

## **Change your thinking to change your feeling and your doing!**

*Take control of your thinking to manage pressure and reduce stress*

Whether we like it or not, most of us become stuck with repeating patterns of behaviour. Some of these patterns might be useful when linked with times when we feel confident or situations where we feel comfortable. Others might be less beneficial when we are not supported by positive feelings. Whatever the patterns are, they will tend to produce the same, or similar, results and, therefore, reinforce how we think and feel about the situation.

When we feel under pressure, or might be becoming stressed, we can tend to go into an “auto-response” mode and repeat our patterns – and usually end up with the same feelings and results. Ask yourself if you want to continue in this way, or would you prefer to handle things differently to get another result? It can be done with practice and determination.

How we behave is generally as a result of a basic process. Our thinking about a situation, events or people dictates our feeling about it. In turn, our feeling influences our behaving. We can change our responses to people or situations, or how we might approach something or someone by looking at each of these. Although they do go in a flow from thinking to feeling to behaving, changing any element will have an effect on the overall process.

### *Thinking*

We will follow the flow of the process and begin by exploring thinking and how your thoughts are developed. One essential to remember is that your thoughts are your own! No-one has the right to tell you how to think about anything. You have a choice about how to think and can choose to begin thinking about situations or events. Your present way of thinking will have evolved as a result of a number of factors, starting at a young age. You might have been influenced by parents, other family members, teachers, bosses, work colleagues and friends to name some of the sources. This is perfectly natural and there is nothing wrong with it. What many people overlook is that they do not have to let these views and thoughts be the only ones they hold. We all have the power to develop our own thinking, and to let go of any unhelpful thoughts. I repeat, your thoughts are your own and you have a choice about what you think. This enables you to view situations differently, possibly in a more positive or helpful manner.

You can identify your thinking patterns if you pay attention to your “self-talk” and where the messages sit on a continuum of negative to positive. (The old cliché, do you see the glass as half empty or half full?) Although some recent research suggests that using things such as self-affirmations have little or no value, there is no evidence to infer that positive thinking does not work! Be careful of labels you put on people or events. If we think poorly or negatively about someone or something, it will influence how we feel – and how we behave. Guess what, if we think it, it will be so. This is the rationale behind the frequency of self-fulfilling prophecy! Allow yourself to change your thinking. Start reframing, looking at things in a different way. Recognise that there are other ways of looking at things. Facing something which you feel might be difficult, rather than think, “this will be difficult, I’m sure I can’t do it” consider, “I have done difficult things before, I can do this” or “this is not too difficult when I compare it to.....”. Change your “self-talk” to help you change your thinking.

### *Feeling*

Your emotional response to things provides you with feedback on what you have been thinking. This is worth paying attention to as our thoughts about things are often happening at an unconscious level and so we are not always aware of them. Just as our thoughts influence our feelings, these emotions will lead to our behaviour. Think about how you act when you are feeling positive. What is your physiology, ie your posture and the body language you are using? Now think about how you act when you are feeling down or

negative? For each instance, consider how your voice comes across – does it show your confidence, or does it sound hesitant or “down”?

We might like to think we can mask our feelings, but most of us do not manage it very well. We give a lot of clues about how we are feeling. This is one reason why it pays to take more control of your thinking so that you are in charge of your feelings. What is the benefit of feeling negative, or feeling “bad”? Some people may become comfortable with feeling like this through habit. It is their choice if they want to do this. Ask yourself, what do you want to feel? To achieve this, look back to your thinking and begin your changes there. Once you start generating more positive thinking and responses you will have the appropriate feelings – leading to projecting these through your behaviour and non-verbal signals.

### *Behaviour*

Your behaviour is what others see. They use this to make judgements about you and your character, whether accurate or not! Another factor to think about is the impact your behaviour might have on others and their behaviour in response to you. The old saying, “behaviour breeds behaviour” is often very true. If someone’s reaction to you is indifferent or negative in any way, take time to check how you might be behaving, whether it is your body language or tone of voice which is triggering the response. Develop your self-awareness of your behaviour, posture, gesture, degree of eye contact, tone of voice and language you use. Is it what you would like it to be? When could it be better? What do you need to do to achieve this? Most people, including friends and family, will rarely give you feedback about your behaviour and its impact on others. Therefore, you need to learn to monitor it yourself and identify any changes you want to make.

To make the changes suggested here, you need to “unstick” your old patterns. If it will help you, find some help or support. This might come from a friend, family member, a mentor or even a counsellor or therapist. (Especially one who specialises in cognitive behavioural therapy.) Remember, your thoughts and feelings are yours! No-one else is responsible for them. If you want to develop more flexible or useful behavioural options, start by changing your thinking. You can help yourself work towards this by adopting some “as if” behaviours. Although we talk of the process from thinking, through feeling to doing – you can achieve some change in your feeling by behaving “as if” you are feeling positive, confident etc. It might not be quite as powerful as beginning with your thinking, but it can support the process. Finally, change your viewing of people or situations and you can change your doing!