



BODY & MIND
CONSULTING

HOW TO MASTER YOUR MIND



HOW TO MASTER YOUR MIND

What is the most powerful tool everyone has for creation of good but can also be the most destructive? Your mind. Take a minute and think of how you perceive the world around you. Is the world a positive, affirming place filled with love and acceptance? Or is the world scary, judgmental, and filled with hate? Then take a moment and reflect-- Is this the way the world really is? Or, is this the way you really are?

Your mind, more specifically, your thoughts, affect your perception and, therefore, your interpretation of reality. Therefore, your perception is your reality. That does not mean it is actuality. It has been said by many pop psychologists "Change the way you look at things and the things you look at change." While this is true, the problem for most people is how to change their thoughts (often negative) and the emotions (also negative) that are its consequence.

Although I have yet to see a psychological textbook to affirm so, I feel quite convicted that we create the world in which we live. If you do not like your world it is time to change it. You have control over your world, or at the very least, control over your perception of the world. When you change your thoughts you will change your behaviors and feelings. But the real question is: How do you change your thoughts and behaviors?

"...the problem most people have is not thinking; it is not knowing how to stop thinking."

-Eckhart Tolle, A New Earth

Step 1: Awareness is the first step to change

Being aware of what you are thinking is absolutely necessary to change. You cannot change something you are not aware of.

The first stage of change is to recognize a problem. There are many people who simply do not think they have a problem so they do not feel a need to change. If this is you then do nothing. If you want to change you must realize the need for change—and this usually starts with your perception of life.

Everybody's perception of life is different, therefore everyone's reality is different. I don't live in the same world as you and you don't live in the same world as me. That might sound a strange concept to some people, but think about it for a few minutes, it could change the way you see the world.

Everybody's view of the world is different and it all comes down to the thinking patterns you use in your daily life. If you think life is wonderful you will notice the wonderful things in your life, if you think life is awful you will find awful things about life to support the belief. Change your thoughts and you literally change the world you are living in. But first you have to recognize your destructive thinking pattern.

Let's take an example—how many times has a negative thought popped into your mind, for instance something judgmental about a family member or friend—then, being more self-aware, we then find fault with ourselves for even thinking something negative about someone else. Instead of judging your thoughts, observe them—and then decide what you want your thoughts to be.

HOW TO MASTER YOUR MIND

Another example- We see a person that is very overweight walking or working out. We can think about how the person is obese, how in the world they “let themselves go” etc. etc... or we can think “Good for them! They are exercising and trying to get healthy.”

Don't judge thoughts, observe them. Then change thoughts to be what you want them to be.

Step 2: Identify and categorize your thoughts

Most people who come to my office are struggling, whether with a situation or with their thoughts about some circumstance that is leading to their feeling helpless, hopeless and anxious. After you have become aware of your thoughts tune into how you're feeling and work backwards. Every feeling we have is the direct result of something we were thinking. Therefore, if you're feeling anxious, begin by stepping back for a minute, and asking yourself, “Why do I feel anxious?” Maybe it's a project or a meeting you're dreading. Maybe you have to fire someone on your team or meet with the principal at your child's school. Figure out what that thing is that's making you anxious.

But go beyond the event that is causing anxiety. Oftentimes the event is usually the situation your mind is using to connect to the emotional state. It is rarely the root cause of the emotional state.

What about the situation is making you anxious? Did you previously have a bad experience in a similar situation? Did you miss your last deadline? Did you receive some toxic feedback from your boss? Was it something else? By getting to the ‘root cause analysis’ we can make informed decisions about what to change in our thoughts and patterns of behavior.



Step 3: Determine where do your thoughts “come from.”

We can employ different thinking patterns depending on what we are doing in life. For example you could use a positive thinking pattern at work as you are very confident in your ability and yet use a destructive

HOW TO MASTER YOUR MIND

one when it comes to looking for love. Recognizing when you use destructive thinking patterns can help you to change that pattern. Now that you have recognized when you use the destructive thinking patterns it is now time to change it.

I have many clients say “they think” their thoughts. That is simply untrue. We do not come out of the womb thinking negative self-talk about ourselves and our life and environment. It is learned by things we hear from others, or perceive that others think of us and what we do in our life circumstance and situations.

I have heard that the average person thinks around 70,000 thoughts a day. That’s a lot, especially if they are unproductive, self-abusive, and just a general waste of energy. Learning where these thoughts come from is a key to actively deciding what you want to “keep” in your repertoire of thoughts and what you want to “get rid of” in your library thoughts.

Authors of your thoughts can come from a variety of places. One author called these “squatters” in our mind, a very fitting name for derelicts that come unwanted but yet stay with us despite efforts to evict them. If you want to be the boss of them, you must know who they are and what their motivation is, and then you can take charge and evict them from your mind. There are many other squatters than those described here—but these I have found to be the most prevalent in my practice.

The Inner Critic

This internal negative “squatter” often abuses you, points out every negative thing you have ever done or said and brings it to remembrance at a time least helpful to your current situation. The critic is motivated by pain, low self-esteem, lack of self-acceptance, and lack of self-love. And since the critic is actually you—why else would you abuse yourself? Why would you let anyone treat a loved one or friend this badly? So

why are you treating you this badly?

In my clinical experience I have surmised that this critic comes from a bunch of different sources that we have collected throughout our lifetime. I call this a metaphorical “bag of poop” that we carry around with us, like a smelly



HOW TO MASTER YOUR MIND

millstone that we think we cannot get rid of. But we can—but it first takes awareness of the origin of the critic.

The inner critic is often a combination of:

- Other people's words; many times a trusted relative or teacher or your parents.
- Thoughts you have created based on you own or other people's expectations.
- Comparing yourself to other people, including those in the media.
- The things you told yourself as result of painful experiences such as betrayal and rejection. Your interpretation creates your self-doubt and self-blame, which are most likely undeserved in cases of rejection and betrayal.

The “Catastrophizer”

I once heard someone say that “worry is unproductive imagination.” The Catastrophizer lives in the land of worry in the world of “what ifs.” Motivated by irrational fear with little basis in reality the Catastrophizer brings to remembrance situations and circumstances of what happened (or almost happened) in the past will happen again.

Change the negative thought into a positive one. For example, if you are worried and focusing on what could go wrong in a situation, change your thoughts to what could go right. The mind can only think one thought at a time; so changing the negative into a positive eliminates the negative.

The Reactor

The “reactor” squatter triggers anger, frustration and pain that often stem from unhealed situations of the past. Any experience that is even closely related to a past situation or old hurt will set this squatter. The Reactor can be set off by words, feelings, situations-- even by sounds and smells. This squatter really has no motivation, and the poor impulse control is destruction under the guise of feelings you think are justified.

The Sleep Depriver

This can be a combination of any number of different squatters Motivation for this “squatter” could be:

- As a reaction to silence, which we may fight against because it can open up feelings and thoughts we have tried to push away through the day
- Mentally going through the laundry list of all the business you neglected during the day

HOW TO MASTER YOUR MIND

- Rehashing conversations and situations, then leading to self-doubt, low self-esteem, insecurity, and generalized anxiety about what you think you “shoulda, coulda, woulda” in that situation

Step 4: Action

"Ok, so now I know that I'm thinking irrationally, but now what do I do? How do I start to think differently?" I'm assuming you've asked this question yourself, which is why you're still reading!

Our circumstances don't define us. Regardless of what happens in life, we always have the power to choose our attitude. So what's the difference between someone who remains hopeful despite experiencing great suffering and the person who stubs his or her toe and remains angry the rest of the day? The answer lies in the person's thinking patterns.

Take back the power: If I were to ask you to think of a painful time in your past and to remember it as if it were happening, you would put yourself right back in that situation. It would stir up emotions and you would feel yourself becoming angry, bitter, frustrated, depressed, etc. That is referred to as associating – putting yourself inside of the event. By default, this is how our mental tapes and movies play – and place us right back into the mental situation in a position of pain.

By default, the majority of people have negative mental movies and tapes that fire off inside of their minds – not positive ones. When a current situation reminds us of a previous situation we tend to replay that movie or tape. Even if we had five successes and one disappointment, it is the disappointment our minds will return to because most of us want to avoid pain more than we to experience pleasure.☒



What you need to do is identify what that movie or tape is and write it down. Why? Because you want it out of your head. Inside of your head, it has power and seems much larger than it really is. Written down, it is now outside of your mind and you gain a distance from the emotion that it creates. By writing out your mental movies (what happened, what was said, what was felt, etc.) it removes you from being immediately associated with the pain and allows you to step back and gain

HOW TO MASTER YOUR MIND

some outside perspective on a situation.

For many clients, taking the mental movies “out” of the vault of your head and writing them down takes away some of the power (real or imagined) we give them. A warning: when we start to “get real” and write down the negative mental memories it may seem worse at first before better. This is a perception- not reality. Again, you cannot change something you are not aware of. Your choice is to continue allowing negative thoughts and situations run amuck in your head or to challenge them and then make a change.

Recognize truth from fiction.

Psychologists use the term “cognitive distortions” to describe irrational, inflated thoughts or beliefs that distort a person’s perception of reality, usually in a negative way. Cognitive distortions are common but can be hard to recognize if you don’t know what to look for. Many occur as automatic thoughts. They are so habitual that the thinker often doesn’t realize he or she has the power to change them. Many grow to believe that’s just the way things are.

Cognitive distortions can take a serious toll on one’s mental health, leading to increased stress, depression, and anxiety. If left unchecked, these automatic thought patterns can become entrenched and may negatively influence the rational, logical way you make decisions.

Behind every negative mental tape (“cognitive distortion”) is a lie about ourselves that we are choosing to believe, either consciously or subconsciously. The lie could be that you’re worthless, a failure, ugly or that you will never amount to anything. Maybe you were told that you are dumb or that you’ll never find a spouse or partner who will love you. Whatever it is, identify it and write it out next to the mental tape.

The only way to combat a lie is with truth and right now is the time to seek out what the truth and clarity about YOU. Your process may be to talk to other trusted confidants (ideally NOT the ones that are the sources of the negative self-talk), work with a psychologist, counselor or coach and get an outsider’s perspective or find a quiet space and get in touch with Deity or spirituality for some clarity or prayer. Whatever method you choose to take you must separate truth from fiction.

Once you have the truth ready to go, write the truth next to the lie. Write the truth in the first person and write it in positive phrasing. So, instead of writing, “I am not a failure,” write down, “I am a successful person who has accomplished many great things.”

Step 5: Challenge the belief and replace it.

Lies about ourselves are irrational beliefs.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What's the evidence for and against this thought?

HOW TO MASTER YOUR MIND

- What would I tell a friend with the same situation?
- What's the worst that can realistically happen? How bad would that be?
- Is it really true that I must, should, or have to...?
- Am I over-generalizing from a past occurrence?
- Are there other explanations besides blaming myself?
- Is there any conceivable way to look at this positively?
- Is this situation really in my control?
- What difference will this make next week, month, or year?
- Is thinking this way in this situation making it worse or better?
- What can I accept about this situation?



This is an example conversation you might have with yourself: "I can't stand this person. They are always nagging and being rude and I cannot stand being around them--change to: This person is challenging for me to be around. They sometimes nag and are rude, which can be frustrating. I may not enjoy being around them, but I can tolerate it or I can choose to walk away..."

Unfortunately this step takes time and is not immediate. You don't say to yourself 'I'll never be able to do that', which is your old thinking pattern, to "Oh yes I can." You have to let the old pattern fade away while introducing your new improved thinking pattern.

For example:

You are out in a work situation and you want to volunteer for a new project. Your thoughts are "My boss won't put me on that project—I (am not good enough, do not have enough experience, etc.)" Immediately recognize this pattern of thinking and tell yourself something good about yourself e.g. "I'm good at

HOW TO MASTER YOUR MIND

_____” (FILL IN THE BLANK). It can be anything. This will not immediately help your situation but it will slowly begin to change your old destructive thinking pattern with a new one.

It helps if you think of real events in your life that back up your truth statement. These events could be related to your current situation or they could just be times where you experienced the truth statement in your life.

Suppose you have a meeting with your boss coming up that is making you anxious. Ideally, it helps if you can think of at least one really great meeting you’ve had with her in the past for this exercise. However, let’s suppose you’ve never had a good meeting with your boss – that’s highly unlikely but let’s go with it. And now, you have a meeting coming up with her that you’re absolutely dreading.

Here’s what I want you to do, think of a similar meeting that you’ve had with someone in a position of power that you would consider a success. Maybe it was a leader at your church or a boss at a previous company you worked at – it’s doesn’t really matter. The goal here is to prove to yourself that you are capable of having successful meetings with superiors or people of influence and power.

Now, what I want you to do is to allow yourself to go back to that meeting in your mind. Re-experience it and see how you feel. Did you laugh during the meeting? Was it lighthearted? Was it productive? What about that meeting made it successful? Now, use that memory to reinforce the truth you wrote about yourself. Make sure it aligns with how you feel about yourself when you think of this memory.

Finally, combining the truth statement, the feelings and the success from the previous event, then imagine that your upcoming meeting happens just like that previous event. Feel the confidence you have as you walk to the office, smile as you shake her hand, feel the calmness in your heart and mind as you discuss the topics, and so on. Do this as many times as you need to.

The power here is not that you have the ability to directly change or control other people. You can change you present yourself and respond to other people. This perception will likely alter how you interpret the events and potentially how that other person responds to you.

Step 6: Change takes time and does not equal failure

Changing thinking definitely takes time. Changes take place over time and are not done immediately. Remember, you did not “get here” overnight—so change will take time also. Slowly replace the negative thinking pattern with one better for you. People often want a “quick fix” – put the entrée in the microwave and it’s ready in 3 minutes. Your life did not get to this place quickly and change will not happen overnight.

Think about learning how to sign your name. Remember those first few times you tried to write your name? It looked awkward, and maybe you wrote some of the letters backward or missed some. But by practicing over and over again, you finally learned to print and then sign your name. If you had given up after a few

HOW TO MASTER YOUR MIND

times of it "not working" you would not have accomplished the goal of printing and signing your name. The same goes with changing your thinking. So be patient!

The key is to be diligent in monitoring what you are thinking, to catch the negatives before they have time to become engrained patterns of thought. With practice you will notice when you are thinking negatives, and you then can take the appropriate actions. The mind is a creature of habit, so encourage positive thoughts and eliminate negative ones. You wouldn't allow a stinky bag of poop or rotting garbage to build up in your house—so don't let negative thinking build up in the inner walls of your mind. We are responsible for the thoughts we think. This responsibility requires action to change.

References:

1. Beck, Aaron T. (1976). *Cognitive therapies and emotional disorders*. New York: New American Library.
2. Beck, Aaron T. (1972). *Depression; Causes and Treatment*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.