



Rewiring Your Inner Dialogue to Shape Your Performance

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You have spent years earning the right to stand where you stand. The lessons, the clinics, the horses that humbled you and the ones that taught you more than you ever expected. The early mornings, long days, missed holidays, and countless hours spent helping horses and riders become better versions of themselves.

By any reasonable measure, you are qualified. You are experienced. You are a professional.

Yet even the most accomplished trainers occasionally hear a different message. Before entering the ring, teaching a clinic, riding in front of an audience, or simply facing a challenging day at the barn, a small voice may begin questioning whether you're prepared enough, experienced enough, or good enough.

The interesting thing is that confidence isn't determined by whether those thoughts appear. Confidence is determined by what happens next.

As horse professionals, we understand that performance is influenced by much more than physical skill. Horses remind us of that every day. They respond not only to our aids, but also to our energy, focus, consistency, and confidence. A horse doesn't simply react to what we do. It responds to how we show up.

The same principle applies to us.

The conversation taking place in our minds has a powerful influence on how we perform, how we teach, how we make decisions, and how we lead. When that conversation is supportive and constructive, it can help us perform at our best. When it becomes overly critical or negative, it can quietly undermine even the most capable professional.

The Story You Tell Yourself Matters

Researchers have found that most of us carry on an internal dialogue, or self-talk, at a rate of between 150 and 300 words per minute. That's a relentless, largely unconscious

monologue running in the background of everything you do. Most of it is mundane, routine, and harmless.

Where did I put my spurs?

This horse needs to be more forward.

I should return that call.

The challenge begins when that dialogue turns negative and stays there.

When negative self-talk becomes habitual, it stops being an occasional bad mood and starts becoming a belief system. You begin to construct what psychologists call *limiting beliefs*—fixed ideas about yourself and your abilities that operate below the level of conscious thought. You don't simply decide to believe them. You start to act as if they're true.

You don't enter the show.

You undercharge for your services.

You defer to the clinician even when you know, professionally and instinctively, that you're right.

You make yourself smaller, quieter, and easier to overlook.

Not because you lack talent, experience, or expertise, but because you've accepted a story about yourself that no longer serves you.

The encouraging news is that stories can be rewritten.

Horse trainers may actually be better equipped than most people to understand this concept because we witness the effects of confidence and uncertainty every day. We see horses become more relaxed when they trust their rider. We see students improve when they begin believing in their abilities. We spend our careers helping others develop confidence, yet many of us struggle to ex-

tend the same kindness and encouragement to ourselves.

Somewhere along the way, many professionals develop the habit of speaking to themselves in ways they would never speak to a student, client, or friend.

Imagine a rider coming out of the ring after making a mistake. You wouldn't tell them they were a failure. You wouldn't tell them they didn't belong there. You wouldn't suggest they give up because one ride didn't go as planned.

You would coach them. You would help them learn from the experience. You would remind them of what they did well and what they can improve next time.

The question is: why don't we offer ourselves the same courtesy?

Positive self-talk is not about pretending everything is perfect. It isn't about ignoring mistakes or refusing to acknowledge areas for improvement. It is about replacing unnecessary criticism with constructive coaching.

Instead of saying, *I always mess this up*, try *I'm learning and improving every time I do this*.

Instead of *I'm not ready*, try *I've prepared for this and I'll do my best*.

Instead of *I don't belong here*, try *I've earned the opportunity to be here*.

Those small shifts may seem insignificant, but they can create powerful changes over time.

Changing the Conversation

One of the simplest ways to begin changing your self-talk is to become aware of it. Most of us move through our day without paying much attention to the words running through our minds. Once you begin noticing those patterns, you gain the ability to change them.

Many people find success with a simple technique called thought-stopping. When you catch yourself engaging in negative self-talk, interrupt the thought. Some people say the word “cancel” out loud. Others take a deep breath and consciously replace the thought with something more constructive. The specific method matters less than the interruption itself.

Like any skill, it improves with practice.

After all, horse trainers understand repetition. We don’t expect a horse to master a new concept after a single ride. We understand that learning takes consistency. The same is true for the mind.

For those who want to create deeper and more lasting change, hypnosis can be an effective tool because it works directly with subconscious patterns and beliefs. While many people associate hypnosis with stage performances and entertainment, clinical hypnosis is simply a focused state of attention that allows positive change to occur at a deeper level. It can help individuals identify limiting beliefs and replace them with beliefs that better support their goals and performance.

Whether you choose hypnosis, coaching, journaling, meditation, or intentional self-awareness, the goal is the same: to develop an inner dialogue that supports your success rather than undermines it.

One of my favorite tools involves two simple words: I am.

The statements that follow those words become part of your identity.

I am capable.

I am prepared.

I am learning.

I am resilient.

I am a professional.

In my book *Perfect Enough*, I discuss the importance of the language we use when speaking to ourselves. The words that follow “I am” communicate powerful messages to the subconscious mind. Over time, those messages influence how we think, feel, and behave.

Choose them wisely.

The Professional You’ve Already Become

The horse industry is demanding. The standards are high. We work in a profession where performance is often visible, feedback can be immediate, and perfection can feel like the expectation.

But confidence does not come from being perfect.

Confidence comes from trusting yourself despite imperfections.

Every horse trainer has learned through successes, setbacks, exceptional horses, difficult horses, mentors, students, victories, disappointments, and years of hard-earned experience. Those experiences have shaped the professional you are today.

You have already done the hard work of becoming qualified.

Now give yourself permission to recognize it.

The next time you walk into the barn, stand at the in-gate, step into the ring, or teach a lesson, pay attention to the conversa-

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tion happening in your mind. Ask yourself whether the words you're using are helping you become the professional you want to be.

Because your inner dialogue shapes your performance.

Choose words that strengthen your confidence, support your growth, and reflect the capable professional you've worked so hard to become.

Laura King is a certified hypnotherapist, sports performance coach, and author of Perfect Enough. She works with riders, trainers, athletes, and professionals to help them achieve peak performance through hypnosis and mindset training.

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Laura King is the Director and Founder of Summit Hypnosis and Wellness and is a Certified Hypnotist, NLP Practitioner, Life Coach, and Sports Performance Coach. Laura has written and published several books and workbooks, including "Power To Win" for equestrians and "Perfect Enough," a guide to help you evaluate your perceptions and experiences around vital areas of your life.



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