



Implementing Concepts of Self-Coach, Self-Sabotage, and Self-Compassion

I want to share a few concepts that come out of my experience working as a psychologist in private practice for many years. I believe that working on strengthening our internal self-coach, interrupting our self-sabotage behaviors, and developing self-compassion can have a significant impact on our journey. So let's highlight each of these so you can identify some things you can address specific to these concepts.

Inside our minds we have a voice that analyses our efforts and outcomes, and conveys messages to us about ourselves and our abilities and accomplishments. An internal self-coach, so to speak. It is from this self-coach that we receive feedback that can guide our efforts, motivate us, help us believe in ourselves, and ensure us that we can lean on this resource to support us.

Some of you may be familiar with Bobby Knight, a college basketball coach whose outstanding winning record earned him a place in the Hall of Fame. But what some recall more than his winning record, is his behavior and coaching style. He was ultimately fired from a university despite leading his teams to the most Division I wins because of his abusive and severely harsh treatment of his players, opponents, and referees. Without even seeing the footage of his coaching or hearing former players' accounts, you would likely say that no coach should ever abuse his players, --mocking them and screaming obscenities and threats in front of teammates, punching them in the back of their head with his fist, or throwing chairs at them, etc.

Yet, sadly, many of us have kept relying on an internal self-coach that bears some resemblance to this coach. The reality is that few of us actually feel motivated by these tactics. More likely we feel defeated, fearful, and devalued, which do not encourage us to willingly do things that we find challenging. Instead, it is time to terminate this self-coach and develop one who is nurturing and motivating.

Critical Internal Self-Coach

- *highlights insecurities
- *uses negative descriptions for your efforts/qualities
- *reminds you of failed attempts
- *repeats “not good enough” messages
- *tells you that you “can’t”
- *only gives credit for positive outcomes
- *demands perfection

Affirming Internal Self-Coach

- *accepts insecurities and helps reframe them
- *chooses positive ways to describe your efforts/qualities
- *reminds you of successes and progress
- *reminds you of your inherent value
- *explores resources you need so that you “can”
- *finds value in effort, change,
- *embraces progress

So which internal self-coach are you listening to in your daily life? If you aren’t already, it is time to start practicing the affirming self-coach behaviors. Begin by imagining a really good coach who listens to you, cares about you, understands your goals, and is willing to be by your side as you tackle changes in your way of eating and fasting behaviors. When things go well, this coach congratulates you and reminds you of what you have done in making progress. And when things don’t go as well as planned, this coach sits with you and talks you through what happened, what insights or resources you need, and strategizes ways you can feel more successful moving forward. There is no need to continue employing a negative internal self-coach. You deserve to feel valued, trusted, respected, and encouraged!

Self-sabotage is another concept that you can begin working to address in this journey. As you probably are already familiar, self-sabotage refers to our behaviors and thoughts that interfere with us making positive progress toward our conscious intentions and typically lead to a decrease in motivation and drive because we get discouraged when we experience being unsuccessful despite our knowledge. Almost all of us have examples where we self-sabotage. So it is important to understand that we tend to self-sabotage for a few reasons--the behavior change and feedback we are getting about it are incongruent with our self-concept, we have low self-esteem, we have internalized limiting beliefs from the past, we fear the unknown, or have a high need for control which makes changing behaviors challenging. Identifying which of these factors may be leading to your self-sabotaging behavior allows you to then work to replace the problematic behavior with another that is more focused on reaching your goal. You can stop yourself and see what you were thinking right before you consider the sabotage behavior, and then work to replace this thought with one that is more helpful. And this can help you select an alternate behavior that interrupts the sabotage path and instead moves you closer to your desired goal. You can also focus on whether or not a behavior you are considering is consistent with your values and not just your goal. Goals are things like wanting to lose 10 lbs, but values are things like integrity, self-compassion, or trust. You can ask yourself if the decision to engage in this behavior is consistent with your values, or in another way of saying it, who you

want to be. The goal here is to decrease the need to self-sabotage because you are addressing the underlying thoughts and needs that motivate it and instead provide yourself thoughts and behaviors that are congruent with your goals and values.

And lastly, self-compassion is one of my favorite concepts to help us in making significant changes and to improve our inner relationship that drives so much of our behavior. Self-compassion is different from self-esteem--it is not just highlighting positives within yourself. It is actually more treating yourself similar to how you treat others whom you love. It is being warm and understanding toward yourself when you are struggling, just as you would with your child, partner, or best friend. It means that rather than expecting yourself to just ignore your pain or chastising yourself with self-criticism when you have not succeeded or feel inadequate, you recognize that life entails struggles and that we are all imperfect, so you can respond with gentleness and kindness. Making significant changes to how you eat and developing fasting skills, requires a lot of practicing of new behaviors and certainly will provide ample opportunities to not do things perfectly. This is where self-compassion comes in. Being able to accept yourself and your imperfections is key to a greater sense of inner peace rather than the stress and tension of frustration with yourself. Self-compassion also includes the awareness that all humans struggle, suffer, and experience some degree of personal inadequacy. Acknowledging these as part of the shared human experience and not just something that happens to you alone, can prevent the tendency to get angry at yourself or feel isolated in your struggle. Recognizing that everyone in our community struggles at times with their food choices, falls short on their intended fasting plan, or engages in behaviors that they know are problematic, helps you not to feel alone and not to be so hard on yourself. Just as you wouldn't judge someone else in the community as weak or a loser for struggling to complete their fast, you can offer yourself acceptance and support. This can help build momentum and motivation rather than feelings of defeat and self-loathing. You are deserving of compassion. And perhaps you can start incorporating a different take on the old Golden Rule of "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." My self-compassion rule invites you to "Extend kindness and compassion to yourself as you would do unto others."