



Laura Shin Contributor

I write about personal finance, business and the economy.

Opinions expressed by Forbes Contributors are their own.

PERSONAL FINANCE 7/23/2014 @ 8:00AM | 42,765 views

One Word That Could Help You Achieve More

[Comment Now](#)

As we go through our day, we often need to give ourselves little pep talks in order to execute mentally taxing tasks at work, work up the gumption to make a request (such as for a raise), and encourage ourselves to stick with our budgets so we can afford that upcoming vacation to Buenos Aires.

In fact, scientists have found that 96% of adults report engage in an ongoing internal dialogue.

Several recent psychology experiments suggest a really simple way for all of us to accomplish a little more : Talk to ourselves in the second person. (Find out [seven other hidden influences that can help you get ahead.](#))

Saying “You can do it” will help you get more done than saying “I can do it,” and asking yourself “Why are you nervous?” before a speech instead of “Why am I nervous?” will make those watching the speech find you more confident and persuasive — and even less nervous.

Or so the scientists say. Let’s take a look at how they reached their conclusions.



(Dan-Scape.co.uk/Flickr)

In one study consisting of three experiments, published in the European Journal of Social Psychology, [Sanda Dolcos](#) at the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign and [Dolores Albarracin](#) at the [University of Pennsylvania](#) wanted to further investigate previous studies showing that that when people talk to themselves, they prefer to use “I” when talking about their feelings and “you” when they’re under pressure. Their experiments explored whether that predilection also resulted in greater success.

In the first experiment, they had 95 undergrads imagine they were a character in a sketch who was facing a choice. They were asked to write down the advice they would give themselves in making this choice, and half were told to use “I” in their instructions while the other half were told to use “you.”

Afterward, the participants were asked to complete anagrams. Those who had used “you” in their advice to their character completed more anagrams than those who had used “I” — 17.53 on average, to 15.96.

The Forbes eBook To Succeed In A Brutal Job Market

Don't let a rotten economy spoil your goals. Use the career and money advice in *The Millennial Game Plan* to get and stay ahead for good.

In another experiment, this time with 143 students, the students were divided into three groups — those who would use “I,” those who would use “you” and those in a control group who did not give themselves advice. The first two groups were asked to give themselves advice specific to anagrams (using either “I” or “you”), and then everyone was asked to complete anagrams. Upon completion, the researchers asked about the students’ intention to complete more in the future. Students who used “you” in their advice completed more anagrams and also said they would be happier to work on more in the future than students in the “I” and control groups. In fact, no significant difference in attitude was detected between the “I” and control groups.

Lastly, the researchers had 135 psychology students write down advice to themselves about exercising for the next two weeks. The ones using “you” in their advice planned to do more exercise during those two weeks and also reported more positive attitudes toward it than the students giving themselves first-person advice.

In another study, conducted by University of Michigan’s Ethan Kross, participants were told they had to give a speech to a panel of judges on why they were qualified for their dream job. And they had to give it in five minutes without notes.

Half the participants were told to manage their anxiety in the first person, by asking questions like “Why am I nervous?” whereas the other half were told to use the second person. Afterward, each subject was asked how much shame she or he felt right after the speech and how much they ruminated on it.

Those who spoke to themselves using “you” reported experiencing less shame and didn’t ruminate over how it went as much as those who used “I.” And the judges thought those who had spoken to themselves as “you” were less nervous, and more confident and persuasive.

Kross told the [Wall Street Journal](#) that when people think of themselves as another person, “it allows them to give themselves objective, helpful feedback.”

Dolcos and Albarracin suggest that the exhortations that we receive as children from parents and teachers can habituate us to responding to other who direct us in the second person and that, as adults, hearing “You” directions and encouragement can trigger that behavior. But they acknowledge their study was limited in that it didn’t test the effect of self-talk while performing the task or on future behaviors.

Still, it couldn’t hurt, when you face your next challenge, to tell yourself, “You can do it!”

Laura Shin is the author of the Forbes eBook, [The Millennial Game Plan: Career And Money Secrets For Today’s World](#). Available for [Apple iBooks](#), [Amazon Kindle](#), [Nook and Vook](#).