# **Confidence Case Study**

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# Erin Herle

# Master of Sport and Performance Psychology, University of Western States

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Dr. Maryrose Blank, PsyD, CMPC

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1. **What are some guidelines for “Effective Self-Talk” in sport? What do these guidelines say about the cause of Conner's negative attitude and difficulty in dealing with mistakes?**

Self talk is simply the conversations we have with ourselves in our heads. As a mental skill, self-talk is a technique used to monitor the way athletes feel about themselves and how they speak to themselves in terms of motivation and task performance. If positive self-talk is repeated, those thoughts become beliefs (Burton & Raedeke, 2008). Thoughts also become actions as our thoughts influence our behavior. Voluntary actions always have a preceding thought (Vernacchia et al., 1996). Effective self-talk in sport involves understanding the difference between negative self-talk and positive self-talk because each will lead to negative or positive performance outcomes respectively. Positive self-talk involves an optimistic yet objective perspective, a focus on the present moment, see problems as challenges to be overcome and success as repeatable, concentration on the process instead of the outcome, and a separation of performance from self-worth (Burton & Raedeke, 2008).

Because negative self-talk leads to negative emotions, tense muscles, and slowed reactions, it leads to negative performances (Burton & Raedeke, 2008). Conner’s focus on the negative brings more negative experiences which can further affirm failure (Woolsey et al., 2015). Training Conner to change his inner dialogue to positive self-talk would cut the cycle of negativity and allow him to focus on the positive, the present, and the process–elements he seems to be missing. His ability to highlight the mistakes over anything else means he is not thinking positively nor is he concentrating on the present. Rather, his past mistakes are causing future mistakes. Since he is initially resistant to learning about self-talk it would be wise to educate him about the benefits in a way that relates to baseball and high school. Other ways to gain entry to teach him the intervention would be to align oneself with the administration and the coach and other people Conner respects and listens to in order to build trust.

**2. What is the "Critic," and what impact does it have on Conner's attitude and approach to mistakes and adversity? Name at least two types of "distorted thinking" or "irrational beliefs" that may be responsible for Conner's problems. Explain each.**

The critic is the negative voice that attacks and judges. It highlights failures and mistakes, sets perfectionistic standards, and blames you when things go wrong (Burton & Raedeke, 2008). Conner’s own worst enemy is the critic. When he cycles thoughts of flaws and mistakes, the critic is winning and controlling his thought process. The critic is the source of his negative thinking patterns. It can be inferred that Conner is held back by his thinking, rather than his ability to play baseball because his coach said he is the most valuable player on the team.

A type of distorted thinking that may be responsible for Conner’s issues is overgeneralization. When he makes a mistake he perceives it to mean that he is not good at baseball or that he is only capable of mistakes. Coach Tom could help Conner to avoid making sweeping conclusions about his performances based on one mistake or flaw by reminding him of Conner’s skill and previous successes. An irrational belief that Conner may experience is perfectionism. This is the inability to forgive oneself for mistakes and flaws. Conner may be attaching his self-worth too much to his performances as an athlete which causes him to be harder on himself and criticize himself for what he does while in the role of athlete. It would be helpful to remind Conner that mistakes are normal and part of being human. His self-talk should be with excellence in mind rather than perfectionism (Burton & Raedeke, 2008). Burton et al. (2013) note that irrational beliefs tend to be the hardest to counter because they require detection, figuring out why they exist, and a reframing into a more positive and productive way.

**3. Name and explain at least three Positive Self-Talk Statements that could help Conner maintain a more positive and constructive attitude.**

Conner would benefit from self affirmations to aid in turning his negative thoughts into positive self-talk. Affirmations are positive self-statements that help to counter the critic and build confidence. Conner would benefit from reminding himself of his abilities, recalling past successful challenges, appraising situations as challenges instead of threats, and reframing negative thoughts (Burton & Raedeke, 2008). Since Conner is skeptical of self-talk, reminding him that these are things not said aloud might help him be more open to learning and implementing this critical mental training tool (Woolsey et al., 2015).

When Conner’s critic reminds him of his mistakes, he can counter with an affirmation like, “I have the ability to help my team achieve success in many ways” and “My skills bring a lot to the team” to highlight his value rather than focusing on what he might do wrong. When Conner’s negative thought patterns do not allow him to think positively, he can remind himself of the times in his competitive past that he accomplished a difficult task successfully rather than a time he failed. He can say, “I can do this because I have overcome it in the past”. When the pressure hits and Conner is faced with a competitive situation, he can choose to perceive it as a challenge instead of a threat. He can say, “Each problem is an opportunity for excellence”, which can help him overcome the irrational belief of perfectionism by focusing on excellence and doing his best. Lastly, negative thoughts turned into positive thoughts looks like: “I know I have made mistakes in my past but this is a new opportunity to do my best”. In this way, Conner acknowledges what he can control instead of what he cannot–the past.

**4. What is "self-talk reprogramming" and how can it be used to help Conner become a better baseball player? How could Conner re-frame his remaining negative thoughts?**

Self-talk reprogramming is a skill that reframes negative thought patterns with positive thought patterns. To do this, Conner must become aware of his current thought patterns (Burton & Raedeke, 2008). If possible, it would be helpful for Conner to review tape of his successes as well as of his failures. He should recall what he was thinking during those performances and identify which ones were most powerful in aiding or sabotaging his efforts. This will give him the ability to recognize good and bad thinking. Another way he can increase awareness is by counting how many negative thoughts enter his mind during practice. These logs offer evidence or proof of negative thinking. In order to reprogram the thoughts into positive ones Conner should use the positive affirmations noted or cue words that trigger automatic responses and increase success in his task that result in successful performance outcomes. His other negative thoughts outside of being a better baseball player he can apply the same techniques. Like any skill, self-talk must be practiced. Like Malcom Gladwell’s 10,000 hours rule, Dr. Ivan Joseph highlights repetition as the key to implementing a new skill such as self-talk. Persistence is key (Tedx Talks, 2012).

**References**

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