afraid of flying, waiting at the airport for their holiday flight?
2. Someone waking up on a morning not looking forward to going to work?
3. Someone who's agreed to go out with a group of friends into the city centre on a Saturday night but now it's come to it, really doesn't want to go?
4. Someone who's getting married today and it's raining?

Think of something that you have coming up in the next week. What would the positive and negative self-talk be? Which would make the situation better?

### Out of session project:

Practise your positive self-talk, and make a note of how this worked for you, ready to share with the group next week.

