

Breaking Free of Anxiety, Part VIII, Learn To Compartmentalize

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In the last posting, I addressed global vs. linear thinking, as it contributes to enhancing or diminishing one's susceptibility to anxiety and panic. Now I want to address compartmentalization, another critical thinking skill.

Compartmentalization is the ability to set aside one aspect of your experience and focus on another instead. Through this process, we use the creative power of the mind to break a problem, situation, or task, down into smaller and smaller bits, so it becomes easier to manage. Obviously, the ability to think linearly versus globally, rests on one's ability to compartmentalize.

Emotions are the product of thought. So, when we compartmentalize a problem or situation, we automatically experience a decline in emotional intensity. People who are easily overwhelmed tend to think globally and over-emphasize all the emotions attached to the entirety of the situation. Let's take the example of completing a picture puzzle containing 1000 pieces...To look at all 1000 pieces at once is overwhelming. But, once you begin to sort the pieces...edges, color, corners, etc., it becomes more manageable. Read part VII of this series on linear thinking, and you can recognize individuals with linear thinking styles...they will tend to compartmentalize their experiences naturally and automatically. Those who tend to think globally, will need to develop the skill of compartmentalizing, so they can gain greater management of their emotions.

Learning to compartmentalize is a necessary skill for living effectively. By enhancing the ability to separate key elements of experience, they don't contaminate or conflict with each other. For example, one who cannot separate "work" from personal life, often creates a good deal of conflict for themselves and others on the job. Another example would be parents who can't separate their fears and worries from letting their children go off to college. Their worries and fears create a good deal of anxiety, which transfers onto the children, making separation process all that more difficult.

The ability to separate an impulse from an action is also what creates numerous behavioral problems for many children at home and at school.

To summarize, compartmentalization is a specific skill, and the ability to separate two or more elements of one's life experience from each other, so that they do not emotionally contaminate each other. Why is this important when breaking free of anxiety?

Compartmentalization is what allows one to experience some nervousness or self-doubt regarding a given situation, and be able to move ahead and deal with it anyway. The calm and confident experiences nervousness and anxiety in new situations, just as those who suffer from severe doubt and panic reactions. The difference between the two...the overly anxious do not compartmentalize their experience, so their anxiety continues to

heighten and magnify to the point it immobilizes them. The confident are able to feel the anxiety, put it aside, and do what they need to do anyway.

Compartmentalization is a skill which can be learned by anyone. It is developed and strengthened with practice. It is a key component when breaking free of anxiety. Hypnosis is one tool, and an effective way to teach these skills to those who are global thinkers. By developing these skills, the initial awkwardness or nervousness that comes with a new situation, can quickly and easily give way to a sense of mastery and increased feelings of self-confidence.