

How Your Thinking effects You

One thing is certain in everyone's life and that is that we will all have good and bad experiences. Most of us can handle the good ones quite well. But why is it that some people take the bad experiences and make them work for them and others let those same experiences drag them down. It's an important question and we know more than a little about the answer.

The answer has a lot to do with our thoughts about the situation. If you were to remember only one idea about emotions, the most important would be that **your thinking always comes back to you as a feeling**. Try being angry without having angry thoughts!

Let's look at some thinking patterns;-

(I suggest you concentrate on just one of these at a time and find which works best for you - also read Section 5 before you try any of these)

1) Positive and negative thinking

If you are driving down the road and your petrol tank is reading zero, you may think it is positive thinking to believe everything will work out. But it wouldn't be a good idea; what you need here is realistic thinking.

What you can do, however, in any situation is **focus on the positive**. There is a saying that "in each moment

of your life you have as many reasons to be happy as unhappy, whatever the circumstances". If you focus on the negative in just about any situation, you will soon have a list about as long as your arm and they may all be true. Check how you feel as you think about that lot! Not very pleasant. In the same situation, focus on the positive - you will soon have a long list too. If you don't believe this think about what someone with a terminal illness or perhaps someone living in Ethiopia or a time-traveller from 500 years ago would say to you. They might consider you had luxuries beyond their wildest dreams. Check how you feel as you focus on the positive and notice the difference.

The only reason to focus on the positive is that it feels better. We can assume that nearly everyone would rather feel happy than unhappy. Focusing on the positive is a powerful, perhaps the most powerful, way of improving the quality of your life. It is also simple, very cheap and the only side-effect is happiness. Why not try it.

Piggy-backing

A particularly spectacular version of this technique was devised by Evy McDonald. Finding herself dying of motor-neurone disease, an unpleasant and incurable disease and told she had only 12 months to live, she came up with several ideas which eventually led to her cure, probably the only known cure from this disease.

Noting that she had many negative and few positive thoughts about her body she wondered if this could be contributing to her disease. She then

developed the method of piggy-backing. Every time she found herself saying something negative about her body she simply added a positive. For instance if she thought "I look horrible", she added "I have lovely hands" or "my hair looks pretty". After about a month she noticed that something had changed: she had no negative thoughts about her body and she started to think of her illness as a gift and a challenge. The beauty of this method is that you don't concern yourself with the negative thoughts, you just use them as a handy reminder to have a positive one.

2) The Power of Questions

During the course of an average day, we will ask ourselves many, many questions inside our heads and probably answer them. What few people realise is how this process can have a subtle and very powerful effect on our lives.

For instance, if something unpleasant happens, it's tempting to think "Why does this always happen to me?", "Why is life so unfair?", "Why do I always fail?". But beware - your brain is about to give you an answer - that's what brains are for. The answer you get will be something like "because your stupid, bad or you deserve it". As long as your brain is working it has to give you a negative answer to a negatively framed question. And of course, feelings follow the thoughts and here they will be feelings you won't like.

But there's a better way. If you ask high quality questions, as long as your brain is working, you will

always get useful answers which perhaps lead to action or solutions. Let's look at some of these:-

How could I use this situation positively?

How could I learn from this?

How can I turn this around?

How can I make this work for me?

How would I like to feel?

What new understanding is there, which I haven't yet realised, which would change my feelings about the situation?

How important is this in the overall scheme of my life?

What's funny about this situation?

As long as you ask with a real expectation of an answer, your brain will come up with it sooner or later.

To give an example, if someone says to themselves "Why can I never lose weight?" you can guess the type of answer they will get and how useful it will be. If they were to say "How can I lose weight and enjoy the process" they are likely to get a lot further.

[3\) The Importance of Physiology](#)

Perhaps you are in a negative state of mind and you want to change. There are basically two ways to do this:- 1) to change your thinking 2) to change your body. Often the second method is the quicker and easier. To do this, simply put your body into a really positive state. This is usually more upright, more relaxed and breathing more deeply. Smiling will help. Initially it will seem that your mind is saying one thing and your body

another but persist and you will be surprised at how much better you feel. Remember to do this whenever you feel negative and you can change in an instant.

It is unlikely that you will resolve your problems while your body remains locked in a negative pose. Try this instead. Start walking until you develop your most elegant, flowing rhythmic walk, usually brisk with your head up or level. When you are in this state you can now think about your problem and the chances are you will think about it in a different way to before.

4) The World's Most dangerous Thought patterns

Let's imagine a man goes out to play tennis. All goes well for a while and then he starts to hit his serves out. He says to himself "I can't serve today". Things get worse and before long this becomes "I can't play tennis, I'm no good at sport, I'm no good at anything". Or perhaps it becomes "I never could play tennis, I never will be able to play" or perhaps it becomes "It's me I'm no good".

Martin Seligman has spent most of his life researching depression and helplessness. He found that there are three basic patterns which people use to become depressed. Can you spot them? They all subtly distort reality.

The first is generalisation. For instance no good at serving becomes no good at tennis, sport, life.

The second is permanence. For instance, inability to play tennis at that time becomes never could and never will be able to.

The third is making it personal. Instead of realising that serving is a specific skill that needs mastering it changes to I'm no good at it.

In other words, bad things happen to us all but it's the "It's me. It's going to last forever. It's going to undermine everything I do" that really causes us trouble. Can you spot these distortions in your own thinking - we all do it. Why not use "I haven't got that skill yet. The problem can go away quickly. It's just one thing".

5) The Sequence of Change

You might read about these patterns and think - I'll just change to this new pattern. But it doesn't work like that. Typically to change you need to go through four stages. These are:

Unconscious Incompetence You're getting it wrong and you don't even know it. You're unaware of your thought patterns and the emotions they create. To use the analogy of driving a car, you're at the stage that you don't know you want to drive.

Conscious Incompetence You're getting it wrong but you know how. You recognise you are thinking negatively or asking bad questions. This is a crucial first step though people often wrongly get frustrated that they've only got this far. In driving it would be realising you can't drive but you want to.

Conscious Competence You get it right but it's hard work. You change your thinking but it doesn't feel like you. It's a bit of an effort. In driving you can now drive

a little but you have to think where the gears and indicators are and you feel clumsy. This clumsiness and feeling of it being not me is typical of this stage.

Unconscious Competence Most of the time you are thinking in a useful way and it is much more automatic. Give yourself plenty of time to achieve this as it is a considerable achievement. In driving it is when you can drive, listen to the radio and have a conversation all at the same time. However, keep in mind that even experienced drivers make occasional mistakes.

You may say "Why bother" if you have to do all that. The answer is: - do you want to go through life using patterns you are unaware of, that you may have picked up unconsciously from others, such as your parents, patterns that can make you feel bad, or do you want to create positive thoughts and therefore positive emotions of your own choice.