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IMPROVE YOUR... – SELF-TALK

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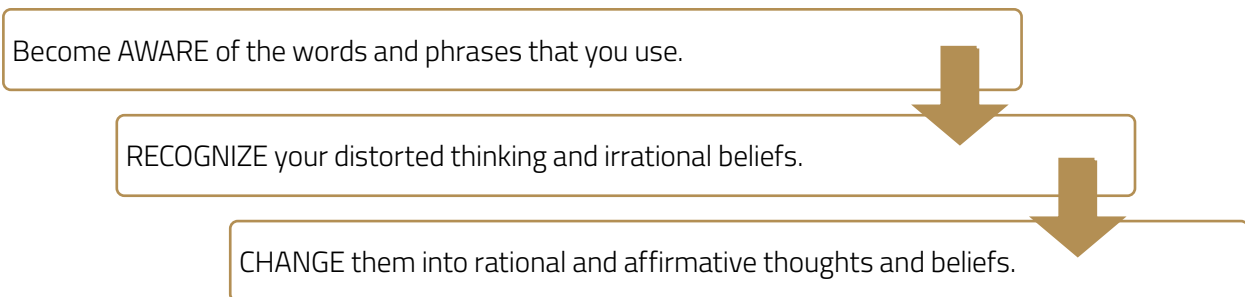
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IMPROVE YOUR... SELF-TALK

When you think about something and have an **internal dialogue in your mind**, you are actually doing self-talk. Thinking about yourself and saying something to yourself is crucial for your performance. Self-talk can sometimes become a self-fulfilling prophecy; either positive or negative. The more you repeat a thought, the more automatic it becomes, and eventually leads to a belief. It is therefore important to control your self-talk in a way of how you think, what you think about and when you will use it.



TRIGGER SITUATIONS FOR NEGATIVE SELF-TALK:

- Missing a call
- Doubtful decision
- Listening to coach and players complaining
- Listening to the crowd
- Losing your concentration
- Bad teamwork between co-officials
- Forgetting a rule
- Forgetting the mechanics and the positioning
- Fatigue and tiredness

Positive self-talk, task-oriented, and encouraging will boost your confidence and performance. Negative self-talk, on the other hand, can hurt your confidence, and cause more anxiety and lead to poor performance.

Using **positive / affirmative self-talk** can help you remain focused on the task and the performance at the present moment – **here and now** (Figure 5).

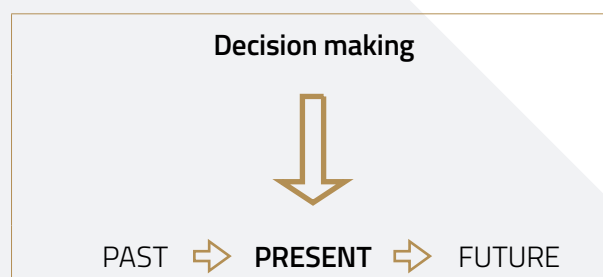


Figure 5. Decision making at the present situation

It is important that you stay focused on the situation “here and now” – the action happening in front of you on the court. That is the time and the place where the decision is made.

Table 4. Non effective self-talk

		THINKING ABOUT		
		NEGATIVE PAST EVENTS	NEGATIVE FUTURE EVENTS	DISTRACTIONS
thoughts	<p>mistakes or bad decisions you had 10 seconds, 2 or 5 minutes ago</p> <p>“How could I do this?”</p> <p>“Why I did not see that contact?”</p> <p>“I made a terrible call!”</p>	<p>what will the consequences be if you do make mistakes</p> <p>“I hope I will not do make a mistake again.” “Will I make it the last two minutes under pressure?”, “What if I blow a big call?”, “What will the observer say after this game?”</p>	<p>thinking about so many things, and paying attention to too many cues, especially the distracting and irrelevant ones</p> <p>crowd, flight time, private life issues</p>	
outcome	<p>anxiety starts to increase, attention starts to narrow and directing too internal</p> <p>and</p> <p>you are not able to concentrated on the present action and you’ll probably not be able to make a proper decision</p>	<p>anxiety starts to increase, attention starts to narrow and directing too internal</p> <p>and</p> <p>you are not able to stay concentrated on the present action and you’ll probably not be able to make a proper decision</p>	<p>Attention starts to spread and becomes too broad-external</p> <p>and</p> <p>you are not able to stay concentrated on the present action and you’ll probably not be able to make a proper decision</p>	





Many people believe that emotions and behaviour are products of a situation in which you perform, but on the contrary, it is your **interpretation of the situation** that determines your mood, emotions and behavior. How you perceive possible consequences of your performance it is essential. If you start to think that you will fail in this game, you will start to feel anxious, and eventually perform under your abilities.

Generally speaking, each situation can be interpreted as a **CHALLENGE** or a **THREAT**.

Perceiving a situation as threat can lead to some physiological and cognitive changes (i.e. increased heart rate, muscle tension, narrow focus of attention, negative thoughts, etc.). Perceiving a situation as a challenge can give you an additional energy burst and shift your attention towards achieving the goal – managing the challenge.

EXAMPLE 1: If you are nominated to the FIBA U19 World Championship and you will officiate the opening game you may perceive the information as a challenge or threat (Table 5).

Table 5. Situation perception – challenging or threatening

SITUATION / EVENT: Nomination for U19 World Championship perceived as:		
THREAT	or	CHALLENGE
<p>THOUGHTS (i.e. "OMG this is so important!", "I cannot make any mistakes!", "What will everyone think if I blow up at the opening game?")</p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p>REACTIONS <i>(emotional, physiological, behavioural)</i></p> <p>Anxiety and fear Self-doubt Confidence loss Increased heart rate and breathing rhythm Choking Narrowed attention</p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p>PERFORMANCE Poor</p>		<p>THOUGHTS (i.e. I earned this nomination due to my great officiating during the last two seasons. I will physically and mentally prepare for this event. I will try to do my best when once there!")</p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p>REACTIONS <i>(emotional, physiological, behavioural)</i></p> <p>Pride Excitement Optimal heart rate and breathing rhythm Calm and ready Confident Proper attention shifting and re-focusing</p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p>PERFORMANCE Good</p>

CHANGING NEGATIVE SELF-TALK TO POSITIVE SELF-TALK

When you become aware of your negative thoughts and inappropriate self-talk, it is important that you change them into positive and affirmative ones (Table 6). You can do this by using a thought stopping and solution mode thinking!

Self-talk should be affirmative in the direction of what you want to do, not what you don't want to do. For example, instead of saying "I don't want to make any mistakes" you should say "I am prepared to do my best.", "I will pay attention to my AoR and be ready for the decision".

Table 6. Changing negative self-talk to positive self-talk.

Negative self-talk	Positive self-talk
That was a terrible call	It can happen to anyone
I will mess up with the mechanics	Search for the best position to see the action
I cannot make any mistake	I am prepared to do my best
If I do a mistake everyone will think that I am a bad referee	I am not in control of others. I am in control of my performance and will concentrate on that
I hate how I feel when he starts to provoke me	Keep calm - take a deep breath and regain control
I can't make any mistake in the last two minutes!	Last two minutes I will keep my concentration at the highest level
I will never be a top referee	I can make it if I set my goals properly, step by step, and continue to work hard.
Nothing is happening at my AoR. When will I make a call?	Wait, be patient, follow the action focus on my AoR!

TRIGGERS

The term trigger indicates a word, action, phrase, or stimulus that reminds you to stay relaxed, calm and focused in a particular situation. Triggers can be something general or something very personal for you that will help you in some particular situations (Table 7). The more the trigger is personalized,

the more effect it will have on your concentration, your task orientation and it will reinforce your performance.

Table 7. Triggers

KEY WORDS AND PHRASES	i.e. relax, calm down, focus, pay attention, move, control, wait, be ready, search, re-focus, etc.
SIGNALS AND SIGNS	i.e. red stop signal, green light, blue arrow, etc.
ACTIONS OR STIMULATIONS	i.e. pinch on a leg, snapping fingers, touch on the belt, eye contact with co-officials, etc.

EXERCISE 1: CONTROLLING SELF-TALK

In order to change negative thoughts into more constructive and positive ones, it is important to:

- Become aware and recognize a negative thought or self-talk (i.e. "This was a bad decision. How could I make such a mistake? I am a really bad referee")
- Stop and interrupt negative thought with a trigger or physical action (i.e. red stop signal, touch the belt, pinch yourself)
- Regain control with 1-2 breaths

Use the affirmative self-talk (i.e. "Ok, this was a bad decision, but for now I will put it in the "pocket", and analyse it after the game. Stay focused on the action in front of you! Search for the best position to make a best possible decision!")

By doing this you will tell yourself that you did make a mistake but you will think about it after the game. Also, you shift your attention to present action and task oriented thinking!

EXERCISE 2: SOLUTION MODE THINKING

For each worry and possible problem situation create a possible solution.

- What is the problem situation? i.e. "Coach A usually starts to provoke me."
- What can I do and how can I properly react? i.e. "I will stay calm and concentrated on the action on the court. If he starts to be too rude, I will give him a warning."

By doing this, you give yourself directions and regain control.

This kind of thinking requires that in any problem situation you set your mind to solution mode. If we start to think that everything is going to be perfect and that there will be no problems during the game, this will not be productive nor effective, as we do not know that for sure, as we cannot predict events. What can we do is to prepare for some problem situations that can usually occur during the game (more about preparation for the game in Chapter 6: Facing stressful & challenging situations).

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