

SELF REFLECTION FOR COACHES & USEFUL RESOURCES FOR COACHEES AND CLIENTS

Thinking Habits/ Thinking Traps

We all have habits. It's one of the ways we free our brain processing space, (Pre-frontal cortex), to leave room for complex, innovative thinking. Some of our habits keep us stuck in traps. For example:

List of thinking traps – with a brief explanation of their nature:

- ❖ **Black and white thinking** – things are either perfect/success or they are terrible/failure (no shades of grey)
- ❖ **Emotional reasoning** – if it feels true it's true? So if you feel unlovable, or a failure it must be true. Been rejected? You may see yourself negatively without any facts to support that view.
- ❖ **Tunnel Vision** – can you only focus on the stressful situation? Or the rejector in your story? Do you forget about aspects of your life that this situation does not touch? Are you planning for a bad outcome? Only noticing things which trigger you? (If positive aspects of life/positive ideas cannot get your attention you will develop a negative bias.)
- ❖ **Wishful thinking** – is your life organized around what you hope will happen? Do you have a plan b or plan c? Failure to plan translates as wishful thinking – don't study for the exam and hope to pass? This one operates over simmering anxiety.
- ❖ **Personalising** – taking this stressful situation personally – as if you are responsible when there are no facts to support that idea? Stressors can arise from factors beyond our control. Your lover may leave you because of their commitment issues for example?
- ❖ **Blaming yourself or others** – are you blaming yourself for past decisions that did not work well? Or are you blaming someone else who is involved without being clear about the part you have played? Blame is problematical because most problems are multi-faceted. And blame is past focussed – so you hold onto anger and negative feelings.
- ❖ **Guilt and Regret** – guilt can be helpful when you have acted against your own values and hurt people you love – helpful because it can focus you on making amends. And once you have made amends you need to forgive yourself. Otherwise guilt will prevent you from being mentally and emotionally present for the people you love.
- ❖ **Pessimism** – Your negative mood may prevent you from seeing what you have learned or from noticing the positive possibilities in your situation. This one has the thought 'all is lost' – when it usually isn't!
- ❖ **Overthinking/second-guessing** – do you begin to doubt yourself every time you make a decision? Do you think of everything that could go wrong? This one can have you feel stuck. Remind yourself that you do not need to have the perfect answer before you act.
- ❖ **Unhelpful comparisons** – do you compare yourself with others who seem to be doing better or coping better? Comparing makes you feel worse about yourself and your situation. Other people's lives may not be what they seem; and your challenges may be building inner strengths you don't appreciate yet.
- ❖ **Judging mind** – do you criticize yourself for not doing what you 'should'? Or tell yourself you 'should' be doing more? Here it is useful to ask yourself what is stopping you from being in action perhaps?

For coaches working on your presence or your self-awareness there is an exercise below. If you would like to use it with your clients and coachees please attribute it.

Thinking Traps exercise – Mary Britton

Thinking Traps:

You can reduce your stress by identifying and naming your thinking traps – instead of continuing to believe what they tell you.

Let's do some analysis!

1. Think of a stressful situation you are facing. In a journal, on your computer, or a whiteboard (whatever works for you) write one-two paragraph(s) setting out the facts of this situation. (Please just the facts at this stage. No judgments, opinions or predictions as yet.)
2. Now write your personal views of this situation. If it's helpful ask yourself: why do I think it happened? How will it affect my life? What does it say about me and my abilities? What do I want to do about it? What's stopping me from acting? How do I think the situation will end? If you have any negative thoughts about self or others in this situation include these now.
3. Read through what you have written and highlight any parts of it which can be classified as one of the thinking traps listed. Label which thinking trap it is.

Follow up

Coaches working alone can consider what you are learning as a topic for super vision. And when you are working with coachees – invite them to bring what they are learning to your next coaching conversation.