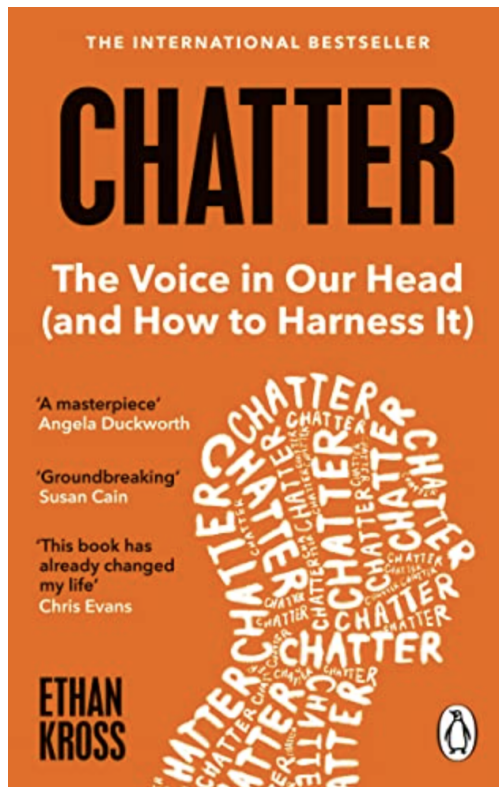


## Ethan Kross' Toolbox for Harnessing the Inner Voice



*Chatter: The Voice in Our Head, Why It Matters, and How to Harness It*

Ethan Kross

Sometimes, we, as humans, feel trapped inside our own heads. Personally, I feel this all the time, whether it is in the form of not being able to concentrate when reading or overthinking what I'm going to say in a discussion. When my thoughts feel overwhelming, I look to my google document. I have a google document in my drive entitled "strategies." It's a document I've been working on for a couple of years now, ever since going through a hard breakup. The document is filled with advice, not for board games, cooking, or how to get good grades, but for the more tough parts of life. Things to do during hard times, when I'm trapped inside my own head, to make the situation better.

My google doc is filled with advice from past therapists, my parents, and my grandmas. Things that others have recommended that have worked for me in the past. My mom is a big proponent of getting outside and getting exercise. Therapists have taught me breathing techniques. And one grandma promotes talking to yourself. As an introspective person who has struggled with feeling like my own worst critic instead of best coach and as someone who wants to be the best, happiest version of myself, I love having these strategies in my back pocket at all times. And I'm always on the lookout for more. Reading Ethan Kross' debut book made me realize I'm not alone. This guy is just like me. He too has been on a quest to harness what's inside our heads, to make our lives better. The difference between him and me? He's a leading expert on controlling the conscious mind and, luckily for you and I, he's found all the strategies and wrote a book about them.

"Chatter: The Voice in Our Head, Why It Matters, and How to Harness It" provides a toolkit for using our inner voice for good. Kross provides a simple guide so you can gain control over your inner-voice and thoughts. He finds a way to provide important advice without coming off as preachy.

In his book, Kross lays the strategies out clearly, even compiling a chatter “tool box” at the end of the book. Kross gives the reader 26 strategies for improving our lives through control of our inner voice. He succinctly divides these into 4 categories: tools you can implement on your own, tools you can use when supporting others, tools you can use that involve others, tools for receiving support, and tools that involve the environment. As a strategie enthusiast, I appreciate his organization and how they are thoughtfully aimed at certain, specific parts of our lives.

What came up time and again in Kross’s explanation of these tools was the benefit of zooming out and gaining more perspective on what is going on with the issue. One way that you can trick yourself into doing this is by using what Kross calls “distanced self-talk.” Just like my Grandma recommended! Distanced self-talk is as simple as using your name and the second-person “you” to refer to yourself, such as, “Hey ‘your name’! You can do this. It will all be okay! You will be okay.” Another way to zoom out is by imagining yourself advising a friend instead of your own self in the troubling situation.

In his book, Kross also addresses the necessity to acknowledge our cognitive needs, or our needs for help on how to move forward mentally, when faced with an issue or just having a hard day. When comforting a friend, our first instinct might be to sympathize with them and support them emotionally— to make them feel validated. As Kross explains in his book, what our friend (or ourselves) might really need is a solution. We can all understand the necessity of having people to comfort and empathize with you during hard times. But, Kross emphasizes that having people in your life who will give you concrete advice about how to move forward, or being the person in someone else's life who not only validates their experience but also helps them gain perspective and a path forward, is really important for reducing chatter and for fostering positive growth from a challenging situation.

Additionally, Kross stresses that our environment matters a lot. One way to reduce chatter is to create order in our environments. Think of your office, your home, your car, whatever space you occupy, imposing order on your surroundings will boost your sense of control and help you extinguish chatter. I like lists. Creating lists helps me impose order on what’s going on and feel a greater sense of control.

Lastly, the feeling of awe helps us transcend our current concerns. Kross encourages his readers to find what cultivates awe for them and to seek it out. Seeking out awe-inducing experiences in our surroundings can also help reduce chatter. What is it for you? Live theater, nature, art, food? Prioritize awe. For me, exercise outside, like my mom recommended, provides me with feelings of awe. The distance from the situation, the endorphins from exercise, and then the feeling of awe that being outside creates are the secret sauce my brain needs.

Throughout the book, Ethan Kross is a delightful storyteller while also providing clear instruction to his readers. Not only does he provide the reader with a toolbox, but he also guides the reader seamlessly through complex psychological studies and what they imply.

As someone who has struggled with distractions from my inner voice and someone who is constantly on the lookout for implementable tips and tricks to make everyday a little better, “Chatter” was a book I had a hard time putting down. I am really looking forward to trying out the tools from Kross’ toolbox. I can already tell some of them will end up on my own list of strategies.