

Disarming The Critic

The cost of listening and believing your Critic is great. Each time the critic attacks you, he is harming you psychologically. He is wounding your sense of worth and making it more difficult to feel happy and competent in your world. To stop him you must first recognize his chatter. It is sometimes disguised and hard to distinguish, but when you hear him and know it is him, you have the first step in stopping his destructive ways.

It takes concentration to recognize your Critic. Often you hear from the Critic when you are dealing with stress or in relationships. There is another time and that is when you are feeling low or discouraged, depressed, down on yourself. At these times it is very helpful to follow these four steps, in order to catch the Critic in the act of making you feel bad.

1. Close your eyes and take some deep breaths. Draw in the air to your abdomen and stretch your diaphragm.
2. Relax your body. Relax the tension in your neck, shoulders, jaw, arms, back and legs.
 1. Pinpoint where in your body you feel the depression. Really get to know the feeling there by focusing on that area.
 2. Pay attention to your thoughts that go along with focusing on that part of your body. Notice everything you are saying to yourself. Try to remember how your negative feeling began, what the Critic was saying to you at that time.

If you do this each time you are feeling down or depressed it will become much clearer to you the specific contents of the Critic's voice and attacks.

Disarming the Critic involves 3 steps: 1) unmasking his purpose 2) talking back and 3) making him useless.

Unmasking His Purpose

You expose the Critic's true purpose and functions when you unmask him. Some examples of unmasking the Critic are:

3. You're comparing me to everyone so that once in a while I'll find someone lower on the totem pole than me.
4. You're slapping me around like my parents used to and I believe you because I believed them.
5. You're insisting that I be perfect because if I did everything exactly right, I might finally feel OK about myself.
6. You're saying I can't do it so that I won't bother trying and won't have to worry about messing up.
7. You're telling me they won't like me so that I won't be so hurt if I'm rejected.
8. You're saying she's disgusted with me so that no matter what the truth is, I'll be prepared for the worst.
9. You're telling me to be perfect so that I'll stupidly think that maybe I could be perfect and for a few minutes feel better about myself.
10. You're kicking me around so that I can atone for divorcing Jill.

Clearly seeing the Critic's functions makes the things he says less believable. You can see his ulterior motives. Even though he may rant and rave, you have exposed his secret agenda

and can feel less vulnerable to his attacks. Remember the Critic's voice has place in you because you unwittingly reinforce him. Identifying the Critics voice and calling him on his game, is the beginning of seriously undermining his credibility.

Talking Back

You need to learn to refute the old negative programming taught to you as a child. Your self esteem will not improve until you learn to talk back to the messages sent to you by the critic.

There are three methods for talking back. Used properly they will stop the critic for a little while. See which of these three or any combination will work for you.

The Howitzer Mantras—These are words or phrases to hit the critic like a cannon blast.

This is poison. Stop it.

These are lies.

Lies from my father, mother

No more put downs!

Shut up!

Get off my back.

This is garbage, stop it.

The mantra(s) you choose should help you feel angry. You want to shout them loudly inside your head. To drown out the voice of the critic, mentally scream at him to drown him out with your indignation. One other help to try is: put a rubber band around your wrist and snap it while yelling internally at your critic. Snapping the rubber band reinforces the “stop” commands and makes more successful your thought commands. The sting from the snapping of the rubber band helps break the chain of negative thinking. If you snap the rubber band and simultaneously yell at your critic when he's talking to you, his attacks will greatly reduce.

Asking the Price—To disarm the critic, ask yourself what price you pay for his attacks. What is the cost of listening to the critic. Here are some possible costs you may pay:

Defensiveness with spouse.

Blowing up at your child when he/she doesn't mind.

Losing a friend because of my rudeness.

Fear of being assertive with clients/fellow workers because they might reject me.

Tendency to be distant from those in authority because of being afraid of them.

Feel anxious and on guard with people.

Constantly thinking that others don't like me.

Fearful of attempting new things because I'll mess them up.

Poor self esteem costs you a great deal in every area of life. So when the critic attacks, you talk back by telling him, “You make me fearful and afraid of people, you lose me friends, you make me harsh with my little girl, you cost me advancements and more money in my job”. You can't afford your critic—he costs too much!

Affirmation of Worth—This method is difficult especially if you deeply believe that there is something wrong with you—you're not OK. But it is essential to learn to affirm your worth in order to completely disarm the critic. The first two methods of talking back are important but they are not permanent. You create a vacuum when you silence the critic, but he'll be back if that vacuum is not filled with an affirmation of your worth.

Many people feel that their worth depends on their behavior, as if they were an empty vessel filling up with drops of achievement. This makes your worth dependent on what you do and how well you do it. The critic wants you to believe that you have no intrinsic value, only potential for *doing something worthwhile or important*.

But in reality you are a complex miracle of creation. Your intrinsic value is that you are a human life that lives, experiences and perceives. By this definition, you are just as worthy as everyone else who is doing the same thing. Achievement does not equal worth. So whatever you do or create, contribute should not come from a need to prove your value, but comes instead from the natural flow of your own aliveness.

Matthew McKay and Patrick Fanning,d(1992). *Self esteem*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.