

The [Professional Learning Hub](#), Griffith University, is proud to present **Positive on Purpose**, a podcast series by Mia O'Brien

Episode 3 – Stories part 2



This podcast outlines strategies for ensuring that YOUR self-talk is enabling, empowering and evidence based. That's the path to making the stories we tell ourselves a potential superpower.

One of the most powerful ways to manage self-talk is to pay close attention to it, unpack it in the cold clear light of *evidence*, and then consciously overwrite our basic self-talk tapes. That's not to say we ignore reality and talk ourselves into impossible ideas or aspirations. Quite the opposite - *we start with reality, and we build our stories around the deliberate intention to be enabled and empowered to live our best lives.*

So when your self talk is in overdrive, the first step is to stop and ask yourself: *how real is all of this?* That stance is enough to cast doubt on the story right up front, and you can then open it up to further questioning with the following 3 step hack – tune in, test it out, and turn it around.

- i) Tune in – tune into the story you're telling yourself; pull out all the key descriptive words, particularly if they're negative. Make them neutral. As in, neither bad nor good; just rewrite the story as a short factual description. Using our scenario, that might sound more like this: *I overlooked the start of the meeting, my presentation is due. I have coffee on my shirt.* Also tune in to the parts of the story that are **not actually real** – back to our scenario, the self talk of our heroine is she saying things like *I'm going to sound stupid, Joe's smirking...he's going to pick holes in my presentation, I'm going to forget the statistical terms etc.* These things haven't actually happened, but she's rehearsing them so hard there's just no mental space available for anything else. SO to recap – tune in, neutralise the descriptors, delete the stuff that isn't real or didn't happen – stick to the facts.
- ii) Test it out – this bit is important. Test out what is real, what you do have evidence of; and test out the emotion you're giving it because chances are that emotion is unwarranted or premature. Back to the scenario:

- a. our heroine is late for the meeting (that bit is real) but is it awful and career breaking? (no not yet, so that's out),
- b. our heroine has coffee on her shirt (that is real) does it matter (well, its not directly related to her ability to give the presentation, so it's not relevant)
- c. Jo is smirking (hmmm, that bit could be real!) but who really knows what that means anyway? Perhaps Jo has indigestion... so not relevant.
- d. our heroine is about to present a report (that part IS real) –
And that's that... there is no other evidence of relevance here.

This step can really change the gravity of a situation, particularly once emotions are neutralised and our focus directed to evidence only. The story our heroine was telling herself starts to lose its negative power – here's what we're left with: She's is late for meeting, is about to give presentation, and has coffee on her shirt. That's it. Suddenly things seem a little more manageable.

Step three makes all the difference:

- iii) Turn it around – we keep it real, but we turn that self talk around because we're committed to being evidence based, enabled and empowered. So from the evidence our heroine can also remind herself of the weeks she's spent meticulously preparing this report; think back to the detailed fact checking she's undertaken, and remind herself that this it has now been six months since she's taken on this role, and this is her third presentation to the committee. All facts, all good evidence; all great ingredients for turning around her self talk to read something more like this: *Okay, I came late to the meeting and I have coffee on my shirt; but I'm so well prepared for this presentation. The summaries went out in advance with the agenda, the graphs illustrating the stats are on the powerpoint, and I know these four milestones like the back of my hand. I can give this presentation confidently and take any questions that I can't answer on notice, that will reflect just how thorough and committed I am to getting this right. Big breath...coffee, hmmm... I'll button up my jacket.*

Everything in this revised story is real and achievable. By tuning in, testing it out and turning it around, our heroine can ditch the negative self talk and tell herself a more empowering story that is more likely to activate her higher order functioning skills – and that's going to greatly improve her chances of delivering a presentation in a confident, coherent and settled frame of mind.

So there it is – self talk and in particular, the stories we tell ourselves, have incredible influence on our lives. To turn that influence into a super power we need to be conscious and intentional about what that story is telling us, weed out the negative and unhelpful commentary, and replace it with statements that are clear eyed, evidence based, and empowering.

Now that kind of attention is in itself a superpower, and requires consistent mindfulness and mental discipline. And that's the topic of our next podcast.

My name is Mia O'Brien, and you can contact me on email via:

mia.obrien@griffith.edu.au. Please join me again on 'Positive on Purpose: no magical thinking required' as we explore the topic *Attention: the key to sustaining positivity, flow and well-being in life*.

References and extended reading:

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