

## Self-Leadership Challenge #8: How Your Thoughts Impact Success

When Victoria showed up for her executive coaching session with me, she looked forward to focusing on three behaviors that she had identified as holding her back in her career progression. Here's what she had written down:

1. I need to speak up more in meetings, particularly with senior leaders.
2. I need to stand up to pushy clients.
3. I need to become more comfortable promoting myself to top management.

But during our session together, it quickly became clear that the issue for Victoria wasn't necessarily these behaviors. Instead, it was her underlying *mind management* driving those limiting behaviors.

It isn't unusual for a potential [coaching client](#) to show up for a trial session with a change-in-behavior objective, and then realize that their *thoughts* are actually at the heart of the challenge.

In Victoria's case, through our discussion, she discovered that she had been quietly talking herself out of embracing the very behaviors she wanted to embody. She had been listening to that little voice inside her head that says, "If I speak up, I'll probably be wrong and make a fool of myself." Or: "Even if I don't agree with a client, I don't want to rock the boat, so I just go along with it." Or: "I've never been any good at [self-promotion](#), so my chances of getting anywhere in this job are slim."

Does Victoria's dilemma ring true for you, too? These kinds of limiting thoughts can pass through your mind so quickly that you don't even consciously realize it. But these thoughts are incredibly powerful and can have a dramatic effect, causing you to postpone actions and make all sorts of excuses for not initiating positive change.

What's at the heart of it all? One of the worst enemies of [self-leadership](#) is a *fear of failure*, and it plagues even the most high-ranking executives.

Here's another example: Sarah is a woman who helped start up a successful high-tech company. Previously a strong individual, full of energy and excitement, she and her fellow leaders grew the company from a dozen employees to a thriving organization of several hundred.

By that time, Sarah had become a mother, with one child already born and a second one on the way. She found herself struggling to balance the demands of work and home and realized that her family was getting the short end of the stick. So, after serious consideration, she decided to leave the work world for a few years to focus on raising her kids. Those "few years" turned into more than 10 years of being out of the corporate environment.

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That’s when Sarah arrived at my office for coaching. “I thought I could just pick up my career where I left off,” she said, “but I realize I was being naïve. What was I thinking?”

She then proceeded to tell me about how she was certain she had completely blown her recent interview for a new position. “You won’t believe what I said, Brenda,” she told me. “What an idiot! How stupid can I be? Some of the answers I gave to questions were ridiculous, the more I think about them.”

I looked at her and quickly changed my demeanor. “I can’t believe you did that either, Sarah! What *were* you thinking? You really are an idiot, you know that? How stupid can you be! Your answers were completely ridiculous!”

Sarah looked at me with shock on her face, clearly taken aback by my words. But it only took her a moment to understand my purpose. When I saw the recognition register on her face, I returned to my normal tone of voice and asked, “Now, if I were your boss, Sarah, and I spoke to you that way, would you work for me?”

“No!” she said, “Of course, not! That would be the worst boss in the world!”

I responded, “But, all I did was mirror back to you exactly what you’ve been saying to yourself. My point is: You *have* been listening to the worst boss in the world—and it’s that nasty little voice in your head.”

## The Power of That Nasty Little Voice

When it comes to mind management—a foundational element of self-leadership—it’s absolutely critical to watch the little voice inside your head ... like a *hawk*. Many executives deal with the same problem, so much so that author Seth Godin even wrote a blog post about this very issue called, “[The World’s Worst Boss](#).”

If you think about it, that inner voice is the one that talks to you the most (no matter how chatty your spouse or others in your life might be). So, it’s fundamental to pay attention in order to get clear about what that voice is saying to you morning, noon, and night. Simply by paying attention, you can bring these thoughts to the surface and change the dialogue you have with yourself.

Remember: That voice has no right to treat you in a way that you wouldn’t allow others to treat you. It’s your choice which voice in your head you listen to—the one that tells you that you *are* ready to handle any job/challenge that comes your way ... or the one that will defeat you.

Great self-leaders recognize the power of their thoughts. How will you begin to change your inner dialogue today?

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*Do you want to strengthen your self-leadership skills? Check out my latest book, [Leading YOU™: The Power of Self-Leadership to Build Your Executive Brand and Drive Career Success](#), where I share dozens of tips, tools, and techniques to help you rise to the top in your career.*

**Brenda S. Bence** is an internationally-recognized branding expert, Certified Executive Coach, Certified Speaking Professional, and the author of several award-winning books, including *Would YOU Want to Work for YOU™?*, *Master the Brand Called YOU™*, and *Smarter Branding Without Breaking the Bank*.



In one of her recently released books, *Leading YOU™: The power of Self-Leadership to build your executive brand and drive career success*, Brenda brings her many years of transformational coaching successes, insights, examples, and real-world stories to the rewarding task of helping leaders reach their full potential.

After earning her MBA from Harvard, Brenda spent the bulk of her career as an executive in *Fortune* 100 multinationals, building brands across dozens of countries spanning four continents. Now, as President of her own company, Brand Development Associates International, she travels the world speaking, training, and coaching individuals and companies to greater success through creative, yet practical, personal and corporate brand and leadership development. Visit [www.BrendaBence.com](http://www.BrendaBence.com).

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