

# THE ENQUIRY

*an* EXCERPT *from*

*Love Your  
Negative Self-Talk*

PRACTICAL WAYS *to turn your* MOST VICIOUS CRITIC  
*into your* MOST VALUED COLLABORATOR

ROBERT MCFADDEN



All identifying details, including names, have been changed except those of the author and his family. This book is not intended as a substitute for advice from a trained professional.

First published in 2017 by  
Next Step Life Coaching  
121 avenue Laurier west  
Montreal, Canada H2T 2N6  
*www.NextStepLC.com*

Copyright © 2017 Robert McFadden

All rights reserved under international and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. No part of this document may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review.

Canadian Intellectual Property Office Registration Number  
1140998

ISBN-13: 978-1548369132

ISBN-10: 1548369136

cover illustration and book design by Tegan McFadden  
edited by Minda Bernstein, Patrick McDonagh  
photography by Minda Bernstein

The Pomodoro Technique® is a registered trademark by Francesco Cirillo. This book is not affiliated with, associated with, or endorsed by the Pomodoro Technique or Francesco Cirillo.

## ~ INTRODUCTION ~

*“What’s wrong?”*

*“What do you need?”*

*“How can I help?”*

Specific answers to these three questions help us turn difficult situations into desired solutions. They provide the initial building blocks for creating a long-term collaboration with self-talk. A relationship based on understanding, respect and trust.

The initial aim of these questions is simple. First, we want to find out about the source of the problem. What's wrong? What's in the way? What's the mud puddle? Next, we want to find out what solution will fix this problem. What change is needed? What's missing? What's the desired outcome? And finally, we want to find out what action we can take to help achieve this desired outcome. What's the first thing that needs doing? How can we help get things going? What's needed from us?

With each question, we listen to make sure we have clarity on the issue. What's its source? What's its solution? What's the first thing to do? In the last paragraph I gave some examples of how you might choose to word these three questions. They're just examples of how you can pose these questions to yourself. My words or phrasings may not work for you. You may find them unfamiliar or uncomfortable. If so, I encourage you to find your own versions of these questions. The Enquiry is all about communicating effectively with yourself. In that spirit, choosing whatever language best suits you at each step of

this process matters.

Developing an ongoing practice with The Enquiry is key. Over time you begin to establish credibility with your inner critic. You are no longer reacting from a sense of threat. You are taking an active interest in the challenges these thoughts want addressed. This new approach goes far in reducing the vehemence and vitriol of these thoughts. It may take a week or two. It may take a day. How does this new rapport show up? Emotions subside. Issues becomes more specific. The subject becomes the actual problem, not your character.

## **CONTEXT**

How, when and where you pose these questions is also important. How would you want a close friend to treat you if you went to them for help with a serious difficulty? Chances are, you'd prefer your friend to be energized, attentive and receptive. You'd like them to be available at a reasonable hour of the day. You'd want them to afford you all the time in the world to settle your emotions. To clarify your thoughts. To express yourself fully. And you'd probably prefer to meet in a quiet, private space. A space free from distractions, interruptions and prying eyes.

Productive collaboration with any thought benefits from attending to contextual factors like these. Prioritizing the appropriate time, place and energy goes a long way to assure success.

## **EUREKA!**

The method you use to conduct The Enquiry is another important factor for your success. Mentally running through this process may not be the best approach to get the results you want. Chances are you'll find greater success by sitting down and writing. You can use a pen

## LOVE YOUR NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

and notebook or a digital device. Whichever you prefer. Many of my clients use a dedicated notebook or file. Beyond making The Enquiry a much easier process to follow, this approach also lets them keep track of their conversations and commitments over time. To look back and recognize the progressive developments in their self-talk.

Try approaching your writing as if you were messaging a friend. Begin by writing down the initial thought in exactly the words it came to you. Next, write your version of the first question. Once that's done, leave time for an answer to present itself. This may take patience.

You want a response from the source of the original self-talk. The hidden voice behind the thought. Like Oscar Zoroaster Phadrig Isaac Norman Henkel Emmannuel Ambroise Diggs - the little man behind the curtain in the Wizard of Oz. Forget the bluster and bombast of the original thought. You want to know what's going on behind the curtain.

So no rush. Above all, you do not want to write your conscious interpretation of what the answer should be. "I think this is about that." Your impression of what's at stake only gets in the way - and may spark resentment. Would you like it if your friend asked you what was wrong, then abruptly supplied their own answer? I suspect not.

Your task is to wait for the answer to present itself - just as the original thought did. If no answer comes, let it go. You'll find the answer will surface later, probably when you least expect it. In the shower or walking down the street. After a good night sleep.

The key, as I said at the outset of this book, is to be gentle with yourself. This is a new relationship you're creating. Give yourself time to have your own "Eureka!" moment.



# ~ PRACTICING THE ENQUIRY ~

THIS CHAPTER BEGINS by outlining a simple nine-step model for carrying out The Enquiry. This model is followed with a template version to guide you step-by-step through The Enquiry. This template is followed in turn with an example of how my client Carlo used this template to open up a constructive exchange with what started out as a rather disagreeable bit of self-talk. The chapter wraps up with a debriefing of the results Carlo came up with at each step in his example.

## LOVE YOUR NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

### THE ENQUIRY MODEL

1. Write down your thought in the exact words it came to you.
2. Write down your version of the first question: "What's this about?"
3. Write down in full the first answer that comes in response.
4. Check to ensure this answer is clear about the specific area of your life this thought concerns. If needed, pose further questions. You want to know exactly what issue this answer concerns.
5. Continue this process with your version of the second question, "What do you need?"
6. Once again, check for clarity in the answer you've received and ask follow-up questions as needed.
7. When you have a clear response, move to your version of the third question, "What's the first thing I can do to help?"
8. Record the answer, clarifying as needed.
9. Make a clear, specific commitment to complete the first action step identified. Make sure your commitment fits the thought's requested needs.

## THE ENQUIRY TEMPLATE

This template is provided in the event you find it helpful to get yourself started with the process. The Enquiry is about opening up a means of communicating effectively with yourself. The sooner you can adapt it to your own needs and preferences, the better.

You'll find a downloadable version of this template available at *NegativeSelf-Talk.com*.

1. Write down the self-talk in the exact words it came to you.

**Thought:**

---

---

2. Write down your version of the first question: "What's this about?"

**Question 1:**

---

---

3. Write down in full the first answer that comes in response.

**Answer 1:**

---

---

4. Is this answer clear about the specific area of your life this thought is about? If not, continue with further questions until you know exactly what

## LOVE YOUR NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

issue this is about.

**Question 1a (if needed):**

---

---

**Answer 1a:**

---

---

**Question 1b (if needed):**

---

---

**Answer 1b:**

---

---

5. Write down your version of the second question:  
“What's the desired outcome?”

**Question 2:**

---

---

6. Write down the full answer. Add further questions as needed. You want to know exactly what outcome the self-talk wants.

**Answer 2:**

---

---

**Question 2a (if needed):**

---

---

**Answer 2a:**

---

---

**Question 2b (if needed):**

---

---

**Answer 2b:**

---

---

7. Write down your version of the third question: “What's the first thing I can do to make this happen?”

**Question 3:**

---

---

8. Write down the full answer. Enquire further until you are completely satisfied that you know what to do.

**Answer 3:**

---

---



**Verification:**

---

---

**Answer:**

---

---

## LOVE YOUR NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

### THE ENQUIRY TEMPLATE EXAMPLE

Here's an example of how my client Carlo worked with The Enquiry Template. Hopefully it will help you gain greater insight and familiarize yourself with the process.

1. Write down the self-talk in the exact words it came to you.

**Thought:**

Wow, smart-ass – always the same story! Loser!

---

2. Write down your version of the first question: “What's this about?”

**Question 1:**

What's this about?

---

3. Write down in full the first answer that comes in response.

**Answer 1:**

You don't keep your promises. You never follow up.

---

4. Is this answer clear about the specific area of your life this thought is about? If not, continue with further questions until you know exactly what issue this is about.

**Question 1a (if needed):**

Which promise in particular do you mean?

---

---

**Answer 1a:**

Calling Teresa. Arranging to get together.

---

---

**Question 1b (if needed):**

Are there other broken promises that you're concerned about right now?

---

---

**Answer 1b:**

No.

---

---

5. Write down your version of the second question: "What's the desired outcome?"

**Question 2:**

What's the desired outcome?

---

---

6. Write down the full answer. Add further questions as needed. You want to know exactly what outcome the self-talk wants.

**Answer 2:**

It's your responsibility to make the arrangements.

---

---

## LOVE YOUR NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

### **Question 2a (if needed):**

What do you want me to arrange?

---

---

### **Answer 2a:**

Getting together. Discussing workshop ideas.

---

---

### **Question 2b (if needed):**

What specifically needs to be organized?

---

---

### **Answer 2b:**

A place and date. A time to meet.

---

---

7. Write down your version of the third question: "What's the first thing I can do to make this happen?"

### **Question 3:**

What's the first thing I can do to make this happen?

---

---

8. Write down the full answer. Enquire further until you are completely satisfied that you know what to do.

### **Answer 3:**

Find Teresa's business card and call her.

---

---

**Question 3a (if needed):**

Is there anything else I need to do?

---

---

**Answer 3a:**

Have a couple of suggestions ready and your  
Calendar open.

---

---

**Question 3b (if needed):**

Anything else?

---

---

**Answer 3b:**

That's enough for now.

---

---

9. Make a clear, specific commitment for completing this first step. Verify it fits with the thought's needs.

**Commitment:**

At 2:00 this afternoon I am going check in my  
calendar for 3 possible times I can get together  
with Teresa for 1 hour in the coming week. I will  
then find Teresa's business card and call her  
immediately. I will suggest we can either meet at  
her office, my office, or at a café of her choice. I  
will leave a message to that effect if she's not  
available and check back at 5:00 p.m. if I do not  
hear from her by then. Finally, I will check back in  
with myself at 8:00 a.m. tomorrow morning to  
ensure everything is good.

---

---

## LOVE YOUR NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

**Verification:**

Does that take care of everything to get started?

---

---

**Answer:**

Yes.

---

---

## THE ENQUIRY TEMPLATE EXAMPLE DEBRIEF

Let's take a step-by-step look at the example provided above to review in greater depth Carlo's feedback from The Enquiry.

### **1. Thought:**

*Wow, smart-ass – always the same story! What a loser!*

This thought is a great example of how unresolved thoughts evolve over time to provoke a response. Carlo's example uses all the familiar tricks. Adopting an aggressive vocabulary and emotional tone (“smart-ass”, “loser”). Generalizing and simplifying the problem (“always the same story”). Putting the focus on what Carlo is instead of what needs doing.

### **2. Question 1:**

*What's this about?*

### **3. Answer 1:**

*You don't keep promises. You never follow up.*

Carlo is getting a start on understanding the issue: following up on promises. The aggressive words are gone and tone diminished. The generalizing (“You don't” and “never”) is still there. Some actionable details (“keep promises” and “follow up”) add specificity. This softens the personalizing of the problem somewhat.

### **4. Question 1a:**

*Which promise in particular do you mean?*

## LOVE YOUR NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

### ***Answer 1a:***

*Calling Teresa. Arranging to get together.*

Now Carlo has something specific to work on: “call Teresa to get together.”

### ***Question 1b:***

*Are there other broken promises that you're concerned about right now?*

### ***Answer 1b:***

*No.*

There are two simple issues for Carlo to take care of for now. Call Teresa. Arrange to get together. Notice how the attention-seeking strategy of using emotionally-charged generalized personalization is gone?

Two simple tasks. This is a great time to recognize and accept a basic self-talk fact. The initial aggressive form self-talk takes is usually about grabbing attention. Rarely has it anything to do with the actual issue behind the thought.

### ***5. Question 2:***

*What's the desired outcome?*

### ***6. Answer 2:***

*It's your responsibility to make the arrangements.*

Carlo's thought is shifting over to the role of a personal assistant here. He forgot about an agreement he made with Teresa to get in touch and make arrangements about something. These answers are no longer about Carlo, or how typical this is of his past behavior. They're about taking steps to get something done. Follow-up questions will help clarify the outcome this thought wants.

**Question 2a:**

*What do you want me to arrange?*

**Answer 2a:**

*Getting together. Discussing workshop ideas.*

**Question 2b:**

*What specifically do I need to organize?*

**Answer 2b:**

*A place and date. A time to meet.*

These follow-up answers clarify the need driving this thought. Contact Teresa to set up a place, date and time to discuss workshop ideas.

Carlo has a pretty good idea at this point of what he needs to do. Still, he can jam himself up by trying to think of everything he needs to do. Trying to anticipate all eventualities is the ideal recipe for complicating even the simplest project. Keep it light and simple. Focus on the first immediate thing to get done. Asking the thought for guidance makes this step easier still.

**7. Question 3:**

*What's the first thing I can do to make this happen?*

**8. Answer 3:**

*Find Teresa's business card and call her.*

**Question 3a:**

*Is there anything else I could start with?*

**Answer 3a:**

*Have a couple of suggestions ready and your calendar open.*

**Question 3b:**

*Anything else?*

## LOVE YOUR NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

### ***Answer 3b:***

*That's enough for now.*

These answers cover pretty well everything needed to complete the thought's desired outcome. Contact Teresa to get together and discuss workshop ideas. It remains for Carlo to organize and commit to the specific steps he will take.

### **9. Commitment:**

*At 2:00 this afternoon I am going check in my calendar for 3 possible times I can get together with Teresa for 1 hour in the coming week. I will then find Teresa's business card and call her immediately. I will suggest we can either meet at her office, my office, or at a café of her choice. I will leave a message to that effect if she's not available and check back at 5:00 p.m. if I do not hear from her by then. Finally, I will check back in with myself at 8:00 a.m. tomorrow morning to ensure everything is good.*

Carlo makes his commitment as specific as possible. This ensures he has measurable benchmarks guiding him through to completion. Notice the difference between Carlo's commitment and "Let's see when I can meet Teresa somewhere and let her know." Keeping it specific will help Carlo stay on track.

Great news for Carlo. But what if you have difficulty coming up with your commitment statement? One possible solution is to ask the thought to come up with one for you. Asking something along the line of "what would you like me to commit to doing next?" can give you everything you need to get rolling.

Keep in mind that you'll want to use your commitment as a guideline rather than a hard and fast rule. Let's use Carlo's detailed commitment above as an example. Say that, for some reason, Carlo was unable to check availability times at 2:00 p.m. Setting a new time to check

availability is clearly a more productive step than ditching the complete commitment. Using your commitment as a guideline allows flexibility in your actions and self-assessments. Hard and fast rules are much more likely to frame your actions as successes or failures. To serve as reasons to give up when obstacles arise.

Carlo's decision to set a follow-up appointment with himself was a great idea. This gives him a chance to get final confirmation from the thought. To get sign-off that he's met all desired outcomes, needs and intentions. Setting this follow-up appointment also provides for a moment of recognition. A chance to acknowledge and honor an accomplishment. If Carlo keeps a stash of gold stars anywhere, this sets up the opportunity for him, in time, to break one out.

***Verification:***

*Does that take care of everything to get started?*

***Agreement:***

*Yes.*

If you do not get immediate agreement at this step, continue to ask for help and clarification until you do. Throughout *The Enquiry*, your aim is to leave ownership of the issue with the thought. The thought sets the standards and makes the decisions. Envision your enquiring self as playing Sancho Panza to the thought's Don Quixote. Robin to the thought's Batman. Willow to the thought's Buffy.

It's not your job to provide the answers. Your job is simple. Ask the right questions and do what needs doing next.



# LOVE YOUR NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

About the Author



**Robert McFadden**

*Love Your Negative Self-Talk*

For more than a decade, Robert has coached people to develop their ability in achieving outstanding results through their personal lives, careers and businesses. Robert's clients come from all backgrounds. Professionals in medicine, law, engineering and finance. Entrepreneurs from management consultancies and software development through to the fashion, hospitality and travel industries. Corporate executives and managers. Business owners and venture capitalists. Artists, service providers and freelancers of every stripe, discipline and trade.

Robert comes to coaching with a background in innovative leadership within organizations including Microsoft, Avid Technology and the National Gallery of Canada. Before receiving certification by the International Coach Federation and The Center for Human Relations and Community Studies at Concordia University, Robert completed post-graduate studies at University College London and undergraduate work at the University of Ottawa. An accomplished writer, visual artist and musician, Robert lives in Montreal, Quebec.