

Lesson 5

Change Your Feelings and behavior

Introduction

The notion that 'thoughts become things' is well-founded. Your thoughts are incredibly powerful, and the nature of them determines the extent to which you feel happy, sad, anxious or calm, content or dissatisfied with life.

Knowing how to change your thoughts to impact your mood, and transition from a state of anxious to calm is a skill worth learning. People who can think positively are given a boost in their emotions and this directly impacts the body as well as the mind.

While it's not as simple as 'snapping out of it,' there are practical steps you can take to recognise negative thoughts and steer yourself towards more positive ones.

Once you understand this and become proactive in shifting your thoughts from negative to positive you'll notice real, tangible changes in your life.

Taking the time to celebrate your achievements - large or small - and permitting yourself to feel good about them, is also important in helping you transform your emotional state to one of calm.

When you're able to stay calm, collected and rational, you always feel better about yourself - at least in so much as knowing you handled things as well as possible.

'Standing tall,' even in the toughest situations, by reminding yourself to stay calm, get up, go out, and keep doing, you slowly but surely shift your way of thinking from 'I can't cope with this' to 'I'm calm and can do this!'

Science

Positive affirmations, or 'positive self-talk' helps change the way you think to create a more positive outlook. Studies show that affirmations are in fact a practice grounded in science, as both positive and negative affirmations affect the neurological function of your brain.

Challenging negative automatic thoughts and interpreting a situation with more 'rose-tinted' glasses on is a skill that is evidenced in numerous studies from Cognitive Behaviour Therapy. As the habit of thinking positively can be learned, you're on to a winner if you give yourself permission to set it aside.

Recognising when you're trapped in a negative thought cycle and learning to draw the line under unpleasant experiences and punishing yourself is possible to do.

Value

The great thing about affirmations is that they are available to you whenever you want to use them and wherever you are, they cost nothing, and they can create real change in your mood.

Drawing the line under negative thinking helps lead you to focus more on the present and can therefore result in greater focus and engagement and better relationships, performance at work, physical and mental health, and enjoyment of life.

Focusing on changing you, not the world and flipping your perspective using a calmer you, puts you firmly back in the driver's seat and has a very positive effect on your way of thinking. The best thing is, you have more control than you think. You have the power to change you, the 'remote control' on the way you experience life and interact with the world around you.

There's plenty you can do to help change your thoughts to change your feelings.

Video

We all practice affirmations daily, whether we realise it or not. An affirmation is simply something we say to ourselves on a regular basis. We might not do this purposefully, repeating a set phrase, but we will do it.

When things go wrong and we reprimand ourselves for our stupidity over and over, we're using an affirmation. When we look in the mirror and criticise a particular aspect of our appearance, we're using an affirmation. And because these are unconscious affirmations that we are saying without consideration, they are usually negative.

Noticing when we're practising negative self-talk and affirming negative concepts to ourselves is the first step towards changing the way we think to a more positive outlook.

We tend to be forceful in our negative affirmations, thinking the worst of ourselves and our situation, and we need to be just as forceful in creating positive affirmations. Phrases like 'I should complete my project', or 'I might succeed' are too normative and not powerful enough. Instead, use the strongest version possible:

I will complete my project.

I will succeed.

When we notice ourselves having negative thoughts, or practising negative self-talk, we need to pause and consider what we're saying. Flip the script and instead, say something positive and powerful.

Learning to draw the line

Another debilitating habit we're all guilty of is mulling over our various misfortunes. When we feel we have been wronged, treated unfairly, or missed out on an opportunity, we have a tendency to dwell on it. We reprimand ourselves for our mistakes, and continually remind ourselves of how angry, hurt, or let down we are over the situation and people involved.

We also try to endlessly think what we might have done differently, how we might have avoided the issue, and worry ourselves with guilt over all the ways we should have done better.

Learning to draw a line under negative thinking doesn't mean that we stop learning from past mistakes, or making intelligent plans for the future informed by our experiences. Rather, it means we should stop overthinking things, to the point that we're well past learning and planning, and are simply mentally punishing ourselves by constantly reliving it for no positive benefit.

Wrap

Use these thought-changing exercises to help bring about a sense of calm daily if you can, as it'll then become easier for you to learn this way of evaluating the world, curb any overthinking, and help manage your emotions.

What next?

If you're struggling with a super-busy home, our next lesson is designed to help you declutter and organise, and tells you exactly how to create a zen-like zone just for you.