



Exercise: Challenging Troublesome Thoughts

Emotionally-driven thoughts can be unrealistic and inaccurate. They can have a serious impact on your mood, your confidence, and your effectiveness at work. A helpful strategy can be to challenge these thoughts and come up with more realistic perspectives on a situation. There are many questions you can ask yourself to challenge your thoughts.

Read through the following situations for examples of situations in which managers may experience troublesome, emotionally-driven thoughts. Contemplate the suggested questions to see how they could help put things into perspective. Becoming adept at challenging troublesome thoughts can lead to striking positive changes in the way you experience common workplace situations. Maintaining a realistic perspective on the actions and reactions of your workers can also make effective management much easier.

Situation: You feel angry after a meeting with a worker. Your emotionally-driven thought is: “She thinks she’s better than me”.

Ask yourself:

Do I have any evidence that this is true?

Do I have any evidence that this might not be true?

I don’t have mind-reading powers, so how can I be so certain of what others think?

Are there other possible reasons she acted the way she did?

Is there evidence that she behaves this way with others too? Am I personalizing this too much?

Has she ever acted in a way that suggests she doesn’t think this?

What’s the worst thing about it if it is true?

Are there other ways of looking at the situation?

Is there anything I can do about this if it is true? (If not, shouldn’t I just forget about it?)

Is this really important in my life? Does it affect anything truly meaningful, like my family or my health?

Situation: A group of your colleagues are chatting and laughing in the staff room. When you joined in on the conversation, nobody laughed at your joke. Your emotionally-driven thought is: “Everyone must think I’m a loser”.

Ask yourself:

That’s not very specific. So I believe *everyone* thinks I’m a loser, or just some people?

What do I mean by *loser*?

Do I have any evidence suggesting that my colleagues think this about me?

Are there any alternative interpretations of their behavior?



Have my colleagues ever demonstrated in the past that they accept me and like having me around?
What would my wife/husband/sister/best friend say to me if I told them that I think I'm a loser?
Are there small positives in my interactions with my colleagues that I am not noticing right now?

Situation: Your team is scheduled to launch a project by the end of the month and the project, which you've worked on for months, is not even half finished. There was simply not enough time to do all of the work on your plate. You want to discuss the need for an extension with your boss, but fear holds you back. Your emotionally-driven thought is: "She will think that I am completely incompetent. She will harshly criticize me and then fire me."

Ask yourself:

What sort of mental images do I have about this? Am I making a prediction about what will happen based on imaginary outcomes?

I don't have a crystal ball, so how do I know for sure how the conversation will go?

What is the worse that could happen if my thought is true?

If I were in my manager's shoes, how would I react to my request for an extension?

Is it possible that the problem is not as daunting as it seems in my mind?

Make sure you don't let troublesome, emotionally-driven thoughts go unchallenged, especially ones that tend to occur frequently. Asking yourself questions like those above may seem unnatural at first, but the more you do it, the more comfortable you will feel. As you practice the technique of challenging troublesome thoughts, you are very likely to notice significant changes in how you react to situations. Sometimes asking one or two simple questions is enough to help put a situation into perspective and forget any unrealistic concerns that may have popped into your mind.