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GREAT THOUGHTS

How many thoughts have you had today? Some years ago there was a Peugeot TV commercial, filmed in sepia, showing a man driving the latest model. The ad said we have 84,000 thoughts a day (or was it 8,400?) and in amongst the drivers thoughts he still saves a little girl in a red coat ("*Schindler's List*" rip-off) from an on-coming lorry. I guess the ad stayed in my mind because as a designer, I wanted to know how they had done it (filming in sepia but adding in the red coat: the oncoming lorry towards the little girl actress: and how they had seamlessly 'stitched' it all together?) and I was intrigued about how they had come up with the number of thoughts. Did they use one of those 'clicker' counters things on an 'average Joe'? Is there a university studying the amount of thoughts we have? And why did this commercial come into my head as I decided to write this? Mmm.... how both amazing and random is my mind! However, despite being unsure how many thoughts we have each day, I know that everyone can improve their thinking ability to find better solutions and have really creative ideas. We just need to know how – so I thought (forgive the pun!) we could look at this in more detail.

Finding the answers

When people first come to coaching they expect to talk to me about about what's going on and then for me to give them the answers. Yet those of you who have experienced coaching, know that it's rare for me (or for other coaches) to do that. Why? Because the best answers come from the person who is asking the question, not the coach. So why on earth do you need a coach? The reason is the coach helps you find those answers by stimulating your thinking processes. The first step in coming up with creative ideas, solutions and or new perspectives is to talk it through with someone who will *really* listen. Let me show you how this works.

Lets say you want to speak to your boss, but you forever keep putting it off. It might be to ask for a pay rise, or to ask if you can use a different approach in the way you work, or even work different hours, or whatever. But although you *really* want to do this, you just can't seem to find the courage to do it. Weeks go by and you've still not spoken to your boss. Why is this so? Nearly always it will be because you have an 'assumption' about your boss in regard to what you are going to ask. You assume your boss will

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laugh, or will be cross at you for raising the issue. You assume your boss will think you are stupid. Moreover, if you think about this some more, you might start to believe that you are not worthy, that you *are* stupid and why on earth should you risk bothering your boss? It is these 'assumptions' get in the way of clear, creative thinking, and which often keeps you 'stuck' for days, weeks, months or even years.

To get 'unstuck' you need to express your *all* of your thoughts about the issue that is bothering you. But in normal conversations, only *some* of these thoughts will get expressed. If we use the above example, telling a friend about wanting to talk to your boss, their response will probably be something like: "You're *not* stupid! Go talk to him!", or: "Your boss sounds like a difficult person to approach" or they will regale you with a story of what happened to them when they were in a similar situation. Often the friend will listen *just long enough* to get the bare facts of the story, then they will jump in with their thoughts, solutions or ideas. But notice something here: it's *their* ideas, *their* thoughts, *their* solutions and mostly *their ideas* simply won't work for you because you need to find your own solutions.

When you are being coached, this is the first part of what we (coaches) do: listen, *really* listen without interruption. Then we share with you what we have heard (reflecting back what you have just said, because in a strange way sometimes you don't 'hear' what it is you have just said) and then we will ask you a question to help you explore this issue some more. In this way we help you to keep going, bringing out all of your thoughts, ideas, blocks, fears, worries, anxieties to the surface. When it has all been expressed, your mind can start to *really* work on the issue – and at this point you will often suddenly get a new idea, one that suddenly makes sense to you.

Can just *listening* produce this? Yes, but notice that the listener also needs to help you get to the bottom of this by asking questions. And not just any old questions will do. They need to be ones that help you go deeper. CoachU describe these questions as 'empowering questions' but Nancy Kline in "*Time to Think*" calls these 'incisive questions' – and I think that's a better way of describing them. Nancy Kline's incisive questions work like this: they address the assumption, offer an alternative view and they request a solution. Again using the example above an incisive question might look like this: "If you

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knew you were an intelligent woman (*addressing the assumption and giving it an alternative view: i.e. not stupid*), how would you talk to your boss? (*requesting a solution*).

If you're not being coached just now, and you have an issue that is bothering you, ask a partner, friend or family member to *really* listen to you (without interrupting you) until you can think of nothing else to say on the issue. You will be surprised how effective even this first stage of getting your mind to work is, and how it helps you clarify things. Another way is to use an exercise called 'direct writing'. This form of writing is where you write about an issue that is bothering you until you can write no more. Expect to write pages as it all comes tumbling out. When you use direct writing, pay no heed to grammar, syntax nor even how neat your writing is. Let it all just flood through. When you have got to the end, ask yourself for a solution to the problem, using the incisive question technique. If you're still stuck, try posing the question from the perspective of someone you respect. Something along the lines of: "If Helen, who is really great at talking to people, wanted to find a way to talk to her boss, what would she do?"

Positive thinking

Positive Thinking (or positive mental attitude) is regularly bandied about, but few people put it into use everyday nor even understand the power of it. In fact most of us seem to have a hefty dose of in-built negativity. Susan Jeffers in "Feel the Fear and do it Anyway" suggests that the main reason we don't apply positive thinking to our daily lives is that it takes effort. I think she is right. Susan Jeffers' book has a whole raft of exercises and ideas for you to begin working on your in-built negativity like using inspirations quotes, reading affirmations and listening to music, ideas, stories that will be up-lifting and inspirational. Susan Jeffers' reminds us that we take time to shower, put on make-up and shave every day – so why not add some time everyday for positive thinking too? Still not convinced? Try this exercise below. It will show you just how powerful the mind is.

Check the power of your mind!

To do this exercise you need a friend (partner/colleague/or family member) to do it with. Stand in front of each other. Ask your friend to extend their arms out to the side. Now ask them to resist with as much strength as possible as you try to push their arms back

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down to their sides using your hands. Now ask your friend to close their eyes and say out-loud: "I am a weak and unworthy person". Ask them to repeat this 10 times. It doesn't matter whether they believe it or not – just ask them to say it with feeling. Now ask your friend to extend their arms again and to resist again as you try to push their arms down. I think both of you are going to be surprised! Now ask your friend to close their eyes and say out-loud: "I am a strong and worthy person". Again say it with feeling and repeat 10 times. Now repeat the exercise of trying to push down your friend's extended arms. What happens? When you try this exercise before saying anything, your partner can easily resist you trying to push down their arms. When they have said "I am weak" ten times, the mind takes this on board, so the next time you can push their arms down – even if they are physically stronger than you. When they have said "I am strong" once again you can't push their arms down.

...and finally

There is a great website called Totally Unique Thoughts which can send you a message 'from the universe'. Getting these messages great way to start your day. The messages are positive, inspiring, thought provoking, up-lifting and sometimes funny too. Here's one I received recently:

When you finally get that call, meet that person, walk that walk, and live that dream, Jennie, do you think you'll even care that there were a few dark and scary moments in a journey that made them all possible? Trust me, you won't even remember.

The Universe

And, Jennie, won't you be glad you never settled for less?

Sign up for these and more at: www.tut.com. To find out more about "Time to Think" by Nancy Kline or "Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway" by Susan Jeffers, go to www.reddandelion.co.uk/books.html

As always, I love to hear from you. Let me know you how you got on with the exercise and, if this has been useful to you, please forward this email to a friend.

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