

How to Silence the Internal Self-critic

by: John P. Foppe

My best friend, Neil, has often invited me along on his annual ski vacation to Colorado. I always declined. Not having arms and using my feet as hands, I can't afford to break a leg. Neil wanted me to try

Snow blades—shorter and more maneuverable skis.

In Colorado, Neil wasn't content with my skiing the bunny hill. He thought my instructor was babying me. So he took over the lessons and insisted that I ski a green run away from the distractions of other beginners.

The instructor gave Neil a tether to tie around my body and hold while skiing behind me to control my speed.

I glided down the hill to the left, and he pulled back on the rope. As I slowed, he yelled, "Swing your butt into it and pick up that left foot. Bear down on your right foot!" My body turned right.

My speed increased.

"Head toward those trees! Now swing your butt back. Pick up that right foot."

I tried, but the back of my right ski dug on the snow, and I continued straight. I couldn't turn my body, and I went faster.

Suddenly I skied into a ditch filled with soft, loose snow. I wobbled and fell. Half buried, I laid there on my back with my feet up in the air. Both skis crisscrossed each other like disjointed propeller blades waving uselessly in the air.

As I lay helplessly in the snow, I got angry with myself. "*Neil can't do it for you, John. You need to decide to do this for yourself.*" Deep down, I really did want to

ski. "*I am going to do it!*" I resolved.

Neil looked down at me like disgruntled schoolmarm. "Get up, you're embarrassing yourself."

Maneuvering through each turn with great effort, we slowly continued down the path. Under my snow suit, my body was drenched with sweat. My feet hurt. I was thirsty. Then, the path opened up into a wide open basin of virgin snow.

"Welcome to Glitter Gulch!" Neil said.

He untied the tether and said, "You can ski up those high banks and let them slow you down."

Swallowing hard and remembering my snow bound commitment; I scooted forward and slid down the incline. Glitter Gulch was a fantastic clearing for learning. The path gently flowed through a grove of frosted pine trees like a wedding veil through a bride's curls.

With the combination of bending down and swinging my butt and picking up the outside foot and digging it back in again, I was able to make graceful turns. Back and forth, I arced across the gulch.

"I am actually skiing!"

Today, I am extremely thankful Neil pushed me. Wouldn't it be wonderful to always have a friend right behind you to give you that extra push? Life doesn't work that way.

Ultimately, you have to push yourself—which requires being true to yourself. When you give into fear, you're selling out. When you walk away from something you know to be important, deep

down there's a gnawing unresolved feeling.

All of us have some sort of internal voice chattering away constantly telling us what is and isn't possible. How do you silence this internal critic?

You can't simply ignore the self-talk. You have to focus on the goal. Vincent Van Gogh once said, "If you hear a voice within you say, 'You cannot paint,' then by all means paint and that voice will be silenced."

You may not always be able to silence the voice, but you can change the conversation. Internal messages like "*I'm too tired. It's too complicated. They don't understand,*" are simply considerations of the situation. I try not to allow these assessments to become an excuse. When that voice tempts me to falter, I simply say "*Thank you!*"

"I know I'm tired...Thank you! I know it's hard...Thank you! I could never ski...Thank you!" Like Van Gogh, I simply proceed. By telling that voice, "Thank you!" you are not giving the doubt itself power. You don't waste time and energy arguing with yourself. You don't beat yourself up or deny your instincts. Today, I wonder how much sooner I would have skied if I hadn't listened to my fears initially?

I've trekked down some of the most beautiful avenues in the world: Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington D.C., Champs-Élysées in Paris, and Las Ramblas in Barcelona. But, that Rocky Mountain ski run created the most spectacular avenue I had ever traveled.

John Foppe advises, speaks, and writes about how to maintain momentum when executing initiatives. For information, go to www.visionaryvelocity.com.

