

### **If I See a Tiger, Do I Run?**

Kant's Paradigm offers an elegant way to understand the cognitive model of behavioral change, which posits that people's actions are not caused by a particular event, but rather by their interpretation of it. In coaching situations, the cognitive model helps people become aware of flawed thinking patterns that create and sustain undesirable behaviors, such as procrastination, inability to delegate, micro-managing, etc.

To read Kant's Paradigm, start at the bottom with #1 and work upwards to #4:

- #4. I run (behavior)
- #3. I feel afraid (feeling/emotion)
- #2. I believe that I am in danger (thought)
- #1. I see a tiger (perception)

Most people assume that their perception (#1) causes action (#4): "Yikes! I see a ferocious tiger that could maul or kill me, so I'm outta here!" However, it's really item #2, *our thoughts about what we see*, that starts the cascade of feeling to action. Imagine, for instance, that you see a tiger in a cage at the zoo. In that case, your thoughts, feelings, and behavior would be quite different.

When applying the cognitive approach to real situations, it's imperative that you are able to associate your thoughts to the behavior that you want to change. Let's say that you're falling short of a sales target because you're not making enough cold calls. What's going through your mind as you're staring at the telephone? One budding entrepreneur realized that she was associating every "no" from a prospect with an indictment of her product ("It's not good enough"). She learned to reframe her thinking and make the cold calls into a process of matching the right customers to the right product.

The cognitive technique should not be confused with New Age power-of-positive-thinking mantras. Your new thought pattern must be one that you really believe is more effective and realistic than the old one. You will also need a plan for practicing and reinforcing the new pattern, for example by enlisting the help of a mentor, colleague, or coach.

It can be useful to review some of the general styles of thinking, specific thoughts, and specific thinking patterns that psychologists have identified as troublesome.<sup>1</sup> Here are 15 "Styles of Distorted Thinking" that were developed by McKay, Davis, and Fanning (shown in an edited format).<sup>2</sup> See if any seem familiar to you.

- 1) Filtering – magnifying negative details and filtering out all positive aspects of a situation
- 2) Polarized Thinking – the situation is black & white, good or bad; you're either perfect or a failure
- 3) Overgeneralization – making a general conclusion based on a single incident or piece of evidence – if someone disappoints you once, you assume that you can never trust them again
- 4) Mind Reading – making assumptions about what people are feeling, why they are acting as they are, and how they feel about you

- 5) Catastrophizing – expecting disaster and the worst possible outcome; “what if?”
- 6) Personalization – thinking that everything people do or say is a reaction to you; comparing self to others
- 7) Control Fallacy – either you see yourself as a helpless victim of fate, or you’re hyper-responsible and feel accountable for everyone else
- 8) Fallacy of Fairness – being resentful because you believe that everything in life should be fair
- 9) Emotional Reasoning – believing that what you feel is the truth: if you *feel* stupid, it means that you *are* stupid
- 10) Fallacy of Change – needing and trying to change others because you believe that your happiness depends on them
- 11) Global Labeling – generalizing one or two qualities into the negative global judgment; if you have a bad experience with one customer service rep, you label the whole department a “bunch of idiots”
- 12) Blaming – holding others responsible for your pain or blaming yourself for every problem
- 13) Shoulds – a list of ironclad rules about how you and others should act; the shoulds are perfectionistic and no one could really meet the standard
- 14) Being Right – being “on trial” to prove that your opinions; going to any length to demonstrate your rightness because being wrong is unthinkable
- 15) Heaven’s Reward Fallacy – expecting self-sacrifice and self-denial to pay off as if someone is keeping score; feeling bitter when the rewards do not come after working so hard

**October’s Coaching Challenge:** Try using Kant’s Paradigm to discover any unrealistic thought patterns that are interfering with a task or goal. Choose one area to work on, and begin by simply noticing what you’re thinking each time the difficult situation comes up. In what ways is the thought pattern flawed? What is another way to look at the situation that’s more realistic? Mentally imagine yourself confronting the situation in a new way. Do this in as much detail as possible (how do you feel? what are you saying/doing? what are the results?). Ideally, get someone to help you reinforce the new thinking by observing times when you slip into old patterns, and/or practicing new scenarios with you.

<sup>1</sup> Beck’s problematic patterns, Ellis’ “Irrational Ideas,” and McKay, Davis, and Fanning’s specific thoughts, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> *Styles of Distorted Thinking (McKay, Davis, and Fanning) edited and paraphrased from The Psychology of Executive Coaching, Theory and Application, by Bruce Peltier, © 2001 Taylor & Francis*

\*\*\*\*\*

**Get clear, get focused, and take action!** Coaching helps you develop effective strategies for change, eliminate self-defeating behaviors, and step outside your comfort zone. To schedule a complimentary, no obligation coaching session, call our 508/835-2482 or send an email to [ForwardMotion@charter.net](mailto:ForwardMotion@charter.net).

\*\*\*\*\*