

## 15. Effort Activity: Inner Storytelling

In *Better Than Before: Mastering the Habits of Our Everyday Lives* (2015), Gretchen Rubin, a lawyer and writer, says that the language we use to describe ourselves – our ‘inner storytelling’ – massively influences the amount of effort we put into a project.

Rubin argues that ‘we tend to believe what we hear ourselves say, and the way we describe ourselves influences our view of identity’ (2015, p. 225). Perhaps this describes you – maybe you’ve told yourself these stories for years. Inner storytelling helps us live up to our own hopes and fears.

Use this space to think about the stories you’ve told yourself. (Have you ever said, ‘I’m not a good student’ or ‘I’m dim’ or ‘Other students are cleverer than me’ or ‘My problem is, I’m lazy’?)

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For a week, your challenge is to change your inner storytelling. This, in turn, could well change your patterns of behaviour, your habits and, ultimately, the effort you put into your work. A good place to start would be to choose one of the following stories to tell about yourself:

- » When I started A levels, I suddenly became a hard-worker. I battle.
- » I give 100% whatever I do. I never give up.
- » When I say I’ll do something, I do it.
- » I’ll deliver. I always do.
- » I don’t waste time. I get things done.
- » I’m dedicated and strong under pressure. People can rely on me.
- » When there is a challenging task, I go at it until I’m done.
- » I’m not lazy or flaky. I’m no shirker.

Research conducted by Ethan Kross, a professor of psychology at the University of Michigan, shows that self-talk like this works even better in the second or third person (using the pronoun ‘you’ or your first name instead of ‘I’) so you might want to experiment with your language (Kross et al., 2014). Once you’ve chosen your new story, you need to find a method of verbalising it. The word ‘mantra’ is often used to describe an utterance or phrase with psychological power. This is what you’re creating here. Find a time of day when you can repeat your mantra – on the bus, in the shower, walking home or crossing the campus between lessons. Then try it for a week.

Record your mantra here:

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When can you repeat this mantra to yourself? Think about bus journeys, waiting periods, silent study:

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### **Final Thoughts**

Simple, memorable mantras are best. Try creating a phrase – or even a list of words – that captures the kind of person you want to be.