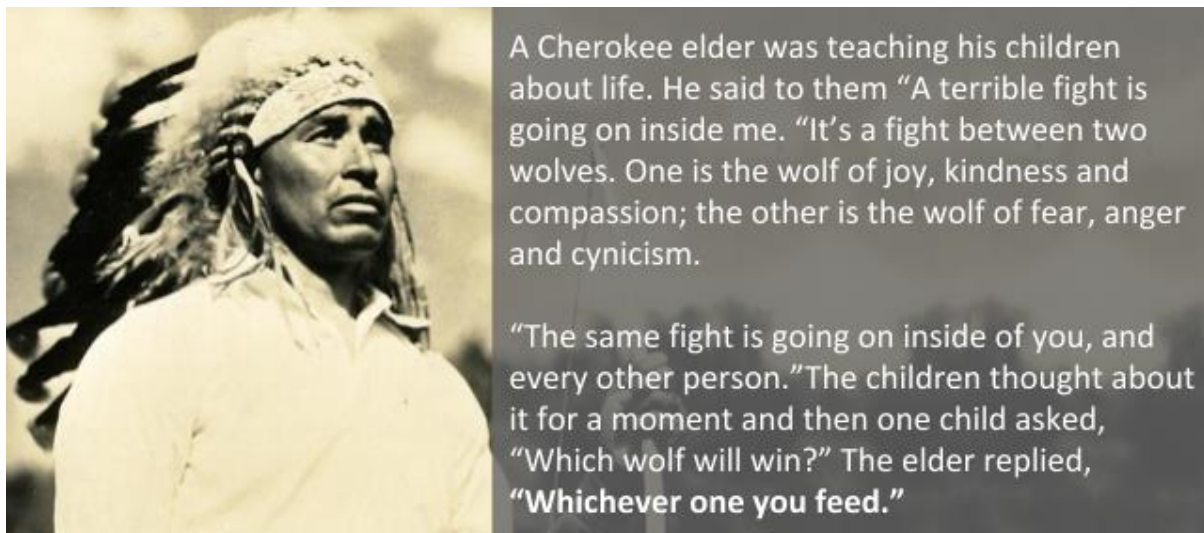




Coaching Exercise

Taming Your Inner Critic

Watch What You to Say to Yourself, Because You're Always Listening



As humans we have many things in common and one of them is that we all have an Inner Critic. The inner critic is that voice inside your head which springs to life with little warning and always with a critical, negative point of view.

Our thoughts greatly influence our feelings and our behaviour, which in turn impacts our ability to succeed in life. It's incredibly useful to grow your awareness of, and your ability to combat and respond positively to your inner critic.

'The private conversations you have with yourself can be either a powerful stepping-stone or a major obstacle to reaching your goals.' Amy Morin writing for Forbes

If your inner dialogue goes on a loop with things like, "I'm going to embarrass myself," or "No one is going to talk to me," as you walk you into a cocktail party, you probably won't appear relaxed and approachable. Or "I'm not good enough to get this job," as you wait to go into an interview, you'll struggle to present yourself in a confident manner.

If you aren't able to recognise and manage this negative voice it can quickly turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

So, what can we do to tame our Inner Critic?

We're delighted to share a very practical exercise that we've been using for years in our coaching. It is simple but very effective. We recommend you take the time to do this exercise over the period of a few days, maybe even a week. It won't take you long each day, but it is important that you take the perspective of a few days to capture and reframe your thoughts.

The objective is not to silence your inner critic (this voice may play a vital role in our self development) but to tame her, to remove the biting edge of her power, so you're free to come to your own conclusions, from a positive place of understanding and knowledge, and not fear.

This is our four step process to taming your Inner Critic

1. Recognise

It's very useful to understand what role your inner critic plays and why she's important. In the early days of growing in awareness and struggling with my own inner critic, I felt only hatred and a fear for her appearance and her horrible words. I thought the only way to deal with her was to squash or block her, but the result of that tactic was she just got louder and more vicious. Over time, as I learnt more about the subject, I started to realise what her purpose is, and this helped me enormously in reconciling her tirades and finding a positive way of dealing with them for a lasting, positive outcome.

Our inner critic is there as a safety valve against us getting ourselves into dangerous, difficult or risky situations. She wants us to be safe, she just has a very unfortunate way of trying to achieve this!

We all have two primal and very effective drivers, Fear and Desire. Our inner critic is leveraging the powerful emotion of fear to get what she wants - us to be safe. She conjures up negative judgments and thoughts and predicts horrible outcomes to stop us putting ourselves in a position of 'danger'. Recognising this and seeing how limited her capacity is for varying her own tactics helped me find understanding and even compassion for her role, which in turn provides energy for the next step in this exercise.

2. Record

In this step you'll give your inner critic permission to speak. This might seem like a risky thing to do, she's likely to say some horrible things! But it's fundamental in taming her influence and impact. Trying to silence and deny her may only fuel her determination to be heard.

Over the course of a few days listen to the things she is saying and write them down. Also record what was happening at the time - what was it that triggered her into this tirade? Keep this journal going until you have enough material to work on for the following steps. All you're doing is listening and recording.

3. Reframe

Book some time to continue this work, you may need an hour to complete your reframe.

This step is about challenging the inner critic's claims with your own grounded and compassionate thinking.

Create a document, either written or digital with a table with 4 columns:

- First column is for triggers, record here what you think set-off your inner critic at that time. The point is to identify patterns so that you can see them coming in future. In this way you can be on alert for your inner critic and what she might say, so you're ready to respond positively.
- Second column is to record what your inner critic said, just write it down word for word. Quite often when you do this, you will immediately see how untrue or even ridiculous the claim is. Remember she is going for maximum impact, so her words are often exaggerated, biased and disproportionate.
- Third column is titled 'the opposite'. For each of your inner critic's claims ask yourself 'could the opposite be true?' and write down what comes to mind if you were to argue the case for the polar opposite of the claim your inner critic is flinging at you. Remember this is the opposite view, you can be just as wildly outrageous in the positive sense as your inner critic has been in the negative.
- Fourth column is titled 'I believe'. Review the 2 polar opposite points of view in columns 2 and 3 and decide what you believe to be true and write down a statement you can stand behind. This is likely to be somewhere in the middle, but for the purpose of the exercise err on the positive, especially if this is the first time you are challenging your inner critic.

This is how this step looked for me for one of my Inner Critic's complaints (this example obviously comes from the pre Covid era when travelling for work was regular and expected!):

Trigger	Inner critic said	The opposite	I believe
Travelling for work	You're a terrible, selfish mother, your children will grow up hardly recognising you and knowing you put work ahead of them every time. You're never there when they need you.	Travelling for work is great for me and my children. They thrive when I'm gone. They never miss me and love that I'm away a lot. I'm not missing anything significant.	Travelling for work is challenging but rewarding. It brings new possibilities for me and broadens my children's horizons. I may be away regularly, but we all know I put my children first.

4. Respond

Once you have the 'I believe' responses drafted, start using them when your inner critic appears. Keep refining until you feel super comfortable with the wording. You may revert to short hand such as the 'thanks for your concern but we're all good with my travelling, it's never easy but we make it work' which was the response I developed over time for the example above.

Above all, stay curious and compassionate - towards both your inner critic and yourself. Know that she is just trying to keep you safe, but don't let that hold you back, use this self awareness as a tool to recognise just how capable you really are.

Above all else, be kind to yourself.

Take these positive steps to manage the voice in your head, because you know you are always listening!

We'd love to hear your thoughts on building self awareness and building confidence and resilience. If you'd like to pick up this conversation reach us on email at elise.finn@nkuzichange.com or kate.franklin@nkuzichange.com

And connect with us on [LinkedIn](#): [Kate Franklin](#) and [Elise Finn](#)

At Nkuzi Change our mission is to help organisations unlock the full potential of their people through coaching that is focused, directed, inclusive and scalable.

We specialise in helping Middle Leaders successfully navigate through periods of change and challenge and bring their teams to successful outcomes.