

The Power of Thought

By Mel Schwartz

There has been a flurry of media attention recently, heralding the power of thought. From the movie, *The Secret* to *Wall Street* Journal articles and a *Time* magazine feature, there is a spate of interest about how our thoughts impact not only our lives, but even our brain chemistry. This approach moves beyond the limitations of the classical bio-medical approach, which asserts that our thoughts are at the mercy of our brain chemistry and that we are hard wired. Indeed, new evidence suggests that the process may well be the other way around. It is with both gratification and validation that I witness these events, as they illuminate a theme that I have been asserting for many years. It appears that a significant breakthrough may actually be underway. For it to succeed, however, it is essential that we not oversimplify the message with a quick fix orientation, as our culture is so inclined to do.

Change your thoughts, change your life

The transformational pundits and the host of well-intentioned speakers and writers in this field, would have us believe that it is as easy as changing your thoughts. The maxim might be, change your thoughts, change your life. This is indeed true, but understanding how to accomplish this loft goal is omitted from the message. Many people come into therapy with me feeling very disappointed, after having been highly motivated by such promptings, only to settle back into old territory. Changing your thoughts does in fact alter the script of your life, but learning how to do so is essential; and very few people are telling you how to achieve this. My work over the last half decade has been primarily devoted to this task and as such I'd like to share some of the pathways toward such change.

Comfort zone or familiar zone?

Our thoughts are primarily informed by our experiences and our beliefs. Thought tends to represent our life experiences. The word represent is literally to re-present. As such, we tend get stuck in particular grooves as old, habitual thought, continues to re-present our past. When this occurs, we aren't present if we're enslaved by old thought and hence, old feelings. The desire or intention to break free of old thought requires coming out from what I refer to as the familiar zone. Ordinarily, we might call this the comfort zone, except that it's not particularly comfortable, only familiar. The struggle to liberate ourselves from this basin of thought and to engage change, if not transformational experience, requires surging beyond the barriers of the zone of the familiar.

The difficulty in accomplishing this is that old thought literally defends its territory, announcing that it's too dangerous or uncomfortable to venture into the unknown in such a manner. I've enjoyed considerable success assisting people beyond this self-imposed boundary by asking them to shift their relationship with their discomfort. If the disquiet of moving into new terrain becomes our justification for maintaining old thinking and old

behavior, we need to shift our relationship with this anxiety. Begin to look at the discomfort as your ally, as a signal that you're venturing out of the familiar zone. If you're comfortable, you're likely stuck in the groove of old thought. Just as working out and training our bodies into shape requires a certain discomfort, so does learning to free our thinking from the groove.

On a larger note, it is not a simple as changing your thoughts, but more literally changing your thinking. By this I'm suggesting the manner in which we think. Our thinking is filtered by a mindscape of beliefs, meta-programming and worldviews. Think of these as filters through which we see. Changing the filter reveals new realities. Taking off very dark sunglasses and replacing them with a lighter tint transforms what you see.

Thinking that is tied to an old, outmoded worldview is terribly restrictive and encumbers our lives in illusions of separation and despair. Fundamental to what I teach in the *Emergent Thinking*® process is that a shift of worldview which integrates the remarkable discoveries of the emerging sciences doesn't simply have us substitute new thoughts for old thoughts. It fundamentally presents an entirely new canvas upon which we can paint our lives. Learning how to change your thoughts, your beliefs and your particular worldview will enlighten your life. Finding the proper pathway in that endeavor is the next step.

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Don't tell you how to...

Tell them how to

Words..thoughts...beliefs...worldviews

Zone of the familiar

Old ideas defend territory