

## How do your self-judgements impact your results?

WHAT you see – business numbers not as high as anticipated, some tasks still outstanding, a couple of conversations you intended to have but haven't yet – takes up far less of your mental energy than HOW you see it.

Today's helpsheet is all about waking up to the hidden power of context, which we often forget and overlook. It is not our goals themselves, outstanding tasks, progress so far this quarter, but our judgements about those things, that we need to be aware of and pay attention to. Your judgements are what is running the show, whether you realise it or not.

So, how closely are you seeing what are you saying to yourself about your goals and targets? Is it along the lines of "I'm looking forward to getting down to those last 2 calls and will have them finished this pm", or "I haven't managed to get those calls done yet, but they're back in the planning for first thing tomorrow"? Or is your inner voice saying something more like, "I know I should make those 2 calls, but I can't bring myself to. They seemed like a good idea before, but now I'm less sure the client will be interested."

If the latter, maybe you've gone round in circles trying to get something started, rescheduling it, still not doing it and finally thinking you can't face it. All things to forgive yourself for – those reactions are normal enough and, if you could accept them as such, you probably would have moved on by now. If you haven't moved on and procrastination continues to weigh you down, ask yourself what you're resisting.

You're probably not just resisting doing the task – if it was that simple you'd have acknowledged that and got back on track. Consider there's something else you're resisting – e.g. that you are questioning your strategy or your ability and confidence to deliver it. It's an opportunity to own up to whatever you're resisting and to allow it to be, rather than to deny it. Acceptance provides you the space to step back and recreate your next action steps, whereas what you resist persists – meaning that if you don't accept where you are now, those unpleasant thoughts will continue to come back and occupy time and space in your head that you could much better use for something else.

Those are our judgements, what we make things mean, how we talk to ourselves - e.g. "something's missing here, that's not good enough, we're behind on that target and won't catch up this quarter" etc. Our judgements and assumptions deeply impact and amplify how we feel about ourselves and our ability to move through what's on our desk now, remaining to be done, taking our attention.

What we resist persists and what we focus on expands. When we can accept ourselves and all the things on our desk the way they are, the feeling of fatigue, disappointment, frustration, whatever the emotion, it can then begin to shrink. As it shrinks, our perspective widens to notice other options and ways of seeing our challenges, as we can zoom back out of that blind alley we've been stuck in and see the open road once more. With that new perspective and the view ahead open to us once again, we are energised to take action and can let go of that long to-do list that didn't get done yet.

Intervening in the pattern, shifting the context

So, if our words to ourselves shape what we see and what's possible for us, often less favourably, what can we do to change the words and shift away from the limits of judgement towards seeing a vista of possibility?

One way, when we find ourselves caught in a downward spiral of judgements, is to step back and stop. Accept this is time to stop, take a break and refocus. Reflect on why we created our goals and what made them exciting in the first place? How did we feel then? What was the rush of excitement about?

Another step is to ask ourselves what's familiar about this current impasse we are experiencing and how we are acting to deal with it. This can enable us to distinguish if we've gone back into the past, revisiting a similar situation from back then which didn't go to plan. What did we make that mean about us and our ability? That decision back then could be the trigger that is driving those same feelings of impossibility right now in the present challenge, reminding us of a past limit and leading us to question what we can now accomplish.

So far, so normal. Once we can distinguish those triggers, such as a past memory when we experienced a barrier to our progress, it provides an opening: an opportunity to accept what happened back then and have compassion for ourselves and to let it go. That situation has served its purpose and it has no connection to the present challenge - unless we decide that it does.

So, we have a choice now. While we could fall into the trap of seeking evidence from all sorts of past examples of things we attempted and did not fulfil on, all that does is provide a convenient way out for us, to justify us as poor victims. It lets us opt out of being responsible for the outcomes we produce – by blaming circumstances, others including our leaders, colleagues, teams etc. That costs us our energy and self-esteem.

A much more empowering place to stand would be to acknowledge those past situations and what our part was in the outcome that got produced. Accept our imperfections and that we, like others, make mistakes. Whatever happened, whatever didn't get done, let's remember that unfulfilled possibility is STILL possibility. In other words, just because I haven't succeeded with that goal yet, doesn't mean I can't or won't.

So take each opportunity to connect regularly with yourself at the start of the day, to see where you're coming from today, tomorrow, the day after etc. Confront what you're experiencing and saying to yourself right now, so you can nip it in the bud and refocus, rather than rushing into the working day on autopilot. Starting the day on autopilot is about as useful as flying without a radar system and hoping you won't crash just because you know the way!

Whereas actively checking in with yourself, such as by doing a body scan or meditation before starting work, is a great practice for seeing where you're located and what mindset you are in. It provides a foundation for you to set your day up powerfully. A body scan will increase your physical awareness so you notice any tension you're holding in your body, experience the act of breathing in the present moment, compared to the passive breathing we all do a lot of the time when our attention is somewhere else.

Once you're in the present moment, you're free to choose your focus of attention, released from the triggers of reliving yesterday's difficult meeting again and again in your mind (regrets about the past), or compulsively jumping ahead three weeks in your mind worrying about a challenging conference you are running (fear of the future).

Turn those triggers to your advantage whenever they come - if you are seeing only negative scenarios, it's a sign to notice them, to stop and reflect. See what judgements you're bringing to what you are seeing. Take a moment to step back and consider the bigger picture. "Direction ok, progress slower this week," that voice inside is telling you? Maybe remind that voice that you had to negotiate some unexpected obstacles, doing so successfully even if you had less time available for the priorities you set. It's all still the right direction of travel, so keep going! That's your reframe.

By deliberately checking in with ourselves, we can INTERVENE in our current pattern of thinking and can observe our thoughts and behaviour from a distance and adapt them. By actively adopting that observer position, a shift is possible for us, emotions can move again, the stuck energy can flow. The shift is immediate, like opening our eyes after sleep, inviting us once again to put our hands on the steering wheel and be responsible, replacing the illusion that we are helpless victims at the mercy of circumstances beyond our control.

In conclusion, we're often on autopilot without knowing it, blind to our operating context, unaware of the air we breathe, our mood, alertness, active listening or noticing the surroundings we are in because they're familiar. If we put on a pair of coloured glasses, we immediately see the colour difference, but after a while keeping the glasses on, that different colour just looks normal. Checking in is like activating the senses, putting on the coloured glasses: we experience our present moment differently.

So it's a useful routine to check in with ourselves for a couple of minutes at least once during the working day. Do a quick reflection on how we feel in our bodies, how is our energy level, what emotions are uppermost. Whatever shows up on our mental and emotional dashboard is useful data, telling us something we were previously unaware of, or avoiding or resisting. Awareness is an invitation to accept ourselves in this moment just as we are. Then, we are free to move on.

I provide one to one and team coaching for leaders and their organisations. If something resonates in what I've outlined here and you would like to check out what support options could be helpful for you and your team, please get in touch.