

Breaking Free of Anxiety, Part VII, Developing Sequential Problem-Solving Skills

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In Part III of this series, I addressed how certain thinking styles create a vulnerability to panic and anxiety. In this posting, I will elaborate on this issue. Let's examine the importance of linear-sequential problem-solving skills to break free of anxiety.

As the science of psychology has progressed, more attention and research has become focused on understanding how different styles of thinking serve to create different styles of emotional reacting. As it turns out, the way we think is far more important than what we think when it comes to managing our emotions. Of the many different thinking styles studied, none is more important to be aware of than a global versus linear thinking style.

A global thinking style is a tendency to think in overly general terms. Examples: "Men are from Mars, and women are from Venus." "Democrats tax and spend and Republicans cater to the wealthy." "Life is good." "Life is short, and then we die." "Everything happens for a reason." etc.

Now, contrast a generalized thinking style with that of the linear style. Linear thinking is the tendency to break things down into logical components and sequences. Linear thinking is logical, detailed, and orderly. Linear thinkers don't spend much time focusing on the big picture. Instead, they quickly focus on the sequence of steps involved in getting to a goal. When a goal is defined, they immediately begin to ask themselves, "What is the first step I need to take in order to be successful in moving toward this goal." Take a complex goal...like getting a college degree. A global thinker will spend a good deal of time thinking about getting the college degree, what it might do for them in terms of a career in the future, and how it might feel to have a college degree in hand. The linear thinker will immediately begin to focus on how they are going to make a decision about which college to attend, what will be involved in the application process, and what the first steps might be to make enrollment a reality.

For anxious individuals, there is a significant tendency to think globally and negatively about the totality of an experience. As a result, global, negative thinkers react emotionally to the entirety of a situation, and become easily overwhelmed. For example, an anxious person may often think to themselves, "I want to quit feeling so anxious." Yet, when asked what it would mean to be less anxious, or when they last felt comfortable and in what situation, they often have no answer. Or, they may say, "I've never felt confident or comfortable." Globalized thinking can be good in some situations, but it is ineffective in problem-solving. Good problem-solvers are logical sequential thinkers. This allows them to stay calm, deal with details, and lay out a step by step approach for creating a positive solution. Global thinking is a positive attribute for those who are in positions that require them to develop vision. But, linear thinkers are required in order to make that vision a reality.

It is important to appreciate that some people may be very global in one area of their life, and quite linear in another. One might be very linear in money management, yet very global in the way they choose to think about their relationships. This explains why we can be very effective in one area of life, and quite ineffective in another.

The more global one is in their thinking, the more apt one is to over-evaluate the risk involved in a given situation. Furthermore, the more global one is in their thinking, the easier it is to become overwhelmed by any given task. To break free of anxiety often requires one to develop and strengthen linear problem-solving skills. This allows for more effective problem-solving and less emotional reaction to life's problems and stressors. You can be sure that those who demonstrate a relaxed, confident approach to life's stressors are thinking and telling themselves things that are quite different from those who react in a highly anxious fashion. If you are prone to anxiety or panic, the good news, you can also learn to think like the calm and confident, and break free of debilitating panic and anxiety.

Hypnosis is one powerful way to effectively and efficiently develop new thinking styles for confronting life's stressors and uncertainties.