



Perform Better under pressure

Chose your wisdom voice over your inner critique

Introduction

3 things you need to know about thoughts :

1. We all have 100s of thoughts going through our minds every day, some are helpful, some aren't.
2. We have very little control on these thoughts, this is down to our biology, the mind creates constantly.
3. It's not our thoughts that get us into trouble, it's the power we give them.

Your inner critic

These thoughts are called our thoughts of habits, they are shortcuts to our memory, they are what allow us to learn, to act quickly, without them everything we do would take an incredible amount of time, because everything would need to be analyzed and depicted. A table doesn't need to look exactly like every other table you've seen for you to recognize it's a table, you see a flat structure supported by 4 legs that stands up and you deduct it's a table, even if you've never seen one just like that before. Your thoughts of habits are the ones that allow you to come to this conclusion, they are fed by your memories, your experiences, your learnings and your beliefs.

Sometimes throughout our lives, throughout our experiences and learnings of what is "good" and "bad, a glitch happens. We draw conclusions about ourselves or about the world that transform into these little voices in our heads that tell us that we cannot do something, we're not enough, we just can't do this... This is when our thoughts of habits become our inner critic

Example: Let's take the case of an interview (but this applies to any stressful situation), if you had bad experiences in your last jobs that might have chipped down your confidence a little, then the thoughts of habits that will spring from that will be the ones in your next job interview of "you're not really capable of doing this, might as well not bother" "you know this is out of your league" etc..

The primary role of these thoughts is simply to protect you from a situation that your unconscious has classified as dangerous, because, in the past that situation put your body in a condition of stress, your unconscious is trying to protect you by getting you to move away from this situation. In these moments we are in a state of protection. Protection means we are closing ourselves from the external environment, from new information. Protection is essential to our survival but it's not sustainable, as if we stay in a state of protection we cannot grow, we cannot develop.

Your wisdom voice

If you were to ignore this inner critique, if you were to bring the volume down on these thoughts of habits in the most challenging moments you would be able to hear another voice, much softer, much lower, a voice that tells you exactly what you're supposed to do. This voice, in us, always, is called our wisdom voice. Your wisdom voice is the one that's been with you this whole time, your whole life, because it's much quieter than your inner critic, it's much easier to hear it in situation when you feel calm, stressful situation will often trigger your voices of habits that are far much louder, since they are here to protect you and it's much more efficient to shout "fire" when the building is burning down than to whisper it.

But your wisdom voice is the one that knows exactly what you are capable of, what your true and unique abilities are, it's the one that knows exactly how to put up the fire.

And it's been with us all our lives, this wisdom, babies don't start walking because of peer pressure, or other people's expectations, they do it because they know it's a better way to get from point A to B and no matter how many times they fall and fail they will never start doubting their ability to succeed, that knowledge is their inner wisdom speaking to them, we are born with our inner wisdom and so long as we have yet to draw negative conclusions about the world and about ourselves, it guides us and tells us what to do, but then we grow up, and the world becomes more complicated, it creates interference and glitches in our learning patterns.

Recognising our inner critique for what it is, a series of thoughts of habits that are not real, can be liberating, as by doing so we allow ourselves to ignore those made-up thoughts that do not serve us, and therefore we make space in our minds to hear our inner wisdom in the most challenging moments, which is evidently when we need it the most. Essentially moving ourselves from a state of protection to a state of growth.

Exercise

The below exercise will help you to move your mindset from a state of protection to a state of growth in challenging situations by:

- 1/ recognizing your thoughts of habits (inner critique)
- 2/ stripping these thoughts of their power
- 3/ Making space for your wisdom voice

1/ bring the voices of habit (inner critic) at the surface

Your voices of habits are created by your inner critic, and this is what we are going to challenge.

Imagine that you're about to face a stressful situation, for clarity purposes we will use the job interview example again but this could simply be a single conversation with someone of authority, doing a presentation at work or any type of situation that causes you to feel nervous, stressed anxious etc... so imagine you are going to the interview today. It's a few hours away, but you've already started thinking about it and how it's going to go. Write these down :

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a / Let's get the good thoughts out of the way first as it's important to focus on the positive so first make a list answering that question: What are some things you can be confident about approaching this situation?

b/ Now for the less helpful thoughts: Are there any things that you're not so confident about if you're going to the interview? Is there anything you need to be careful about, to remind yourself to avoid?

c/ get your inner critic list : For each item/thought on this second list ask yourself and that means? Because?

What we are looking for is to isolate the beliefs about yourself that created this inner critic, so all the things you are telling yourself that have the ability to limit your performance at this interview
Ex :

"I am worried about the job being high pressure" > because? > "Because I don't know if I can handle it"

"This is a big step up" > and that means? > "And that means I might not get it" > because ?
"because I don't think I am as good as they think I am"

2/ Identify your inner critic

When you have your list of thoughts of habits, ask yourself these questions (do not overthink it, write whatever comes to mind) :

a/ if this inner critic had a shape or a form what would it be? Do they have a voice? What kind of voice? Are they whispering to you or are they shouting? Are they wearing clothes? Could you tell if they are bigger than you? Or smaller? Where are they? Do they stand somewhere near you? Or are they like a little worm chewing away in your head?

Help: you struggle with visualisation, keep bringing yourself back into the interview room and repeating your thoughts of habit in your mind to stay on track.

b/ Now let's make this inner critic seem less serious, believable, and threatening ... what could you change about it so that the voices don't seem as real anymore? If it's a person maybe you can change its clothes or its voice so that it looks / sounds a bit ridiculous/ if it had a form or a colour you can change them so they look softer, more comforting etc... spend a few seconds playing with the modalities so that your inner critic looks less serious, less credible to you

3/ listen to your wisdom voice

Can you agree now that your inner critic is not credible/ serious/ important/ telling you the truth?

Now that you've made space in your mind, time to tune into your inner wisdom instead, close your eyes and think about this interview again and you tune in to your inner wisdom...what is the new message? What do you really know about yourself, your strength and abilities that can help you in this situation that you might not have seen before?

Help: If you still struggle to hear it, repeat the exercise again, visualise your inner critic and change the modalities to make it look, sound and feel different/better to you

Write this down.

Conclusion

Congratulations! You are now proficient in listening to your wisdom voice when you need it the most.

This exercise not only sheds light on these moments where we struggle to differentiate what's real (our strength and capabilities - wisdom voice) from what isn't (fears, limiting beliefs - inner critique) it will also allow you to keep your mind clear when approaching a "threatning" situation. Keeping the mind clear means keeping intrusive, negative thoughts of habit at bay, which means performing more efficiently. We perform better when we stop listening to these voices of habits, that's when we feel like we're in a "flow", ask any great public speaker what they were thinking about when they were doing their speech they will all give you the same answer "nothing".

It's when we stop our thoughts to contaminate our mind that we are the most able to deliver our best work.

Charlotte