

# BEAT THAT NEGATIVE VOICE



Everyone struggles with self-doubt. Two-time Winter Olympian Jeremy Rolleston explains how to silence that little voice in your head

**H**erb Elliott won the 1500 metres at the 1960 Rome Olympics in world-record time. While doing so, he recalls hearing an unexpected voice – I call it the "little voice".

"We got to the halfway mark, and I still remember the finish line going under my feet and thinking, 'Two laps to go'," Elliott says. "This was the moment when I would kick as per my pre-race plan. I would have thought at that moment I'd hear a voice saying, 'This is your moment! Show them what you're made of!'"

"And a voice did come into my head, but it said, 'Herb, you're bugged! Stay where you are and wait until the bell goes. You've still got plenty of time to win.'"

Instead of positive messages, Elliott heard negative messages from the little voice inside his head – the cool, logical voice that talks to every one of us. It surprised him – there in the middle of the Olympic final.

"As a kid, I thought if you trained hard over a long period of time, eventually that voice would go away," Elliott says. "That was proof to me that it never leaves us. It's always there; it's always looking for the easy way to do things."

## **Inner doubts**

Even champions have to confront this inner voice. You can always rationalise it and give in. And no-one except you will know.

In my own sporting career, as well as in other areas of my life, I know this to be true. And I hear this little voice in four main forms.

+ **Doubt.** The little voice that is negative. It tells you that you can't or shouldn't do it and gives reasons why. It tells you no-one's ever done what you're trying to do, so why try? It tells you that you don't have the experience to achieve your goal.

+ **Excuses.** The little voice that gives you those excuses that are so easy to accept. It tells you, "Sleep in; you're tired. You can do it tomorrow." That little compromise you think is negligible is in fact huge.

+ **Pressure.** The little voice that shouts loudly in the middle of pain and stress, telling you, "It's too hard. Stop now and it will be over."

+ **Fear.** The little voice that speaks to your fears and inadequacies, trying to make you shrink back rather than move forward.

If we want to achieve our dreams, we have to learn to conquer the little voice. Every day, we have to take control of our thoughts and feelings so they don't hold us back from doing the things we want to do.

## **Taking control**

There is no magic formula for conquering the little voice. It will always be a struggle. You build a foundation of mental toughness over time. But the good news is you can do it, just as Elliott learnt to do.

"In my training, I had practised over and over again, ignoring the voice, so it was impossible for me to give into it. Instinctively, I just kept going and won. But it was a moment of choice," he says.

As athletes, we learn tools and techniques to help us win in these moments. We call them circuit breakers – ways to stop the negative thoughts and replace them with positive thoughts or emotions. With practise, you'll get better at it, and the skill is useful in all areas of life.

+ **Stop.** When a negative thought comes into your head, say in your head or out loud, "Stop!" You'll be surprised how quickly this interrupts your negative thought. Replace it with a more positive thought.

+ **Rewind and play back.** When you have negative thoughts or do something that has a negative impact, visualise the thought or action as though you are watching it on a DVD. See yourself press the "stop" button. Then see yourself rewind to the start of the thought or action. Play it back, but now do it perfectly. This will take only a couple of seconds in your mind.

+ **Use the word "but".** When you feel yourself thinking negatively about yourself, use the word "but" and point out the positive aspects. For example, say, "I'm lousy at this job – but I can improve." You'll break the negative circuit in your brain and finish with the positive thought, which you'll reinforce.

+ **Pinch yourself.** When a negative thought comes into your head, pinch yourself. As with the other techniques, it interrupts the negative thought pattern and replaces it with a positive one. **b**

+ **A Life That Counts (Rollo Publishing/Scribo, \$29.95) by Jeremy Rolleston is out now.**