

Chatter

Author: [ethan-kross](#)

Tags: [#personal-leadership](#) [#mastermind](#)

Dialogue

His story --> "Bodyguards for academics"

My father's rationale was that cultivating the skill of introspection would help me through whatever challenging situations I encountered. Deliberate self-reflection would lead to wise, beneficial choices and by extension to positive emotions. In other words, "going inside" was the route to a resilient, fulfilling life. This made perfect sense. Except that, as I would soon learn, for many people it was completely wrong.

What is it about introspection that we've got wrong?

We've heard that when we're struggling with something, we should seek out support from others. The who and the how of that is really significant.

Studies --> Shootings on college campuses and after September 11th.

In study after study, Rimé found that talking to others about our negative experiences doesn't help us recover in any meaningful way. Sure, sharing our emotions with others makes us feel closer to and more supported by the people we open up to. But the ways most of us commonly talk and listen to each other do little to reduce our chatter. Quite frequently, they exacerbate it.

Emotional needs vs. cognitive ones.

Kirk and Spock

Reconciling advice giving with supporting cognitive needs.

Research indicates that people who diversify their sources of support—turning to different relationships for different needs—benefit the most. The most important point here is to think critically after a chatter-provoking event occurs and reflect on who helped you—or didn't. This is

how you build your chatter board of advisers, and in the internet age we can find unprecedented new resources online.

Advice --> build a board of advisors.

What's a good way to approach thinking about who you engage?

Point --> Different people for different things.

How do you do this?

Creating a list.

What have you changed your mind on?

Reserve

Example: NYPD Hostage Negotiations Team

"Carpe diem" runs counter to our biology.

Quotes

In recent years, a robust body of new research has demonstrated that when we experience distress, engaging in introspection often does significantly more harm than good. It undermines our performance at work, interferes with our ability to make good decisions, and negatively influences our relationships. It can also promote violence and aggression, contribute to a range of mental disorders, and enhance our risk of becoming physically ill. Using the mind to engage with our thoughts and feelings in the wrong ways can lead professional athletes to lose the skills they've spent their careers perfecting. It can cause otherwise rational, caring people to make less logical and even less moral decisions. It can lead friends to flee from you in both the real world and the social media world. It can turn romantic relationships from safe havens into battlegrounds. It can even contribute to us aging faster, both in how we look on the outside and in how our DNA is configured internally. In short, our thoughts too often don't save us from our thoughts. Instead, they give rise to something insidious. Chatter.

None of this was particularly surprising. As we already know, people are naturally disposed to sharing their thoughts with others when they are struggling with chatter, and social media and other forms of virtual connectivity provide convenient avenues for doing so. What was surprising was what Vicary and Fraley discovered when the study ended two months after the shootings. While the students at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University thought that expressing their emotions to others made them feel better, the degree to which they shared their emotions didn't actually influence their

depression and post-traumatic stress symptoms. All that emoting, writing, connecting, and remembering—it hadn't been beneficial.

The people who shared their thoughts and feelings about 9/11 right after it happened didn't feel better. In fact, on the whole, they fared worse than the people in the study who didn't open up about how they felt. They experienced more chatter and engaged in more avoidant coping. Moreover, among those who did choose to express their feelings, the people who shared the most had the highest levels of general distress and worst physical health. Once again, sharing emotions didn't help. In this case, it hurt.

In study after study, Rimé found that talking to others about our negative experiences doesn't help us recover in any meaningful way. Sure, sharing our emotions with others makes us feel closer to and more supported by the people we open up to. But the ways most of us commonly talk and listen to each other do little to reduce our chatter. Quite frequently, they exacerbate it. Rimé's finding, along with many others, clashes dramatically with conventional wisdom. Talking, we are often told by popular culture, makes you feel better. Much self-help literature tells us this, as do many of the people around us. We hear that venting our emotions is healthy and supporting others is indispensable. It's not that simple, though there are reasons it might seem that it is.

Fortunately, there is a reason why the support we get from others so often backfires and a way to circumvent this phenomenon. Other people can be an invaluable tool for helping us subdue our chatter, and we can likewise help others with theirs. But as with any tool, to benefit from it we need to know how to properly use it, and in the case of giving and receiving support, that knowledge begins with understanding two basic needs that all humans have.

When we're upset and feel vulnerable or hurt or overwhelmed, we want to vent our emotions and feel consoled, validated, and understood. This provides an immediate sense of security and connection and feeds the basic need we have to belong. As a result, the first thing we usually seek out in others when our inner voice gets swamped in negativity is a fulfillment of our emotional needs. We often think of fight or flight as the main defensive reaction human beings turn to when faced with a threat. When under stress, we flee or hunker down for the impending battle. While this reaction does characterize a pervasive human tendency, researchers have documented another stress-response system that many people engage in when under threat: a "tend and befriend" response. They seek out other people for support and care.

When our minds are bathed in chatter, we display a strong bias toward satisfying our emotional needs over our cognitive ones. In other words, when we're upset, we tend to overfocus on receiving empathy rather than finding practical solutions. This dilemma is compounded by a commensurate problem on the helper side of the equation: The

people we seek out for help respond in kind, prioritizing our emotional needs over our cognitive ones. They see our pain and first and foremost strive to provide us with love and validation. This is natural, a gesture of caring, and sometimes even useful in the short term. But even if we do signal that we want more cognitive assistance, research demonstrates that our interlocutors tend to miss these cues. One set of experiments demonstrated that even when support providers are explicitly asked to provide advice to address cognitive needs, they still believe it is more important to address people's emotional needs. And it turns out that our attempts to satisfy those emotional needs often end up backfiring in ways that lead our friends to feel worse.

People who care about us prompt us to talk more about our negative experience, which leads us to become more upset, which then leads them to ask still more questions. A vicious cycle ensues, one that is all too easy to get sucked into, especially because it is driven by good intentions. In practice, co-rumination amounts to tossing fresh logs onto the fire of an already flaming inner voice. The rehashing of the narrative revives the unpleasantness and keeps us brooding. While we feel more connected and supported by those who engage us this way, it doesn't help us generate a plan or creatively reframe the problem at hand. Instead, it fuels our negative emotions and biological threat response.

The key to avoid rumination is to combine the two Starship Enterprise crew members. When supporting others, we need to offer the comfort of Kirk and the intellect of Spock. The most effective verbal exchanges are those that integrate both the social and the cognitive needs of the person seeking support. The interlocutor ideally acknowledges the person's feelings and reflections, but then helps her put the situation in perspective. The advantage of such approaches is that you're able to make people who are upset feel validated and connected, yet you can then pivot to providing them with the kind of big-picture advice that you, as someone who is not immersed in their chatter, are uniquely equipped to provide. Indeed, the latter task is critical for helping people harness their inner voice in ways that lead them to experience less chatter over time.

While all of these strategies apply to how you help the people in your life manage their inner voices, they can also help you make better choices when selecting the people you go to for emotional support. After they've made you feel validated and understood, do they guide you toward brainstorming practical solutions? Or do they excessively extract details and revive the upsetting experience by repeating things like "He's such a jerk! I can't believe he did that." By reflecting after the fact, you can often determine if someone helped you immerse or distance. Most likely, it'll be a combination of the two, which can be a starting point for a dialogue about how the person can better help you next time. By thinking through other experiences with your "chatter advisers," you can also narrow in on which people are right for which problems.

Indeed, research indicates that people who diversify their sources of support—turning to different relationships for different needs—benefit the most. The most important point here is to think critically after a chatter-provoking event occurs and reflect on who helped you—or didn't. This is how you build your chatter board of advisers, and in the internet age we can find unprecedented new resources online.

Offering advice without considering the person's needs can undermine a person's sense of self-efficacy—the crucial belief that we are capable of managing challenges. In other words, when we are aware that others are helping us but we haven't invited their assistance, we interpret this to mean that we must be helpless or ineffective in some way—a feeling that our inner voice may latch on to. A long history of psychological research into self-efficacy has shown that when it is compromised, it damages not only our self-esteem but also our health, decision making, and relationships.

Build a board of advisers. Finding the right people to talk to, those who are skilled at satisfying both your emotional and your cognitive needs, is the first step to leveraging the power of others. Depending on the domain in which you're experiencing chatter, different people will be uniquely equipped to do this. While a colleague may be skilled at advising you on work problems, your partner may be better suited to advising you on interpersonal dilemmas. The more people you have to turn to for chatter support in any particular domain, the better. So build a diverse board of chatter advisers, a group of confidants you can turn to for support in the different areas of your life in which you are likely to find your inner voice running amok.

Notes prepared by Dave Stachowiak at CoachingforLeaders.com