

2.5 EQ – taming the inner critic

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One of the most effective ways to minimise the impact of your inner critic's ideas and opinions is to focus on what is 100% true and look for objective evidence.

As a researcher, you would expect that of any proposition you were being asked to support, so you can do the same with your inner critic's propositions.

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How often have you felt this was true? That your imposter or inner critic told you that there was no point in saying something, or sharing an idea or putting yourself forward for something because others already know more than you. It might tell you that you have nothing valuable to offer?

If you believe your inner critic, you wouldn't say anything.

If we think about what is 100% objectively true, we logically know that it is more likely to be the case that our knowledge overlaps with others, but there will always be some knowledge, experience or a perspective that you offer that is unique to you.

If we act on our critic's advice and say or do nothing, we are not creating an opportunity for anyone to learn from us, or for us to learn from them. We are also limiting our learning about the boundaries or extent of our knowledge.

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In all the situations where our inner critic or impostor's voice starts to get loud, there will be some true facts and also some different interpretations and beliefs.

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Let's think of a common example for researchers – presenting our ideas at a meeting. If this is something we are going to do, that is a fact.

Now think of all the perspectives or beliefs we might have about that situation.

Do you tend to have these sorts of beliefs?

We tend to go straight to our inner critic's negative beliefs, which are warning us of a threat.

When this happens, for every belief that your critic has, try to think of at least one positive belief that could be equally true of the same situation. Here are some examples.

If you struggle to think of these, try imagining what your future self, a role model, or someone that you admire might suggest.

When we are gripped by our inner critic, we have a choice: act on their advice or ignore it.

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If you chose to act on the beliefs of your inner critic and avoid a situation or opportunity, think about where that would ultimately lead you...it would leave you feeling safe but would slow or stop you learning and making progress.

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If you chose to act on the more positive beliefs, you would feel more optimistic, and acting on these would always lead you to move forward or learning something... which is the goal of being a researcher.

It's obviously not always as easy to act on these beliefs, and of course, all of the beliefs could be true... but there is only one way to find out, and that is to stretch ourselves out of the comfort zone and take some action and experience the situation.

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Stepping into some of these learning situations is not easy, as it makes us vulnerable to potential criticism, so often we hold off from stepping into these opportunities until we feel ready. If we wait until there is a perfect time, or when we feel perfectly prepared, which is what our inner critic wants, then we get in the way of our learning and creativity.

These quotes, from Dr Brené Brown, are a useful reminder that we have to be willing to make ourselves vulnerable AND imperfect in order to enable innovation, creativity and change.

You might find some of Brené Brown's work useful or inspiring if you are putting off things that make you feel vulnerable. You will find some links to her work in the resources section of these online materials.

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Finally, another time when the impostor or inner critic voice shows up is when good things happen...a belief that our inner critic holds is that these events are just down to luck.

If we believe that our good fortune is simply due to luck, we are dismissing all the hard work we have put in to develop skills, to spend time looking for opportunities, building networks and so on.

But what if you believed that it wasn't because you were lucky? Occasionally there is good timing and good fortune but, more often than not, our successes are because we have done something to earn them.