

# The Art of Mental Training

## Chapter 16

### The Internal Critic

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As I transitioned more and more into coaching, Leo-tai and I often spoke by phone. In those days he enjoyed hearing about the work that I was doing at a large university as the Mental Edge Trainer for the athletes on the various teams.

One day I explained to him how, after the wrestling competitions, the head coach and I would review all the tapes. Then how (one by one) each wrestler was brought in to sit down and watch his tape with us. Mostly the head coach would make suggestions regarding technique or strategy. A few days later I would review some of the tapes again with the guys who hadn't done so well. But this time I asked the athletes to recall what their self-talk was during the toughest parts of the match.

“Very good.” said Leo-tai. “You found something in common?”

“We certainly did.” I said. “The one thing we found that they all had in common was that they all had negative self-talk going on when things were going really badly. By watching themselves on tape, they were able to remember exactly what they were thinking at the time. And in every case of poor performance, when things were going really badly, the self-talk going through their heads was terrible. Their own internal dialogue was setting them up to perform worse and worse. At the precise instances when they needed all their resolve in order to be able to turn things around, their self-talk was busy tearing them down.”

“Interesting,” Leo-tai said quietly.

“So we'd play the tape again; only this time the exercise was to have the athletes verbalize positive self-talk as things got bad. I'd say, let me hear the positive self-talk of a champion who might be having a tough time in the match but who absolutely refuses to talk himself down. Then we'd play the film again. That exercise really opened their eyes. They learned that—especially when things are tough—it's important to listen only for the positive self-talk of a champion who is focused on working his way through adversity.”

At this point Leo-tai offered up a bit of advice.

“Remember to tell them to always listen for the self-talk that sounds more like a positive coach rather than a negative critic. Tell them that if there is any self-talk going on it must be positive, encouraging, and empowering, because like other things, self-talk affects the way we feel, and the way we feel affects the way that we perform. Remind them that the Warrior/Champion shuts down the internal negative critic because he understands that he must.”

**Remember: Especially when things are at their worst, your self-talk must be positive, encouraging, and empowering.**