



Voice of Confidence

Your Inner Voice - Friend or Foe?

© Kirstie O'Sullivan 2023

the voice practice

© The Voice Practice | PO Box 78 039, Grey Lynn, Auckland 1245. | www.thevoicepractice.co.nz

YOUR INNER VOICE: FRIEND OR FOE?

Of the many powerful strategies I've learned from my clients who are competitive athletes, my favourite is the power of **making friends with our inner voice**.

Athletes know, without a doubt, that how they're talking to themselves on the inside has an enormous impact on how they're showing up for the game.

Our inner voice can work for us, or against us. It can be our friend, or our foe.

In a perfect world, the way we talk to ourselves before a speaking event would be similar to how we would talk to a good friend, a friend that we believe in and want to see achieve success.

How would you approach this? Would you tell your friend;

'Well, this is the one. The one where they discover you don't know what you're talking about.'
'You think you can do this, but really you can't. You're dreaming.'
'All that preparation you've done means nothing. You'll forget it in the moments that matter.'
'You're good, but you'll never be as good as [Insert Name Here]'.
'You're just not really good enough.'

Who would talk to a good friend this way?

Sadly, our inner voice often does. Sometimes, we don't even realise that tape is playing in the background, we're so used to its presence.

Our **inner voice** becomes our **inner critic**.

It's important to acknowledge here that hearing your inner critic is part of being human. It is playing its biological role and is designed to keep you safe, alive and functioning. It can also mean you care, you're invested and the outcome matters to you.

But if we let this voice get too loud, it becomes the hyper vigilant parent who keeps their child indoors at all times for fear of disaster striking if they step outside. Best of intentions, but not necessarily helpful in the grander scheme of life.

If our inner critic gets too loud before a speaking opportunity, we run the risk of getting off balance or derailed in the moments that matter. It's going to stop us listening to others and it's certainly going to stop us being present.

One of the other hot tips I've learned from my sporting clientele is that the inner critic doesn't discriminate. If left to its own devices, the higher up the professional ladder you go, the further your inner critic insists you have to fall.

So it serves us well to make friends with the inner critic's counterpart – our **inner coach**. This will help us to restore or maintain balance in high performance environments and send ourselves the message we're safe, calm and in control.

GET TO KNOW YOUR INNER CRITIC

So let's get to know your inner critic.

The first thing I want you to do might seem paradoxical; I want you to say something unkind to yourself in your head. It might go along the lines of...

'You haven't done enough preparation to really nail this'

'You might be prepared, but that's probably going to go to pieces under pressure'

'You're not bright/on to it/hard working enough to be here'

Use your own particular brand of self-sabotage here, I'll give you a moment...

Now, when you say this, notice where you feel this in your body. It might seem tricky to identify initially, because we often want to move past this feeling of discomfort as quickly as possible, so we're not really used to it.

So keep it very practical, give yourself a moment or two and notice where you feel a physical sensation arising in your body when you speak badly to yourself.

Do you feel a tightness in your chest? A feeling in your gut? Tension around the back of the neck, shoulders or head?

Rest your awareness on this sensation for a moment or two.

Now that you're giving it some attention, it may feel like it's growing. It likes the attention. No worries, you've got this, just keep sitting with it and noticing this physical sensation.

Keep your awareness on it and see if it changes. It might grow. It might not. If it does, once its finished growing, what happens? Does it start to dissipate?

Give yourself some time and see. You might want to press pause here for a moment or two so you don't have to rush this experience. Stay with the physical sensation until it starts to move, shift or dissipate.

Ok, now we're going to say something else unkind to ourselves, but this time we're going to notice how that voice **sounds**. What tone does it have? Whose voice is it? Can you recognize it? Is it you? Is it someone you know?

Notice that this voice is often there, unconsciously lurking around the back of your thinking. Now that you've given this voice some conscious attention, now that you have identified it, you can start to play around with it.

Turn up the volume like you're turning your stereo up...now turn it down.

Play around with the tone of that voice too. Make it sound like an over the top opera singer. Sound a bit silly? Turn the volume down.

MAKE FRIENDS WITH YOUR INNER COACH

Notice that you can exercise **control over this voice**.

The most control you have in fact, is to say thank you to this voice. What happens when you say thank you? Does the voice become quieter?

The reason this voice may get a little quieter is that it's trying to help you. It's your built in protection mechanism, trying to save you from a potentially threatening event. When we say 'thank you' to it, it can relax, job done.

We can now continue to dive even deeper into sending ourselves the message we're safe, calm and in control by consciously engaging our inner coach.

First though, let's reflect on your inner critic;

What did you notice about your inner critic?

Whose voice did it sound like?

What tone of voice does it have?

Where did you feel it in your body?

What were the physical sensations that arose?

If it's trying to protect you (which is usually is!), how is it trying to protect you?

What does it want for you?

What's its positive intention?

Remember, your inner critic really gets going when you're feeling nervous or anxious. This can then create a feedback loop where the unkind or even downright cruel things your inner voice is saying to you can make you even more anxious.

These moments are the perfect time to engage your inner coach. We need to be our own best friend in the moments that matter. There's a very real power in nurturing the voice of your inner coach.

Right now, say something kind to yourself, something you know to be true. If this is tricky for you, think of someone who really appreciates you, someone who is encouraging and speaks kindly to you. What would they say?

Now we're going to notice again, where do you feel this in your body? Is there a quality attached to the physical sensation? A feeling of warmth? Spaciousness? Calm?

You can turn up the volume if you like and really enjoy listening to it. I'll give you a couple of moments here to really make friends with your inner coach.

Notice how when you say kind, helpful things to yourself, your state calms down. This is because your nervous system is getting the message loud and clear that you're safe, you're in control. So it can put down its defence and protection mechanisms, all those fight/flight responses which cause us to feel anxious, jittery and out of control.

ACCESS YOUR 'SPEAKER'S WISDOM'

So, let's reflect on what you've learned about your inner coach?

What did you notice about your inner coach?

Is it your voice? Or someone else's?

What tone of voice does it have?

Where did you feel it in your body – the same place, or a different one from your inner critic?

How is it supporting you?

What does it want for you?

What happens if you consciously ask for its advice?

Aside from encouraging and supporting you, your inner coach can be a valuable source to connect to your Speaker's Wisdom, helping you make the wisest possible choice in the moment.

If we can get our **inner voice to work for us rather than against us**, that's when we can show up with presence and power as a speaker.

You might have noticed that your inner critic can sound quite noisy and a little bit strident even, whereas your inner coach may speak a little softer, so here's a very, very simple way to get out of your noisy brain and into your body.

I want you to take your hand and put it on your lower abdominal area, your belly, and I want you to place your awareness on this area. Feel your hand on your stomach, feel the clothes on your skin, feel the air on your face.

Relax your feet, feel them widening and spreading across the floor, fully supporting you while maintaining your focus on your breath. See if you can feel your breath moving under your hand.

Follow the breath moving into your body and out of your body and become aware of the small pauses in between your inhalation and your exhalation.

Notice if this has quietened down the noise of the inner critic and given a bit more space for your inner coach to speak.

Know that this is a place you can come back to whenever you need to refocus and recentre.

Relax and enjoy.