

Siskiyou Community Health Resilience

There is no Siskiyou without Y-O-U!

Building Resilience in the Workplace continued:

Part 4: “Thoughts are things” and “where your mind goes, your body follows.”

- Practice [thought awareness](#) . Resilient people don't let negative thoughts derail their efforts. Instead, they consistently practice positive thinking. Also, "listen" to how you talk to yourself when something goes wrong – if you find yourself making statements that are [permanent, pervasive or personalized](#), correct these thoughts in your mind.
- Practice [Cognitive Restructuring](#) to change the way that you think about negative situations and bad events.

Cognitive Distortions

We all have faulty ways of thinking resulting in incorrect and often limiting conclusions. To some extent, these mistakes are inevitable as our map of reality is inherently fallible.

From the discipline of cognitive behavioral therapy, the concept of cognitive distortions identifies the limiting thoughts we have so that we may move past them. As we experience life, we develop more mature ways of thinking we call empowering cognitions.

This post outlines the types of cognitive distortions and the empowering cognitions we may use to replace them. Any time you feel limited or disempowered, use the following as a checklist to see where your thinking has been distorted. The core concept of cognitive restructuring is that by changing the way you think, you can change the way you feel.

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All or Nothing Thinking

This type of cognitive distortion is characterized by black and white thinking or dichotomizing. When operating under this distortion, you are thinking in either/or terms. An example of this would be the separation of work and play. You can either be engaged in hard work or you can be enjoying what you are doing but not both.

This type of thinking is very unrealistic and limiting. The solution to this distortion is *synthesis* or *both/and thinking*. This allows for the existence of the shades of gray. Life is complex and synthesis allows you to deal with the complexity. In reference to the above example, it allows for the possibility for hard work being enjoyable – it is far more empowering. Life does not operate in black or white– Challenging this thinking allows you to be “okay in the gray.”

Overgeneralization

Overgeneralization occurs when you form an arbitrary conclusion based on limited external evidence. You believe that since something occurred once, it will occur over and over. One failed relationship means you will always be lonely. One failed business means you are not cut out to be an entrepreneur. Fear of rejection is commonly the result of overgeneralization. Asking someone out and having them say no to you doesn't only mean that this specific person rejected you but that you will consistently be rejected in the future. What a limiting way of thinking!

The solution to this cognitive distortion is *contextual thinking*. You examine the specifics of the situations and you realize that there were particular factors that created the result. Instead of thinking "I will never have a good relationship", you recognize the poor choices you made in your behavior. Hence, instead of

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the future repeating the past, the past becomes a resource you can use to create a better future.

Filtering Out the Positive

Filtering out the positive occurs when you excessively dwell on the negative of a situation. An example of this would be focusing on the one dirty spot on a clean floor or while being angry at someone, focusing exclusively on all the ways the person hurt you and blinding yourself to their positive qualities.

To deal with this cognitive distortion, you must expand your perspective. This can be done by asking yourself questions about the situation such as What do I like about the situation? What would I like to change? How can I go about making the change? *Perspective thinking* allows you to see the entire picture without biasing towards the negative. From this place, you can take informed, intelligent action. Changing your perspective can allow you to get clear of the trees to see the beautiful sunset.

Mind Reading

Mind reading occurs when you assume you know what another person is thinking and acting as if that assumption was true. You don't take the time to check it out with the other person – you jump to a conclusion and treat that conclusion as indisputable fact. If someone doesn't say hi to you when you see them on the street, you assume that he doesn't like you anymore. However, in reality, you have no idea if this is the case since you haven't checked it out with the other person.

The solution to this is focusing on current *sensory information*. Essentially, you drop the interpretation of the event or the story and focus on the concrete

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facts. The fact that he didn't say hi is sensory data. The idea that he doesn't like me anymore is the story and you have no way of knowing if it is true or false unless you check it out with the other person. Some times it's good to employ the same tactic used on the old detective shows and keep it to "Just the facts ma'am."

Fortune Telling

This cognitive distortion occurs when you project yourself into a future time and assume some negative event is going to occur. You then feel as if that negative future is indeed fact. Say that you are driving to work and you are running a little late. You imagine that you arrive late and that boss yells at you in front of the entire office. Now, you don't know if that will actually happen, but the mere act of imagining it makes it real to you.

The empowering alternative is to use *tentative predictive thinking*. You make predictions about the future as they are necessary to function but you realize that your predictions are just educated guesses and you remain open to other possibilities. If you are running late, you realize that perhaps you might be late for work so you decide that in the future you will give yourself more time for travel and at the same time, you recognize that there is still a possibility you may make it on time.

Emotional Reasoning

Emotional reasoning is the act of treating your emotions as indisputable facts. The truth is, however, that your emotions follow from your thoughts and if your thoughts are distorted, so will your emotions be at times. When you use this cognitive distortion, you assume that if something feels a certain way, that's the way it is in reality. For example, consider the idea of asking someone

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out on a date. When thinking about it, many people get nervous and project that feeling onto the action. However, when actually doing it, it is usually far easier than you had imagined.

In response to the distortion of emotional reasoning, you can use *witness thinking*. Here, instead of identifying with your emotions as indisputable facts, you just allow yourself to feel them fully without trying to repress or overemphasize them. Instead, you simply witness your emotions as they arise in your awareness.

Should Statements

Using the word “should” in your thinking often creates internal pressure. Although you do it with a positive intention, should-ing often makes you unmotivated because you feel that you don't have choice in the matter. When your behavior falls short of what you think you "should" do, the resulting feelings are often shame and guilt.

Choice thinking is a more empowering alternative to should statements. Here, you weigh the options available to you and select the most beneficial approach to your particular situation. Often this behavior is the same as it would have been had you shoulded yourself. However, it now comes with a sense of ease and lightness because it was choice made freely. Remember “it’s not nice to should on yourself or others.”

Labeling

Labeling is the cognitive distortion of branding someone a particular way. However, a person is a complex, changing person who cannot be

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categorized as one thing or another. When someone behaves inconsiderately toward you and you call them a jerk, you are labeling.

The solution to labeling is *reality-testing*. Instead of making someone's behavior of someone into their identity, you simply acknowledge the behavior as it is. In the previous example, you could identify that the person was engaged in inconsiderate behavior at that time. That's jerky behavior but it doesn't make them a jerk.

Personalization/Blaming

Personalization is assuming responsibility for something negative when you have no basis for doing so. This can often lead to enormous guilt. The flipside is blaming where you project responsibility for something negative onto another person. Both these are flawed in that they assume that if something negative happened, it must be somebody's fault. There is no allowance for genuine mistakes, only people that need to be punished for wrongdoing.

Objective thinking provides the answer to this cognitive distortion. By simply analyzing what behavior created a certain situation without making it about who you are as a person, you open yourself up to far more empowering alternatives.

Utilize this list of cognitive distortions and their empowering alternatives any time you are feeling limited or upset. The empowering cognition will open up entirely new channels of behavior and options to you, so that you can move forward with ease.