



The 5-Minute Inner Critic Makeover

A psychology-based strategy to help you end self-sabotage, and regain confidence at work

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Before we dive in...

I want to acknowledge you. By downloading this guide, you're showing that:

#1

You're no longer willing to accept overwhelm and stress as your default mode.

#2

You're committed to getting out of your own way, and willing to try something new to deal with your self-doubt.

#3

You're done forcing yourself to think positively, and ready to take an honest look at what's keeping you stuck.

This is where my most successful clients started their journeys, so I'm glad we've stumbled into each other's path.

This guide will give you an actionable strategy to pull yourself out of negative thinking spirals in as little as five minutes.

I'll be honest: This strategy won't stop your inner critic from ever emerging again. But it will unearth a new understanding of your challenges, and allow you to start addressing their root cause.

Ready? You've got this!

Melody





We are all slow to learn that we are far more capable than we think we are.

BARBARA CORCORAN

Does this sound familiar?

Cassie sat down at her desk, dropping the papers she was holding. She had just finished her weekly one-on-one with her manager, Greg.

Out of the corner of her eye, Cassie studied Greg through the glass windows of his office. His eyebrows furrowed as he picked up the presentation Cassie had shared with him a few minutes before.

Observing him, Cassie's inner dialogue took over...

"He definitely didn't like my suggestion to redo the reporting structure."

"I could sense his hesitation while we were speaking, and now look at his reaction!"

"I rambled the entire time. He was probably thinking, 'just get to the point already!'"

HAS THIS EVER HAPPENED TO YOU?

Trust me, you're not alone. As humans, we naturally have more negative, unhelpful thoughts than positive ones. It's a tendency designed to shield you from danger, your brain's way of keeping you safe and protected.


Over time however, those negative thinking patterns become deeply ingrained, causing unhelpful thoughts to become almost automatic.



In psychology, these self-critical, repetitive patterns of thinking are called **cognitive distortions**.

You'll find a complete list of different types of cognitive distortions on page 9. But so you understand them, let me walk through one right now...

THOUGHT	TYPE OF DISTORTION	EXPLANATION
<i>"He definitely didn't like my suggestion to redo the reporting structure."</i>	<i>Jumping to conclusions</i>	<i>Cassie makes a logical leap that Greg's body language meant he disliked her idea</i>
<i>"I rambled the entire time. He was probably thinking, 'just get to the point already!'"</i>	<i>Overgeneralization</i>	<i>Cassie may have gotten off track towards the end of the meeting and she overgeneralizes that to her entire performance.</i>



Can you see how Cassie's thoughts weren't necessarily a reflection of reality?

She had no evidence that Greg was indeed unsatisfied with her presentation. And even if he was, her negative thoughts weren't helping her course-correct and move forward in her professional development.

Cassie's situation is no exception. Cognitive distortions are often blatantly untrue. But more than that, they're always unhelpful - they don't serve you or help you perform better.

Proactively identifying and addressing these distortions puts you in the driver's seat so you can be a more active participant and problem-solver in your life and career.

The big question is, of course, how?

Breaking free from unhelpful thoughts

There's a simple strategy you can start practicing today that will help you bust the cognitive distortions triggering the stress and self-doubt you're experiencing at work.

It's called **Name it and Reframe it**, and here's how it works at a high-level:

#1

NAME IT

Cognitive distortions are a lot like white noise. You get so used to them that you don't even notice when they're operating in the background.

Naming is all about bringing awareness to your inner dialogue. What thoughts take over your mind when you slip into overwhelm and self-doubt?

Remember, these thoughts may not reflect the truth of the matter. You need to start hearing yourself out, and sifting facts from cognitive distortions.

#2

REFRAME IT

Reframing allows you to expand the ways you could view a situation, so you can choose scenarios and possibilities that are more empowering to you.

This isn't about being overly optimistic or denying challenges. It's about no longer giving doomsday scenarios the benefit of the doubt.

This allows you to shift your self-talk, handle worries productively, and get out of your own way.



CURIOUS WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE?

To implement the Name it and Reframe it strategy, all you need is a notebook and five minutes of your day. Yes, it's that simple!

Here's the nitty-gritty of the technique, broken down into **seven actionable steps**. See it in action with an example of how Cassie used it to reframe her emotional response to the one-on-one with Greg.

1. Describe the situation that triggered the negative thinking spiral. What was happening? Who was involved? When was it?

I was sitting at my desk after my weekly one-on-one with Greg.

2. Write down the uncensored version of your thoughts. What were you saying to yourself? What images or memories went through your mind? What were you making the situation mean about you?

*I am not qualified for this job.
I ramble when I present my ideas.
Greg thought I was judging him when I offered suggestions.*

3. Map your thoughts to a cognitive distortion using the printable cheatsheet on page 9. Sometimes you'll spot a match quickly. Other times, it won't be quite as evident. The more you do this, the easier it'll become.

My cognitive distortions roughly match examples of jumping to conclusions, and overgeneralization.



4. Look for facts that support your thoughts. Stick with verifiable data, not opinions and interpretations. An opinion sounds like “I’m horrible at this”, while a fact sounds like “I left a typo in the report.” The goal isn’t to eliminate negative thinking, but to make sure your perceptions match the reality of the situation.

I recall an instance when Greg gave me feedback. He said I would benefit from communicating more concisely.

5. Look for holes in your thinking. Are there any experiences that contradict this thought or indicate it’s not completely true all of the time? If you accuse yourself of “always procrastinating”, think of cases where you worked hard or spent a lot of time preparing for a project.

Greg asked me to put together ideas to show him, so it was his request. I also beat three other candidates to land this job, which means he saw something in me.

6. Write new thoughts that take into account the facts for and against the original thought. Balanced thoughts are not the same as positive affirmations. Aim for statements that are neutral and rooted in a realistic perspective that your mind can get on board with.

*I ramble sometimes, but in general I am a good communicator.
I am only six months into this job and I’m still learning every day.*

7. Note how you feel about the situation now, with this new thought. It’s likely you’ll feel steady or more confident. You may not go from fearful to elated in one sitting, but going from frustrated to relieved can be a big breakthrough. Focus on these small improvements.

I feel less anxious and calmer.

A cheatsheet to have on you: On page 11, you'll find a printable cheatsheet recapping this seven step exercise. Print your copy and keep it with you, so you can practice Name it and Reframe it whenever stress and self-doubt strike.

Feeling stuck?

At first it might be hard to brainstorm alternative, supportive thoughts. That's totally normal and yes, a new skill you've got to develop. Here are some questions to help you get there:

- How realistic or helpful is this thought on a scale of 1 to 10? (1 being not at all, 10 being completely)
- Where am I making assumptions or overgeneralizing?
- What can I tell myself to reassure my inner critic that I've got this?
- How can I focus on solutions, not problems?
- What can I learn from this?
- What thought would get me closer to my goals?
- What if everything does work out?
- Does this sound like something a good coach would say to help motivate me?
- What would 80-year-old me advise me to think today, in the present?



Cognitive Distortions Cheatsheet

TYPE OF DISTORTION	DESCRIPTION	TIPS TO MANAGE IT
<i>All-or-Nothing Thinking</i>	You see situations and yourself in black or white absolutes, without room for middle ground. <i>"I have to be perfect, or I'm a complete failure."</i>	Look for the middle ground in situations. Specifically, swap out "or" for "and", i.e. "I had some wonderful wins this week <i>and</i> some failures that were difficult."
<i>Overgeneralization</i>	You take one unfavorable instance and generalize it to an ongoing pattern. <i>"I'm always screwing up."</i>	Stop using extreme words like "always", "never", "all" and "every". Treat events in isolation. Just because something happened once, it doesn't mean it will happen again.
<i>Filtering</i>	You ignore all the positive aspects of a situation and focus on the negative aspects only. <i>"I'm devastated by the flaw my boss pointed out, even though the rest of her feedback was good."</i>	Start a brag file. Every time you get a nice email or piece of positive feedback, pop it in there. Revisit it when you're feeling down to remind yourself of how capable you are.
<i>Catastrophizing</i>	You expect the worst. <i>"I'm going to get fired and end up broke and homeless."</i>	Take a moment to acknowledge what is going well now, in the present moment. Then visualize what could go right, instead of what could go wrong.
<i>Disqualifying the Positive</i>	You reject positive attributes about yourself, such as compliments and achievements. <i>"Anyone could have done it."</i>	Practice receiving compliments and curb the tendency to explain away your successes. A quick "thank you, I'm thrilled with how it turned out," suffices.

Cognitive Distortions Cheatsheet

TYPE OF DISTORTION	DESCRIPTION	TIPS TO MANAGE
<i>Jumping to Conclusions</i>	<p>You make unwarranted judgement and think you know what others think and feel without them saying.</p> <p><i>"He didn't respond to my email. I know he hates me."</i></p>	<p>Try the "Rule of 5". Brainstorm five other possible explanations or ways of viewing the situation. You can count them off on your hand.</p>
<i>Emotional Reasoning</i>	<p>You believe what you feel is automatically true.</p> <p><i>"I feel sad, so I must be a bore to be around."</i></p>	<p>Set a timer for 90 seconds, and picture the uncomfortable emotion floating away. Research shows that that's all the time you need for an intense emotions to pass.</p>
<i>Should Statements</i>	<p>You attach yourself to a certain outcome or expectation about how things should be.</p> <p><i>"I should be better at this by now."</i></p>	<p>Question whose expectations you're trying to live up to. Is it the voice of a parent? Your boss? Then create a more accurate statement based on what you want to do or be.</p>
<i>Personalization</i>	<p>You assume responsibility for things that are beyond your control, and the happiness of those around you.</p> <p><i>"The project failed because I didn't spend enough time on it."</i></p>	<p>Be gentle with yourself when you make mistakes. Self-criticism doesn't motivate, self-compassion does. List what is truly within your control and what isn't.</p>
<i>Double standard</i>	<p>You hold yourself to a higher standard than everyone else.</p> <p><i>"It's okay if you don't show up, but I have to be there on time."</i></p>	<p>Drop perfectionism, and consider options that feel fun and effective. Treat yourself with the respect you give others. Speak up for your needs, don't let others off the hook.</p>

Name it and Reframe it Cheatsheet

1	DESCRIBE THE SITUATION YOU'RE IN.
2	WRITE DOWN THE UNCENSORED VERSION OF YOUR THOUGHTS.
3	MAP YOUR THOUGHTS TO A COGNITIVE DISTORTION.
4	LOOK FOR EVIDENCE THAT SUPPORT YOUR THOUGHTS.
5	LOOK FOR EVIDENCE THAT GOES AGAINST YOUR THOUGHTS.
6	WRITE DOWN NEW, BALANCED THOUGHTS.
7	ACKNOWLEDGE HOW THE NEW THOUGHTS MAKE YOU FEEL.

Self-Coaching Questions Cheatsheet

- How realistic or helpful is this thought on a scale of 1 to 10? (1 being not at all, 10 being completely)
- Where am I making assumptions or overgeneralizing?
- What can I tell myself to reassure my inner critic that I've got this?
- How can I focus on solutions, not problems?
- What can I learn from this?
- What thought would get me closer to my goals?
- What if everything does work out?
- Does this sound like something a good coach would say to help motivate me?
- What would 80-year-old me advise me to think today, in the present?



*There is a solution within every problem.
However, you can't solve a problem with the
same mind that created the problem.*

ALBERT EINSTEIN

Know this: You're not alone.

While having this strategy in your back pocket will be helpful, you might still be wondering why you have all those negative thoughts to begin with.

"Why is my inner critic so loud when everyone else seems so confident?"

"Why do I always put so much pressure on myself to succeed?"

"Why can't I just get it together like everyone else in the office?"

Over the last eight years in my coaching practice, I've worked with hundreds of clients who were haunted by these same worries and concerns.

They're top performers, managers, leaders, and CEOs at the world's biggest companies, including Google, Facebook, IBM, and more. And regardless of their title, industry or experience, they all have one thing in common:

They're what I call Sensitive Strivers.

What is a Sensitive Striver?

Sensitive Strivers are high-achievers who think and feel everything more deeply.

They're driven to succeed and often rise quickly in their careers. But because they process information more deeply than others, they're more susceptible to stress, emotional overwhelm, and overthinking.

This combination of sensitivity and ambition can be tricky to master, but also makes you a powerhouse performer. Research proves it: managers consistently rate people with higher sensitivity as their top contributors.



Sensitive Striving can manifest in many ways, but it's easiest to think about in terms of six core qualities that form the acronym STRIVE:

S

SENSITIVITY

You process information more deeply than others. This means you're perceptive, but also that you have a heightened response to what's happening within and around you.

T

THOUGHTFULNESS

You carefully ponder situations, considering all possible angles and options. Seeing nuance makes you original and creative, but can also lead to overthinking, worrying, indecision, and doubt.

R

RESPONSIBILITY

People trust you and look to you for support. Hard-working (perhaps to a fault), you have a tendency to uphold your commitments, and can't bear to let people down.

I

INNER DRIVE

You have a strong drive to be the best version of yourself, professionally and personally. You devote substantial energy to your pursuits, but sometimes, set unrealistically high bars for success.

V

VIGILANCE

You're aware of subtleties in your environment, and responsive to people's needs, which can be draining at times. You may read too much into criticism, for example.

E

EMOTIONALITY

Sincere and empathetic, you feel things deeply. You experience the richness of positive emotions like joy and gratitude. But can also get stuck in fear, anxiety, and anger more intensely.



Think of your STRIVE qualities like dials on a stereo.

If dialed up too high, the sound is deafening and debilitating.

Your STRIVE qualities work the same way: when turned up too high, they can thwart you.

For example, your tendency to get stuck with negative thoughts is a sign that your qualities of Vigilance and Thoughtfulness need calibration.

When these two qualities are balanced, your negative thinking patterns shift towards *deep thinking*, a Sensitive Striver strength associated with higher levels of certainty, creative and strategic thinking, and competence.

That's just one of the many strengths Sensitive Strivers bring to the table when their STRIVE qualities are well-balanced.



Thriving at work as a Sensitive Striver

Many of my coaching clients come to me thinking they are somehow broken.

But as we work together, they realize their challenges don't come from inadequacy. They come from misapplying their core qualities and built-in sensitivities in the workplace.

Being a Sensitive Striver can be an incredible professional advantage, if you learn to create balance among your STRIVE qualities.

That's the very heart of my private coaching program, which has helped hundreds of sensitive, high-achievers regain their confidence, control, and joy at work.

[LEARN MORE ABOUT PRIVATE COACHING](#)

You can, and will, enjoy success without stress.

I'm here to help you get there!



“

Life is tough my darling, but so are you.

STEPHANIE BENNETT HENRY

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