



**NEED HELP?**  
CALL 1.877.566.9441

[Seminars](#) | [Corporate Solutions](#) | [Government Solutions](#) | [Events](#) | [Books & Self Study](#) | [Blended Learning](#) | [Membership](#) | [About AMA](#)

 

Members Only > Professional Development

## Welcome Members!

### Areas of Interest

- [Small Business](#)
- [Management](#)
- [Leadership](#)
- [Sales & Marketing](#)
- [Professional Development](#)
- [HR/Training](#)
- [Global Perspectives](#)

### Member Benefits

- [Membership Plans](#)
- [Association Partners](#)
- [Member Resources](#)
- [Self-Assessments](#)
- [Executive Matters Newsletter Archive](#)
- [Member E-Newsletter Archive](#)

### AMA Learning Network

- [AMA Seminars](#)
- [European Seminars](#)
- [Canadian Seminars](#)
- [Books](#)
- [Self-Study](#)
- [e-Learning](#)
- [Research](#)
- [AMA Online Library](#)
- [Ask AMA](#)

# Self-Coaching During Tough Times: Lessons from Sport Psychology

By Rob Fazio

In uncertain times, leaders need to create certainty. Too often executives focus on what they can't control (i.e., the economy) rather than what they can control. Most advice to leaders tends to focus on encouraging them to adapt their style and the way they talk to others. However, what is more important is how executives talk to themselves. Now is the time to shift some energy from coaching everyone else and to start coaching yourself.

We can learn a lot about self-coaching by looking at the strategies elite athletes use to maintain their mental toughness in the face of adversity and losing. Self-coaching is one skill that separates those people who "want the ball" during turbulent times from those who "drop the ball" when things get tough.

What happens on the golf course, football field, or tennis court is a microcosm of what happens in life. Sport can be our greatest teacher of how to manage the impact of the financial crisis. You may have lost a promotion, you may have lost money, but you have not lost your ability to choose the right club and take another shot. The best athletes and executives have an internal ability to coach themselves. They are aware of their inner conversation (what they say to themselves) and master the skill of willfully changing their thoughts.

## What is Self-Coaching?

This skill is about becoming aware of what you say to yourself. Most people don't realize how much their inner voice affects them. If you want to tune in to your psyche, try this exercise: Each evening make a list of any negative thoughts you are having about yourself or your situation. Once you become aware of these attitudes it will be to quash any unnecessary negativity you are creating. You'll be able to turn your negative self-statements into neutral or positive statements.

Often times we are our biggest critic and worst enemy. You can build your confidence and achieve a lot more with a positive outlook and attitude.

## Two Strategies for Self-Coaching

Too often people don't want to put effort into changing their

### Professional Development

- ▶ [Index of Articles](#)
- ▶ [Recommended Seminars](#)
- ▶ [Recommended Books](#)

bad habits. They become consumed by irrational thinking, especially during challenging times. The trick is to catch yourself as soon as you fall into thinking traps. Here are some useful strategies:

### **Strategy 1: Change Your Reactions to Responses**

Let's take the example of budget cuts to illustrate the benefit of coaching yourself.

#### **Straighten Your "ARO"**

**A: Adversity** —the event or situation

**R: Reaction** —your initial thoughts, beliefs, or feelings in relation to the adversity

**O: Outcome** —the result or consequence

**Adversity** : Budget cuts

**Reaction** :

- "I have too few resources already." "I can't deliver more bad news."
- "We are never going to get out of this mess."

**Outcome**:

- Feelings of self-defeat
- Snowball effect of negative thinking
- Lower confidence and motivation
- Focus on what you can't control

Most people assume that the adversity (in this case, budget cuts) causes the consequence. But in reality, your belief about the adversity, or your initial reaction, is what actually causes the consequence. In self-coaching the focus is on changing your *reaction* to a strategic and positive *response*.

Example of changing your Reaction to a Response:

**Adversity** : Budget cuts

**Response (Strategic and Positive)**:

- "This will be very tough, but it's an opportunity to demonstrate my ability to keep people engaged in tough times"
- "These cuts will help my best performers stand out and my worst fall out"
- "I am not happy about these cuts. What can I do to ease the concerns of my team and to build capability at no or low cost?"

**Outcome**:

- Snowball effect of positive thinking
- Increase in confidence and motivation
- Focus on what you can control

Self-Coaching is about creating a thinking habit that allows you to create a positive attitude. It's not about not dealing with a tough transition, but rather about finding ways to keep yourself and the people around you motivated in difficult times.

At first, like any skill, this will be a challenge and your emotions may get the best of you. It is your job to keep at it and put the effort into changing negatives into positives. Attitude is contagious, especially if you are a people leader, and especially when adversity is part of the equation.

### **Strategy 2: Ask Yourself the Good Questions**

Another way to coach yourself toward mental toughness is to ask the questions that lead you to positive answers. Your mind works like a computer. Just as a computer works best when it has good input, so does your mind. Become aware of the questions you ask yourself. Challenge yourself to ask strength-based questions. For example, rather than asking, how did we get into this financial mess? Try asking yourself:

- What am I learning about myself and my team?
- What can I do to mitigate my losses?
- How can I help other people?
- What is one thing I learned from this experience thus far?
- Whom can I talk to help me navigate this tough transition?

By asking good questions you will train yourself to think in a productive manner. Spend time every day paying attention to what type of questions you are asking yourself and how you can change them to create more positive solutions.

### **Perfect Practice Makes Perfect Performance**

Play a game with yourself. If someone were to pay you \$100 every time you could change a negative thought into a positive, how much money would you make in a day? At the end of each week keep a tally of how many tough situations you were able to transform into a positive outcome through self-coaching. A variation of this is to teach this skill to your colleagues and have a monthly competition to see who can win the most.

Receiving news about the recession on a consistent basis can be challenging and create difficulty remaining positive. Developing skill at self-coaching is like building a muscle—the more you work at it, the stronger and more resilient you will be.

Remember, you are the only person whom you will work with for the rest of your life. You might as well find a strategy or two to get the best out of yourself. There is always a choice to how you respond to tough transitions. The more you choose the positive path, the more motivated you will be and the more you will benefit your organization and those around you.

### **The Bottom Line**

Everyone has an inner dialogue. Whether we are aware of it or not, we all talk to ourselves. This is a conversation where we have the luxury of controlling what is said and how it is received. If you work diligently on your inner dialogue, I promise you the return on investment will be huge. You will create more positive interactions and opportunities for yourself and for those around you.

**Author Bio:**

Dr. Rob Fazio is a consultant with Leadership Research Institute (ww.LRI.com) where he specializes in executive coaching and talent development. He is also the president and co-founder of Hold the Door for Others (www.holdthedor.com), a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering people to grow through loss and adversity. Contact him at Rob.Fazio@LRI.com or (215) 514-5113.

You can learn more about this topic at these AMA seminars:

- [Moving Ahead: Breaking Behavior Patterns That Hold You Back](#)
- [Projecting a Positive Professional Image](#)

**AMA On-Site:**

Every one of AMA's 170+ public seminars can be delivered on-site. This flexible, money-saving option allows you to train eight or more people, when and where you choose, at a low cost per participant. Click [here](#) for more information.

[Customer Service](#) | [Site Map](#)

[Privacy Policy: Your Privacy Rights](#) | [Terms of Service](#)

**Training Seminars Held Nationwide Including:**

[Boston](#) • [New York](#) • [Washington, DC](#) • [Atlanta](#) • [Orlando](#) • [Chicago](#) • [Dallas](#) • [Houston](#) • [Las Vegas](#) • [Los Angeles](#) • [San Francisco](#)

American Management Association © Copyright 1997-2009