



Episode 4: How To Stop Analysis Paralysis

Welcome to *In the Right Direction* podcast, where we believe you get to choose what's on your plate, you can manage the overwhelm, and that change is possible. I'm your host, Deb Elbaum, and I'm here to share insights and strategies to increase your happiness one baby step at a time. Let's dive in.

Hi, everyone, it's Deb here. Today we're talking about those times when we don't know what to do. We're talking about uncertainty because as the old saying goes, change is the only constant in life, and you're probably fine with that until it's happening in your life, and you don't know how to handle it.

The uncertainty in the world can make us feel like we don't know what to do next. It can paralyze us and muddle our brain because often during these times, we need to do something. We're called to make a decision or take a stand and trying to make decisions in the face of uncertainty can be really hard. It can make our brain freeze and cause analysis paralysis.

The good news is that there is a way to move from "I don't know what to do" to "I've got this," and today I'm going to share the four steps to finding clarity, calming your brain down, and seeing a way to move forward. Today's episode is all about stopping the analysis paralysis so that you can navigate across the sea of uncertainty more confidently and quickly because if you're not clear in your head, you're not clear out in the world.

So, let's break down the problem. What gets in the way of having clarity and answers in the face of uncertainty? I found that there are three things. First, it can be really hard to make a decision when you don't have all the information, and we often do not have all of the information that we'd like or we need. It can make it painful to choose a confident decisive path forward.

Second, in the midst of chaos, it's hard to know where to start. We want to feel like we're doing things right, that we're making the right decision, and this can be challenging when the problems we face do not come with a roadmap. The pressure of knowing exactly what to do and where to go can make the stakes seem really high.

The third obstacle that gets in the way of feeling clear and confident in times of chaos is our own self talk. Our brain is constantly chattering, and in these types of situations, our inner critic is usually the voice with the megaphone. It might be shouting loudly: "What if I make a mistake?" "What will others think of me?" "What if I fail?" Fear of failure is enough to keep even the most effective leader stuck.

Here's an example from working with one of my clients. I have a client who's an interim leader at a healthcare organization. She was appointed by the CEO a few months earlier, and she was feeling eager to tackle this role. Then one day, the CEO who hired her abruptly resigns, and my client learns there's going to be a company-wide meeting in two hours in which she has to address everyone. She has two hours to figure out how to reassure people and communicate confidently when she has no idea what's going on or what she's going to say.

Have you ever been in a situation where you weren't clear in your head about what to do and say? Where you wanted to do the right thing, and you wished there was a crystal ball telling you what that was? How do you overcome the paralysis and figure out the next steps, even if you don't have all the information, and even if your inner critic is screaming that you might fail?

Moving from "I don't know what to do" to "I've got this" takes four steps, and we're going to go through them one at a time. Grab some paper because you're going to need it. So, step number one is about clearing the clutter out from our brain because during these times, our brain is full of questions and chatter, and the first step is to do a brain dump, to get all of the thoughts out of your head and onto paper or your computer screen where you can look at them and work with them. So, take your piece of paper, and you might want to make three columns: one for thoughts, one for worries, and one for questions, and take a few moments and fill in these columns getting everything out of your head and onto the paper.

After you do that, let's move on to step number two. Step number two involves taking the column of questions that you just wrote, and we're going to turn your brain dump into powerful, helpful questions. So, let me take a moment and explain what powerful questions are. Powerful questions are sometimes called open-ended questions or coaching questions because they lead to expanded thinking. Powerful questions start with the words what, how, when, where, and who, and these questions are powerful because they help us think through a situation more effectively.

The opposite of powerful questions, the opposite of open-ended questions, are closed questions. Closed questions are questions that can be answered only with a yes or a no, and in times of uncertainty, closed questions can cause a lot of anxiety because they limit our thinking to binary. To good, bad, right, wrong, succeed, or fail, and when we're leading through change, we want to start by using open-ended questions so that we can be in a growth mindset.

Here's an example of a closed question: "As a leader, should I focus on the technical skills or the strategic thinking?" You see how that's limiting? Limits your thinking? If we change it to an open-ended question, we might ask a question like this: "As a leader, what technical skills would be most helpful right now?" You see how that's different? It leads to a different type of thinking. So, for step number two, take your list of questions and rewrite them as open-ended questions. Again, questions that start with a what, who, where, when, or how.

This leads us to step three. Step three is about choosing a few of those powerful questions that you want to or need to answer first. Focusing your brain on those will help move you from paralysis to forming a plan of action. Let's come back to my client. In our coaching session, she wanted to generate a few powerful questions to help guide her remarks. She knew that people would be confused and worried, and she wanted to avoid them spreading rumors or making up their own stories about what was going to happen. She wanted to control the narrative.

As we talked it through, here were the three powerful questions that my client decided it will be helpful to answer. One: "What do I know right now?" Two: "What do I not know right now?" Three: "What do I want my colleagues to know about how I'm understanding and approaching this transition?" After my

client chose her questions, we talked them through, and this gave her the words and language that she felt confident using in the meeting. Afterwards, she told me that people really appreciated her directness and her clarity.

Let's move on to step four. Step four is how we navigate the change, how we move from uncertainty to clarity. This is so important because the how is how we feel and how others see us. Figuring out our how involves setting an intention. An intention is a commitment to ourselves, means choosing an idea in our mind and following through. Step four involves answering the question: "What's my intention for my leadership during this time, and what three words represent how I want to show up?" maybe you want to be confident, authentic, and bold or maybe transparent, decisive, and curious.

For my client's meeting, she wanted to be direct, honest, and optimistic. That was her intention. When we set an intention, we're much more likely to show up that way because if we don't set an intention, who knows how we'll show up. Choosing your three-word intention lets you align your thoughts with your body language, and then you're much more likely to navigate the change in your life confidently and calmly.

Let's bring this to you. Think about your life and think about one part right now in which you're dealing with uncertainty or trying to make a decision. And as you consider this part of your life, do the four steps that I shared. One, do a brain dump. Take all of the questions and worries and thoughts from your brain and put them onto paper or onto your computer screen. Two, take this list of questions and rewrite them as powerful, open-ended, expansive questions. Three, choose a few of these powerful questions that are most important to answer and answer them. This will move you forward with words, thoughts, and actions, and lastly, step four, set your intention. Choose three words that represent how you want to feel about yourself and how you want others to see you during this time.

My clients are always asking me if I have a list of powerful questions to help them get started. Yes, I do. Please check out my website, debelbaum.com and you will find a list of powerful questions under "Helpful Resources" under the "Coaching" tab [NOTE: As of June 22nd, 2022, this list of questions can now be found under the "Resources" tab]. Thank you so much for listening and thank you for your curiosity and your commitment to your personal development. I wish you lots of clarity, confidence, and calm. Until next time!