



Self-Coaching Worksheet

© 2021 [Gena Gorlin, Ph.D.](#)

Read and subscribe to my Substack newsletter, [Building the Builders](#), for a steady stream of content tailored to the psychological needs of ambitious innovators.

About this exercise: This is a set of optional prompts you can use to 1) coach yourself effectively through difficult situations or emotions, and 2) generally practice taking ownership of your own thinking and decision-making. It may be used in lieu of or in conjunction with [this self-coaching spreadsheet](#), if helpful.

Note: This worksheet is very much in “beta” mode, and I am **eager for any and all feedback you’d be willing to share** about your experience with it (ranging from specific suggestions / criticisms, to actual examples of how you’ve filled it out and/or what you’ve learned from it). Please email me at gorlinpsychteam@gmail.com with any feedback.

How to use: Copy this worksheet to your own personal workspace using the “duplicate” option at the top right of this page. Click in the blank spaces to start typing. If you’d like more information on a given prompt, use the toggle for more in-depth explanations and examples.

Answer the following questions with regard to any current situation, decision, or emotional state through which you could use some self-coaching.

Pt. 1: Observe & Describe

Like any good coach, you need to listen to your "players" and understand what they think, feel, and need before you start to offer feedback or guidance. The questions below are meant to help you do this with your own inner "players," as represented by the various emotions you may be feeling. Think of this as "reflective listening" applied to yourself.

1. What happened or is happening in this situation? (Just the facts)



Write just the relevant facts (ones that any objective bystander would agree on), without value judgements.

3. What emotions do you notice? How can you tell?



What are the emotions that come up as you reflect on the situation? Note that usually these come up as one-word judgements of your physical/emotional state: e.g., anxious, sad, excited, frustrated, etc.

What physical sensations are you experiencing that tell you you're feeling these emotions?

How intensely are you feeling each one (on a 0-10 scale)?

4. For each distinct emotion (i.e., "inner player"), see if you can identify the following:

- **Content: what is it saying?**



Fill in the sentence: "I feel X because I think that ____".

This may or may not be a judgment or interpretation you consciously agree with; the goal is not yet to assess it, just to identify it in words.

- **Tone/style: how is it saying this?**



Is there a distinct tone or style to the thoughts / interpretations / judgments you wrote down above? For instance, were they bullying and hostile? Friendly? Pessimistic? Wishful? Defensive? Sincere? etc.

- **Lies it might be telling me? (See [this article](#) for more detailed suggestions regarding this one)**



Is there anything this "player" might be trying to hide or distort from your view? For instance, any thoughts you might have selectively avoided writing down under "Content," or interpretations / values / beliefs that weren't entirely sincere? What uncomfortable truths or possibilities might they be trying to conceal?

Also check for any additional emotions that might be hidden under this one.

- **Action urge: what does it want me to do / not do?**



For any given action urge, notice: is this pulling you toward gaining or protecting something you want (i.e., a positive)? Or is it pulling you away from discomfort (i.e., a negative)?

- **Underlying core values/needs?**



Fill in the blank: "I feel X because I care about ____".

Why is this (whatever you wrote in the blank) important to you? Why is THAT important to you? You can keep going with this "5-why's" exercise

until you get to one or more core values that are important for their own sake.

If you can't seem to identify any values that really resonate: are there any other emotions hidden under this one? (E.g., is there anger hidden under the guilt, or fear hidden under the anger, etc?)

- **Underlying core beliefs/mindsets?**



For whatever "content" you wrote down above, fill in the blank: "I think that X because I fundamentally believe that _____."

This is an opportunity to reflect on the core mindsets and worldviews that might be showing up in your inner dialogue.

Again, these won't necessarily be beliefs you consciously endorse (and indeed, you may notice multiple conflicting beliefs showing up at once!). But by identifying them in words, you will be able to dialogue with them and assess their validity much more effectively.

- **Name/description to give it (if a frequent flyer)?**



If this is a "player" that shows up a lot, you might want to give it a name (e.g., "nagging mom voice"; "wishful thinking voice"; "insecure 12-year-old me"; "my inner drill-sergeant"; etc.), so you can more easily identify it whenever it shows up again.

Pt. 2: Assess & Decide

Now that you have a better understanding of what the various "players" in your mind are telling you and where they're coming from, you can talk them (i.e., yourself) through the process of forming an objective assessment and deciding how to move forward.

1. Tone to set as a self-coach?



Be deliberate about the tone you're setting for your own self-dialogue. What's the tone you would want to set if you were coaching a teammate, colleague, or friend? If it's respectful, values-oriented, and sincere, then do as much for yourself (even—especially!—if it's not how you're accustomed to talking to yourself).

The nuances of your preferred tone may also differ depending on you've observed in Pt. 1, and what you know your inner "players" most need help understanding or remembering in this context. Perhaps you need a softer, gentler tone because your inner players are being too hard on themselves; or perhaps you need a serious, no-nonsense tone because your inner players are prone to wishful thinking in this type of situation.

7. Additional facts or context needed?



Are there additional perspectives or data points you need to consider—and help your inner players consider—before reaching a fully informed, objective assessment of this situation?

For instance, is there knowledge or evidence you might be neglecting or undervaluing? Are there other plausible interpretations of the situation that you haven't considered?

Check for common thinking fallacies and blindspots, such as confirmation bias, overgeneralizing, all-or-none thinking, mind-reading, selective attention, etc.

Questions that might be helpful to ask yourself: What would I tell a friend in this situation? Which of these conclusions would I actually swear to in court? How much money would I bet on this being true? How will I think about this when I look back in 5 years?

8. Considered judgment of the situation?



All things considered, what do you actually believe is (or might be) true in this situation?

For any given conclusion or hypothesis, how certain are you (0-100%)? What further information would you need in order to be more certain?

4. Choices available? Value-stakes of each?

What will be the costs and benefits of taking a given option in this scenario? For each cost/benefit, consider its probability (0-100%) as well as its importance (i.e., how good/bad would it be if it happened, on a 0-10 scale), relative to your overall goals and values.

Feel free to use the [Decisional Balance worksheet](#) to assist in this process, if helpful.

5. Action(s) to take? If emotional self not fully on board: how to explain?



What action(s), if any, do you want to take with regard to this situation? When and how do you plan to take them, and to hold yourself accountable for taking them?

Just as a good athletic coach takes the time to explain, calmly and respectfully, why they are benching a player or making certain demands on the player's time, so you want to take the time to explain, calmly and respectfully, why you are setting certain limits or making certain demands on your emotional self. To coach yourself effectively, you need to value yourself wholly—which doesn't mean endorsing every judgment or acting on every emotion, but rather caring enough about these various inner "players" to listen, empathize, and sincerely dialogue with each of them, even when you disagree.

So with that said: What can you say to your inner "players" to explain your decision and put it in perspective? For instance, do you remind them of the core values that motivate their concern in the 1st place, and review how this action will move you toward those values over the long-term? Do you explain to them why you believe their feared scenarios have a low risk of occurring, and/or why you are confident that you'd be able to deal with those scenarios if they did occur? Perhaps you remind them of specific previous occasions when you were able to deal with such scenarios effectively? etc.

10. How does your emotional self respond?



How do you now feel, overall, about the action(s) you have decided to take? If your inner players generally feel resolved in the decision, and any leftover emotional resistance or trepidation is a "known quantity" that you have surfaced and dialogued about (and still chosen to take action in light of it), then you are in the clear. But if some part of you is still "digging its heels in" for reasons that aren't fully clear to you, then you may need to revisit steps 1-5 above to understand why. What unaddressed worries or mindsets are still making you resistant to the action(s) you have decided to take? Are there more perspectives or data points you need to consider and dialogue with in order to make a fully informed, self-endorsed decision?
