

# Exercise 2 – It's Your Choice

Recap:

In the last session we talked about what makes us happy, the equation for it and why we are looking at the cycles of lessons in the way we are.

Remember –

1. it takes 21 days to form a habit, and
2. the formula for happiness is –  $H = G + C + T\&A$

Your thoughts and actions are the most important part of the change that you are wanting to make.

How do you feel you went in the past 3 weeks?

**In this session we will cover:**

- the concept of 'Counter factual thinking'
- how we can create our own beneficial mental images of scenarios
- how our perspective colours our world and the choices we make

**Just as you can change your habits, you can change your thinking. Changing your thinking will change your behaviour. You will make better choices.**

**You are the only person responsible for the choices that you make, therefore you have a large responsibility for the outcomes.**

William Glasser, MD, wrote [\*Choice Theory: A New Psychology of Personal Freedom\*](#), which states, amongst other things, that:

- All we do is behave
- Almost all behaviour is chosen.

Positive and optimistic thinking and the relevant choices and behaviour will help in all areas of your life, including relationships, satisfaction and happiness.

**Try this exercise:**

**Imagine that this morning you ended up in a 10-car nose-to-tail accident on the freeway.**



*Photo by Hayden Walker on Unsplash*

Your car is a mess and not driveable, but you are unhurt.

- How would you describe this incident to me afterwards? Would you say that you were lucky or unlucky?
- Would you retell your tale of woe to anyone who you come into contact with, or would you put it behind you as an inconvenience but a lucky escape?
- Would you bemoan the amount of time lost at the scene and rail against the excess on your insurance?

Do you think that by giving thanks for being unhurt you will feel much better about the whole unfortunate incident? How about not spreading negativity by retelling the story? The people who you tell it to can do nothing to change the situation. Are you just looking for their sympathy?

Studies done on this type of scenario show that generally 70% of people say they were unfortunate – and the other 30% say fortunate.

Are you in the former or the latter?

When you extrapolate what could be the consequences of such an incident, surely walking away unhurt is good, positive and you should feel happy? Even if your brand new Maserati has been written off, it's only a car. It doesn't have feelings or family or a living to earn. It's replaceable – you are not.

Psychology tells us that when a situation like this happens we humans choose to create 'counterfactuals' – possible outcomes that could have been different based on 'if only' thinking.

***If only I hadn't gone back into the house for a cardigan, I would never have ended up in the accident.***

***What if I didn't have my seat belt on, I could have been seriously hurt.***

These alternatives that we choose to create are counter to the facts, they happened in the past, and they create space for us to analyse the consequences of what actually happened versus the story we have created in our mind, the counterfactual.

Research on counterfactual thinking has shown that people's emotional responses to events are influenced by their thoughts about what might have been.

We can use this thinking to create positive counterfactuals, beneficial effects caused through more optimistic thoughts and emotions. Because an alternative scenario is invented we have the power in any given situation to consciously select a counterfactual to make us feel fortunate.

Selecting a positive counterfactual sets us up for benefits and motivation that come from a positive mindset.

Downward counterfactuals are where you create a scenario that is worse than the actual event (as in no seatbelt), but they create a positive emotion. Upward counterfactuals are obviously the opposite.

What we can also do is use this type of scenario thinking to learn lessons about what to do in the future – changing our behaviour based on events to ensure better outcomes in the future.

For instance, imagine if you had the accident, but hadn't bothered to renew your insurance. Or if you have no insurance and then you have a near miss in the car, do you think you would then go and make sure you had the premium that was right for you.

Think about this application when it comes to goal setting. When you set a goal it can go one way or the other. You are either going to hit it or you're not.

Olympians set goals and many use visualisation techniques to see themselves winning. But there can only be 1 gold, 1 silver and 1 bronze medal given in each event.

A study was done on the emotional reactions of bronze and silver medallists at both the 1992 Summer Olympics and the 1994 Empire State Games.

Outcomes show that the person who won bronze was generally happier with their outcome than the silver medallist. They could even see it in the smiles on the faces when the 3 were standing on the podium.

The winner of silver can only focus on how close they were to winning the gold. But the bronze medallists think about how they may not have received a medal at all, creating a downward counterfactual that makes them feel so much better with the outcome.

Where else do you think this type of thinking occurs, or where does it happen in your life? How about results from exams or medical tests?

You can choose to use this type of thinking to your advantage.

Use it to spur you into action, look at past scenarios from different perspectives and make difference choices in the future, change your habits or just use scenarios to find the positive in every situation.

You have control over your thinking, and if you are in the habit of creating 'what if' scenarios make sure they are downward counterfactuals that will bring on positive emotions. If you spend a lot of time thinking 'if only', then that is a longing that is going to leave you dissatisfied because you cannot go back and change the past outcome.

## **Exercises:**

- Monitor your thinking and journal on any incidences where you have created a counterfactual, upward or downward.
- Think about a negative incident that you have experienced recently. Journal a scenario that will make you feel better about it. Take the time to focus on those positive and more enjoyable feelings.
- Keep up whatever exercises you have been doing for the past 3 weeks.

## **Resources and Credits**

[Choice Theory: A New Psychology of Personal Freedom](#) – William Glasser, M.D.

[Choice Theory: Audible 30-day free trial](#)

[50 things to do when you turn 50: 50 Experts on the Subject of Turning 50](#) – Ronnie Sellers

Photo by [Hayden Walker](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Last week, you picked 3 of these exercises. Whichever you selected, they are part of your continued development. Use them daily, review their

lessons, implement changes that will increase your happiness. Rinse, and repeat.

1. **Gratitude Journal** – each evening write down 3 things in your life or 3 events that you are truly grateful for. They need to be different each day (that means you can't be grateful for your Labrador Goldie every day).
2. **Experience Journal** – at the end of the week (the weekend might be a good time) journal for between 2 and 10 minutes on something that happened through the week that made you feel great, or even just slightly happy. This reinforces the great feelings of when the thing happened. To make it even stronger, then go and share the experience verbally with someone.
3. **Exercise** – go for a walk, kayak, climb a mountain, ride a bike, go to the gym, take a yoga class, run around with little kids – anything. Just do something active.
4. **Meditate** – just start with 2 minutes. Clear your mind, focus on your breath in and out.
5. **Perform a Random Act of Kindness** – sign a petition, give money, send a thank you card, tell someone you appreciate them, compliment a colleague on their good work. Anything – large or small. Just do it regularly. It will make you feel great as well as the other person, and the act will be a ripple of positivity out into the world.

Credit goes to you on those ones.