



STRESS MANAGEMENT TOOLS

Change the Way You Think

The boss reprimands two employees for not completing a project on time. Sue's response: "What does she think I am—a slave? I can't cope with these demands." Mary's response: "I goofed and I feel bad about it. But I think I can figure out why this project got behind schedule so it won't happen again."

Same stimulus, different response. What made the difference?

Thought Patterns: The Crucial Difference

Most of us think of our feelings and responses as direct results of an activating event outside of ourselves—in this case, words from the boss. But there's a middle stage—your thoughts about yourself. The sequence goes like this:

- A: Activating Event**
- B: Your Thoughts**
- C: Feelings and Behaviors.**

Part B—your thoughts—tends to be hidden from view. Most people don't know it's there. But when you understand how your thoughts about yourself influence your behavior, you can begin to change the way you think. Let's look at how these two employees' responses might have been affected by their thoughts:

- A: Boss's reprimand**
- B: Sue's thinking: "I messed up. I probably deserve to be fired."**
- C: Response: Upset, nervous, defensive.**

- A: Boss's reprimand**
- B: Mary's thinking: "I wish I had finished on schedule, but I didn't. I know I can improve."**
- C: Disappointed but not discouraged.**

Recognizing Thought Patterns

We all have an inner voice directing our responses to events. What's your voice telling you? Think of the last time you felt a strong, unpleasant emotion. Take a moment and write down in part A the event that "caused" the emotion. Write the emotion in part C. Finally, under B, write what you were thinking between the event and the emotion.

A: Activating Event

B: Your Thoughts

C: Feelings and Behavior

Was your thinking rational? Did it help you cope with the stressful event? Can you think of some alternative ways of thinking that might have helped more?

Taking Control Mentally

Most people who suffer from stress have an inner feeling that they have no control over the events in their lives. Sue found the boss's reprimand stressful because she felt that she was inadequate to the task. Mary saw the incident as something she could learn from and improve upon. The next time your stomach starts churning over work-related stress, stop and ask yourself what role your thinking is playing.

OLD WAY OF THINKING:

I'm not smart enough.
I'm not fast enough.
People are taking advantage of me.
The boss doesn't like me.
I can't fail again.

NEW WAY OF THINKING:

I can learn new skills.
Sometimes there's just more work than anyone can handle.
I have the right to say "no."
The boss depends on me.
We all make mistakes.