



MOVING FROM
DESTRUCTIVE TO PRODUCTIVE
THINKING

By Beth L. Buelow, CPC

www.BethBuelow.com

Special Sneak Peek Excerpt!

Beth Buelow, CPC

About Beth Buelow



As a Personal Coach, Speaker and Writer, Beth's purpose is to partner with people who aspire to live a more intentional life. Her passion is supporting individuals as they move from scarcity and fear to prosperity and choice.

www.BethBuelow.com

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More Information: To learn about Beth's coaching services, presentation topics and interactive workshops, visit www.BethBuelow.com, e-mail beth@intentionaltalk.com or call 253.617.0779

Introduction

“The inner speech, your thoughts, can cause you to be rich or poor, loved or unloved, happy or unhappy, attractive or unattractive, powerful or weak.”

~Ralph Charell, American Author

Think back to a major turning point in your life. Do you remember what you were thinking at the time? In 1993, four little words – “I don’t belong here” – changed the course of my life in ways that I could not have foreseen. Up until then, I had been on track to become a professional musician, and all evidence pointed towards a satisfying career. And in one moment, sitting in a recital hall listening to a peer before classes started for our Masters degree program, all of that evidence meant nothing. I didn’t realize it until years later that I had allowed a self-sabotaging thought take over my mind and lay the foundation for the year that followed. Lesson #1: negative thoughts are powerful, and they’re not true.

My attempt to “snap out of it” included practicing and studying even more, motivated by thoughts of “I’m not good enough, I need to be better.” In other words, I was motivated by fear, which brought with it depression and self-doubt. I finished the degree program, and sooner than halfway through it, I knew I was not going to pursue music as my career. Lesson #2: fear as a motivator is not effective.

The next 14 years were spent shifting gears, getting a Masters degree in Arts Administration and working for a wide variety of nonprofits doing fundraising, marketing and grantmaking. My journey led to increased confidence as I found my individual voice and experienced success. A cross-country move in 2007 – from the Midwest to the West Coast – prompted a job search that turned in a soul search. My soul led me to coaching. My experience, expertise and passion has turned into a calling to support others as they recognize and reframe the language choices that have kept them in reverse for far too long.

You speak between 2,000 and 20,000 words per day, depending on which research studies you read. Add to that the countless words that pass through your mind every day, ranging from “what should I make for dinner?” to “I should lose weight,” to “I can’t believe I made the same mistake AGAIN!” and “I give up!”

Here’s the good news: you have a choice about every single thought that’s in your mind. And while some thoughts seem to pop up without consciously summoning them (my “I don’t belong here” falls into that category), there’s still a choice about how you respond to those thoughts.

So of the thousands of words you think and say every day, how many are driving you forward and getting you the results you want? How many are throwing you into reverse and away from your core values, daily goals and long-term desires? How many serve you, and how many sabotage you?

Intentional talk lays the foundation for positive transformation. How you express your beliefs and values – to yourself and to the world – creates a reality that can be full of grace, ease and joy, or one that casts you as a victim, fearful and trapped.

What do you want as your reality?

It's completely up to you. And as we move through an exploration of the various types of self-talk (which I'm calling "chatter"), you will begin to see how you can easily shift your relationship with the chatter into one that is productive, not destructive. Here's an overview of what we're going to cover:

Part 1

1. **What's the Chatter?** Our Chatterbox is with us, 24/7, and it can take us in reverse, neutral or drive. We'll examine each type, with special attention paid to the reverse chatter: assumptions, limiting beliefs, negative framing, lack of choice/victim, self-deprecation, conditional
2. **What's the Chatter Matter?** What happens in our minds manifests in the world. This affects our sense of self, relationships, career and health in profound ways.
3. **The Choice about Chatter:** We have a choice about the Chatterbox; each of the types of chatter has an opposite supportive thought that is more energizing and empowering.

Part 2

4. **Mind Over Chatter:** With patience, practice and using the power that's already in your mind, you can alter your chatter patterns and rewire your thinking.

Part 3

5. **Your 5-Step "Mind Over Chatter" Action Plan:** Awareness, Observation, Curiosity, Reframe, Repeat

Part 1

What's the Chatter?

To utter in a rapid, usually thoughtless way; to talk foolishly without stopping; noisy talk; click repeatedly or uncontrollably; talk socially without exchanging too much information; speak (about unimportant matters) rapidly and incessantly; make noise as if chattering away.

~American Heritage Dictionary

The above definition highlights the reason I'm choosing to call self-talk "chatter." It captures the often unintentional nature of our thoughts, the way we repeat ourselves constantly, replay conversations, and forget to still our minds and invite in silence. Our thoughts are noisy, blocking out the sensory experience of the present moment. Most of the statements and questions only serve to judge our situation, our choices and our abilities. We spend too much time thinking without an awareness of what we're *really* telling ourselves. Our thoughts are dominated by old tape loops about our abilities ("I'm too slow for tennis" or "I'm not sure I can do it"); societal norms that tell us what we should and shouldn't do ("You should want to have children" or "You shouldn't take so much time for yourself"); and a persistent voice that's providing excuses for us to stay in our familiar comfort zones ("It'll change everything if I quit this job" or "I don't deserve a second chance with her anyway").

The undeniable truth: our Chatterbox is with us, 24/7, and it's a powerful presence. It has the ability to move us forward or hold us back. Some of the chatter is stream-of-consciousness thinking that simply distracts us or causes us temporary stress: "I have to pick up milk" and "where are my daggone keys?!?" are examples of the everyday chatter that is part of the ongoing conversation we have with ourselves. There is also the chatter that helps us to process through situations and evaluate what's happening in our lives. I spend a lot of my chatter time replaying conversations that happened earlier, composing responses in my head and thinking forward to anticipated interactions and confrontations.

Remove the processing time and the random and circumstantial thoughts, and what remains is the chatter that we want to focus on in order to shift our relationship with our thoughts. When our chatter is holding us back, it thinks it's protecting us from taking risks, from changing, or doing something that might expose us to failure. It is really an expression of fear. Our thoughts usually have something to do with whatever did or didn't happen yesterday, and whatever may or may not happen tomorrow.

Even courageous, "fearless" people have a Chatterbox and experience fear on the road to success. What separates them from those who become tripped up by the chatter in their way?

The difference lies in how they choose to view the situation. They make the choice to channel that energy of the chatter into action.

Shifting our view is not as easy as saying “Well, I just won’t think that way anymore.” Some people who are impatient with the chatter may think they can simply flip a switch and positive-think their way out of it. “Just turn that frown upside down!”

The good news is that “I just won’t think that way anymore” represents an acknowledgment of choice, which is the critical first step. Now the real, life-changing work can begin.

You can choose to move through awareness to observation and curiosity, investing intentional time and energy into moving into the driver’s seat of your mind.

Through my work with coaching clients, I’ve experienced the power and clarity that comes when we’re able to pull the fearful thoughts out of the darkness and into the light, where they rarely stand up to scrutiny. The truth about your fearful Chatterbox thoughts? They want to be heard; they think they are keeping you safe from failure! Giving them a voice is not about focusing on fear and negativity; it’s about putting fear in its proper place so you can focus on building your strengths. And with that awareness, you can make the intentional choice to replace the chatter in your brain with affirmative, nurturing thoughts.

One of the challenges with chatter is that we tend to label it “good” or “bad,” “positive” or “negative.” This puts us in a position to think that we have to get rid of the bad and only have the good.

I prefer to think of chatter in terms of what it does to our lives. The metaphor of driving a car seems most appropriate: there are gears we can shift into that move us in reverse, keep us in neutral or drive us forward. The car needs all three modes to fully function. A car that only went in reverse would be dangerous and unstable. Staying in neutral would not get you anywhere at all. Driving in forward all the time would not provide you with diverse prospective, needed rests, time to process or a full sense of the journey. There are reasons each gear exists; all serve a purpose that enable us to get where we want to go.



The Mind Over Chatter process places an emphasis on recognizing when we’re in each state, how to come to a place of choice and how to move into a more productive ratio of Reverse, Neutral and Driving thoughts. After all, think about when you actually are driving your car. My guess is that you spend about 80% of your time in Drive, 15% in Neutral or idling and 5% in Reverse – what if your thoughts adopted the same ratio!?

The ratio of Drive, Neutral and Reverse in our chatter is probably nothing like our cars; perhaps closer to 30% Drive, 35% Neutral and 45% Reverse. When we hear the chatter, sometimes loudly, sometimes as white noise, are we really paying attention to the energy the chatter brings? The purpose of shining the light on the chatter is to become fully aware of what it is saying, where it’s coming from and what information it provides us. Only then can we

consciously shift gears and spend most of our time moving forward in Drive. And once we decide to spend more time in Drive, we can make another choice to kick things into high gear!

Here is a summary of the primary types of chatter that keep us in reverse:

Chatter Type	“Reverse” Red-Flag Words	Examples
Assumptions	probably, always, never	“It’s going to be difficult” “I need a degree to do that” “We can’t afford that” “I won’t like it” “We’d never get along” “He probably hates me” “Others will get hurt if I...” “No one will help me” “Everyone will think it’s a silly idea”
Limiting Beliefs	I’m not... I’m too...	“I’m not smart enough” “I’m too old” “I’m too fat” “I’m only good at this one thing” “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks” “I can either have this, or that, and not both” “It’s too late for me”
Negative Framing	don’t want	“I don’t want to be stressed out” “I’m tired of being overweight” “I’m afraid of becoming poor” “What if they don’t get it?” “No one will probably read it” “I will never give up”
Lack of Choice/Victim	should, have to, must, supposed to	“There’s nothing else I can do” “It’s not my fault” “He made me do it” “It’s just the way I am” “I have to do this” “I should do what they say”
Self-Deprecation	just, only, don’t know	“I don’t know about this, but” “This may be wrong/stupid/crazy, but” “I’m only a secretary” “I’ve just got a bachelor’s degree” “I don’t have a degree in this, but...” “It’s only my opinion, but...” “I probably did this wrong” “I’m not an expert” “I’m not the brightest bulb in the pack” “Who am I to think/say/do...?”
Conditional	once, when, if, until	“I’ll be happy when...” “Once this is over, then I’ll be...” “When the kids leave, then I can do what I want” “If she’d just listen to me, everything would be OK”

Assumptions

My first job was as a business manager for a small dance company in Milwaukee. I was young and energetic, and as the only full-time employee, I had a lot of responsibility. Most days I held my own, until one particular day, when I made an assumption about the logistics for a meeting, that we “probably” would have everything we needed. That false assumption resulted in a mad scramble and a rough start to the gathering. When I told someone what had happened, he said, “Well, we know what happens when you assume: it makes an “ass” out of “u” and “me.” It was a crude but effective way to make the point that making an assumption is not in anyone’s best interest.

The words “probably,” “always” and “never” are some of the indicators that you may be thinking an assumption. An assumption is a thought that’s not based on factual evidence. When you assume, you’re making a guess. You may be drawing on past experience, which provides a certain amount of information and provides limited, biased evidence. You may also be taking clues from what others have experienced or assumed about a task or situation.

An assumption can be proven true or false through the gathering of factual information. Consider three examples of common assumptions that get in our way:

It’s always difficult to talk to my father/mother/husband/wife.

They’d never forgive me if I...

I probably can’t afford it.



Each of these is based on a past experience that either we’ve had or that someone else has had. For instance, talking with my father may be difficult for my sister, not for me. Yet when I know I’m going to tell him something he may not want to hear (such as that I’ve decided to drop out of college), I remember back to the time my sister told him she wanted to switch schools and the conversation didn’t go so well. The association between her reality and mine is strong, yet not based on my personal experience. So assuming he’s going to react negatively to my news means that I’m going into the conversation with my guard up and ready to be on the defensive. Isn’t that projecting a lot onto something that hasn’t happened yet? The truth is, how he reacts depends on how I present myself and what I believe. If I believe he’s going to be hostile, then he’ll sense that, and there will be an underlying tension and fear. If I believe he’s going to support me because I’m confident in my decision, then I’ll approach it from a place of love and increase the odds that the conversation will be respectful and meaningful.

The “they’d never forgive me” assumption is allowing others control of your decisions. It’s assuming that they will have an adverse response to your behavior, which may or may not be true. The only thing you can control is how you approach the situation. You can decide to come from a place that honors your core values and says “I know what’s best for me, and I’ll share

that truth in the spirit of mutual understanding.” I’d rather assume my family, friends and colleagues are compassionate people, rather than projecting my own fears onto them.

When it comes to money, “I probably can’t afford it” ranks right up there in the Top 20 of reverse self-talk phrases. As TV personality and inventor Ken Hakuta said “Lack of money is no obstacle. Lack of an idea is an obstacle.” The assumption that you can’t afford something, made without further thought, cuts off ideas for how to get whatever it is that you want. The assumption dismisses possibility.

Assumptions can be proven or disproven through honest self-reflection and evidence gathering. Once you have obtained evidence, you can make an informed choice based on reality.

An assumption is an opportunity to become curious.

Let’s take the last example – “I probably can’t afford it” and apply a few key questions to help us gather evidence.

Is that really true?

The truth is, I don’t know (often a sure-fire sign an assumption is on the loose!). It depends on a few things that I don’t have enough information about yet.

What will tell me if it’s true?

I need to know how much it costs, how much money I have, how important it is to me, and if it’s the best way to spend my money.

What choices do I have?

I can get the exact cost, balance my checkbook, check my bank statement, do a cash flow projection and comparison shop. Based on that information, I can decide if it’s my only option; if I can make payments; if I need it right now; if I should save up for it; if there’s a better deal somewhere else; if it’s really important to me; if I want it.



What is the true statement instead of “I probably can’t afford it”?

I need more information before I can decide if I want to buy it.
Based on my resources and interests, I have a choice about what I can afford.
That would be nice to have/experience; I am going to get more information.

Those new true statements empower you, remind you that you have a choice and put you in the driver’s seat. Rather than making the assumption that you don’t have enough money for the fabulous trip or beautiful shoes, choose to use language that reflects your ability to gather information and make an intentional decision.

What are some of the assumptions you've been making? Use these questions as a guideline to process through any reverse thoughts that have been holding you back.

Assumption
Is it really true?
What will tell me if it's true?
What choices do I have?
What is the true statement?

Thank you for reading the first excerpt from "Mind Over Matter:
Moving from Destructive to Productive Thinking."

Visit www.BethBuelow.com for more information about the
publication of the complete book in late 2010.