



REFRAMING NEGATIVE THINKING

“Tell yourself what you want to do...not what you are trying to avoid.” - Brian Cain and Harvey Dorfman

DON'T: By the time kids reach 14 years old they've heard *no* or *don't* around 40,000 times. That's a lot of negative learning. No wonder we learn to talk to ourselves in terms of what we're trying to avoid rather than in terms of what we are trying to achieve. Too often an athlete has the right idea but sends the wrong message. For example, telling yourself “Don't swing at the curveball” is about as effective as saying “Don't think of a white flamingo.” What did you just think of? Likely, a white flamingo. Instead of telling yourself what you're trying to avoid, tell yourself what you do want to do. Turn “don't swing at the curveball” into “look for the fastball.” That gives your body confident direction.

ABC SELF-TALK MODEL: In *Sport Psychology for Coaches* (Burton & Raedeke, 2008) the ABC model of self-talk helps explain the impact of our beliefs on how we think we will perform (and often do perform). The model proposes that every performance situation activates our self-belief system which determines our emotional and behavioral responses to that event. Let's look at an example to help illustrate the model.

Activating Event: A high school showcase that puts you in front of Major League Scouts and college coaches that might be a huge influence on determining your athletic future.

Beliefs about Event: Your interpretation of the situation dictates your emotions and behaviors more than the actual situation itself.

- **Negative Beliefs:** “I don't belong at this showcase. Those other guys are going to be way better than me. I don't even know why I got the invite. I might as well not show up. I'm just going to screw up my chances and they'll write me off. Don't screw this up!”
- **Positive Beliefs:** “What an opportunity! I've prepared for this. I'm ready. Go out there, have fun, stay within yourself and play your game. Even if it's not your best showing there will be plenty of opportunities to get seen by scouts and college coaches. There's no pressure...unless you put it on yourself. Go earn what you've worked hard for and turn some eyes!”

Consequences: Emotional and Behavioral

- **Negative Emotions:** Stress, Anxiety, Doubt, Worry, Fear, Threat, Unmotivated
- **Negative Behaviors:** Tense; nervous, racing mind; out of control; poor body language; trying to do too much, poor decision making
- **Positive Emotions:** Excitement, Challenge, Opportunity, Motivated
- **Positive Behaviors:** Focused; loose; present; confident; big body language; slowed controlled mind; Interpret nerves as readiness

Any event leads to emotional and behavioral responses. It is your beliefs about how you'll perform that lead to whether you respond positively or negatively. By focusing on developing your self-belief you increase the likelihood of being able to reframe negative thought patterns to positive

ones when threatening game or performance situations arise. Reframing takes time and diligent effort but can be the difference maker in how you perform. Your beliefs (thoughts) effect your words and your words effect your performance.

REFRAME YOUR FOCUS: If you pitch well with the bases empty but struggle with runners on, ask yourself what is it about your thinking process that changes? Do you tense up with runners on base and the threat of your ERA going up? If so, by learning to reframe your thought patterns about those situations will help you reframe the words you speak to yourself. There is less pressure in thinking about making a quality pitch than in stopping a runner from scoring. Focus on the thing in your control and you give yourself the best chance of attaining the result you desire. Reframe your thinking to see the situation as there being no men on base. Look at the runners and see them dissolve.

Similarly, if you are a great hitter with no runners on base but struggle with men in scoring position ask yourself what changes in your thinking process when men get on base? Are you more concerned about RBI's or making hard contact? Which one is in your control? Which one relieves pressure vs. which one adds pressure? Again, reframing your words to focus on what you can control gives you the best chance of attaining your desired results. Use your words to reframe what it is you need to do. In this case like, in any other, your job is to see the ball well and hit the ball hard. Keep it simple.

DISTORTED THINKING (Ideas expounded from Burton & Raedeke, 2008)

- Catastrophizing: Thinking the worst case scenario is going to happen consistently. **Reframe:** Ask yourself, "What is the absolute worse thing that could happen?" Although you may not love the answer it at least gives you proper perspective and allows for positive reframe.
- Overgeneralizations: Forming your opinion off of one or two negative events. Example: Making an error in a big situation leads you to believe you choke under pressure. **Reframe:** "I've made that play a thousand times with runners on base. I just didn't this time. My fielding % says I won't be making an error like that for a long time!"
- Blaming: Placing the responsibility of your mistakes and failures onto others through excuses. Softens threat of failure but kills growth. **Reframe:** "I'll accept responsibility for that mistake and I'll grow from it. I'll be a better player for it."
- Mustification: Thinking things must be done a certain way or always go the way you want them to go. **Reframe:** "Not everything has to go my way in order for me to win. I don't have to be at my best in order to be successful today. Control how you respond to what happens to you."
- Polarized Thinking: ALL-OR-NOTHING. No grey area. You are either MVP or worthless. **Reframe:** There are plenty of ways to contribute without being the centerpiece. All performances are both good and bad. Learn from the bad and remember the good.

YOUR TURN: TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR CAREER

In the following table write out some of the negatives you find yourself saying to yourself and how they might impact your emotions (emo) and behaviors (beh). Then reframe them and give the response you desire to achieve.

Negative Thought	Negative Response (emo/beh)	Positive Reframe	Positive Response (emo/beh)
Ex: Don't miss your spot!	Anxious, nervous, confused, timid	Release our front. Pitch it low and away	Confident, aggressive, relaxed, directed

POSITIVE REFRAME: In the following relationships describe the benefits of focusing your thought life on the bold words:

Having an attitude of Optimism vs. Pessimism:

Seeing practices/games/performances as a Challenge vs. Threat:

Repeat Success vs. Defeat Failure:

Focusing on the Process vs. Product (results):

Focusing on what's in your Control vs. Out of your Control:

Separating you vs. your performance self

