

The Hidden Obstacle to Success: You Overcoming Your Inner Critic to Unlock Your Potential

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What's the biggest barrier to success?
And who's the harshest critic in your life?
The answer is often the same: YOU.

W. Timothy Gallwey, in his book *The Inner Game of Work*, says:

Performance = Potential - Interference

And by "interference," he means your own mind

Our minds can be our greatest allies - but often, they become our biggest enemies. They whisper things like "You're not good enough," "You'll never make it," or "Someone's going to find out you're a fraud." These aren't rare thoughts. Most people experience them. But when these thoughts repeat long enough, they form beliefs; beliefs that quietly limit us every day and keep us from becoming the best version of ourselves.



These thoughts are rooted in fear and self-doubt. And they're not random, they're ancient. Our ancestors had to constantly scan for danger; not just predators, but the risk of being rejected by the tribe, which could mean death. That's where the "inner critic" comes from. It evolved as a protection mechanism; to help us avoid risk, pain, or exclusion.

The problem?

We still carry these outdated mental patterns, even though we no longer face the same life-or-death threats. In today's world, this system often turns against us; making us second-guess, overthink, or hold back from stepping into our full power.

But here's the good news:

When we learn to let go of negative self-talk, we become more present, more focused, and more fulfilled. We stop obsessing over outcomes and start engaging fully in the moment. That's when the magic happens; we tap into flow, notice things we'd normally miss, and bring our best self into everything we do.

Even more, when we soften our negative inner voice, something else shifts: We become less judgmental of others too. Compassion inward creates compassion outward. We listen more deeply. We connect more fully. We move through life with empathy instead of comparison.

So how do you quiet the inner critic?

Here are five tools to help you shift the narrative:

1. Catch it. Challenge it. Change it.

Start by noticing the moment that voice shows up. That awareness is already a win; it means you're present enough to pick up on it.

Then, challenge the thought:

"What's the evidence?" "Haven't I faced this kind of situation before?"

Finally, reframe it:

"I've handled this before, I can do it again."

Try building this into your day with short check-ins or mindfulness practices to help catch those sneaky thoughts before they take over.

2. Practice Presence

When you're truly present, negative thoughts have no space to grow. You can practice presence by focusing on one thing; your breath, the sound of someone's voice, the feeling of your feet on the ground.

The key is to keep unbroken focus on a specific thing, and it will get easier with practice.

3. Name Your Inner Critic

Give that voice a silly nickname; like *Captain Overthink*, *Judgy Judy*, or *The Worry Goblin*.

Naming it creates distance, reminds you it's not you, and makes it easier to smile and move on.

4. Reframe Fear as a Sign of Growth

That nervous, doubtful feeling? It often means you're stretching outside your comfort zone, and that's where growth happens!

Fear doesn't mean stop - it means you're expanding.

5. Build a Confidence Folder

Keep a folder (digital or physical) filled with positive feedback, wins, proud moments, and kind words from others.

On tough days, revisit it. Let it remind you of who you are and how far you've come.

Final Thoughts

Yes, all of this is easier said than done. But it's a practice, not perfection. Every step you take to quiet your inner critic makes space for your true self to lead.

And remember: you're not alone. Everyone wrestles with self-doubt. The difference lies in how we respond to it. So be kind to yourself. Stay curious. Keep practicing. Your potential is waiting, just beneath the noise.

About the Author

Hi! My name is Sasja. I offer coaching for individuals who feel stuck or unfulfilled in their career or life in general. My mission is guiding others through their transformations, by uncovering their unique strengths, true passion and reaching their fullest potential. With my certifications as a transformational coach and yoga instructor, as well as my background in Strategic HR, I bring a holistic approach to my coaching practice.

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