



THE PHD LIFE COACH

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HOW TO BE YOUR OWN BEST SUPERVISOR

INITIAL REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- What habits make you think you're not already your own best supervisor?
- What do you do or say to yourself regularly that doesn't help?
- In what ways are you a good supervisor to yourself already?
- What do you do or say to yourself regularly that DOES help?

Think about the things you say to yourself regularly. Take a few moments to imagine that you have a boss who treats you exactly like this. They plan your days and your workload the way you do, they speak to you the way you do, they give feedback and allow breaks/holidays the ways you do. How would that feel? Would you want to work for that boss?

WHAT WOULD YOUR "BEST" SUPERVISOR BE LIKE?

- Take 4 mins to write about what your ideal supervisor would be like. What qualities do they have? How do you see these qualities? How would they treat you? How would they respond to difficult situations?
 - Now, read through your notes and come up with 3-5 key words that would describe them
 - What is one sentence that you would hear from them a lot?
 - Spend a little while writing about how this description differs from how you described supervising yourself.
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SELF-LEADERSHIP

We are all a variety of different voices (think of the Winnie the Pooh analogy!). We get to decide how we want to lead ourselves and that team of voices.

We are going to design a self-leadership plan which answers the following questions:

- I want to lead myself in a way that is _____, _____, and _____.
- I will remember and use my strengths of _____ and _____.
- I will take the following actions to support myself _____.
- When I'm struggling, I will _____.
- I will say these things to myself regularly _____.

QUALITY-DRIVEN SELF-LEADERSHIP

What qualities do you want to have as a self leader? What strengths do you already have?

I think the following qualities are particularly useful but do think of your own and pick which of these you want to focus on:

Compassionate; Curious; Encouraging; Accepting; Intentional; Resourceful; Ambitious; Strategic; Realistic; Patient.

Spend a few moments considering what it would be like to lead yourself with these qualities in mind.



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SUPPORTIVE ACTIONS

- Boss mode
 - This is not about “bossing” yourself.
 - This is about taking yourself into a more senior and strategic mindset, where you ask yourself “what would I say if boss-me was supervising student-me”.
 - Think of one of the challenges you identified and ask yourself:
 - How could I reassure student-me?
 - What would I suggest student-me does?
 - How could I make it easy and clear for student-me?
 - What would I say if student-me is still finding it difficult?
 - You can then “return” to student-you, and follow the advice of boss-you!
 - Boss mode can be planned (ie do it every Monday morning for example) or responsive (do it when you are distracted/procrastinating etc).
 - Think particularly about how you will plan, how you will reflect and monitor progress, how you will make it easier to follow your plans, and how you will set up and implement a week that you love.
 - You can also think about what barriers might come up, including practical barriers and mindset barriers. Now, while still in boss-mode, start thinking how you could overcome these barriers so that it’s easier for student-you
 - What “plumps your pillows”?
 - Consider what actions help you feel better when you’re struggling – things like having a shower, going for a walk, listening to music etc.
 - Consider what actions make you feel like “you” and feel rejuvenated?
 - These activities are those that “plump your pillows” –
 - How can you ensure that you a) structure them into your week proactively and b) make it more likely that you’ll reach for them when you need them?
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SELF-TALK

Often we get stuck thinking we either need to be:

- Strict, self-critical, over-ambitious, disciplinarian – saying things like “You just need to be less lazy and do it better”
- or Indulgent, defeatist, saying things like “Might as well give up for today and try again tomorrow.”

In reality, we want to find a place in between that is firm, compassionate, understanding and pragmatic.

One way to find this voice is to imagine you’re talking to a toddler from your most patient, caring and compassionate place. Pretend they don’t want to clean their teeth.

- You probably wouldn’t want to tell them they’re an idiot for not doing it already but you probably wouldn’t want to say “ok then, let’s not bother.
- How would be compassionate and understanding of the fact they don’t want to do it, but still encourage them to get it done?
- e.g. I know you don’t want to, that’s ok. But we’re going to do a little bit because it’s important to keep our teeth healthy. How about you choose the song we sing afterwards?” etc
- How could you talk to yourself more like this?

Some thoughts that might help are:

- “It’s OK that this is difficult”
- “That bit’s a problem for another day”
- “I can get this bit done now”
- “I’ve done difficult things before”
- “One thing at a time”
- “I get to decide the best way to approach this”
- “It’s OK to ask for help”
- “Look at what I HAVE achieved”

Consider other thoughts that might help you.



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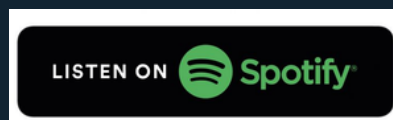
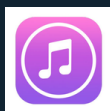
SELF-LEADERSHIP

Let's try to complete our self-leadership plan – complete the following sentences based on the information given and your own plans.

- I want to lead myself in a way that is _____, _____, and _____.
- I will remember and use my strengths of _____ and _____.
- I will take the following actions to support myself _____.
- When I'm struggling, I will _____.
- I will say these things to myself regularly _____.

Now take a moment to think how much different your PhD experience could feel if you regularly practice implementing this plan. Remember though – you're not going to change this overnight. Behaviour change is tough and it's ok if you find yourself going back to old habits. This plan is a safe place for you to return to every time you need it.

STAY IN TOUCH



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