



Episode 24. What To Do When Your Thinking Needs to Change

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. Today, let's talk about one of the most important things that's in our control: our perspective. Perspective means the mindset or the way we think about someone or something.

Here's what I always remind my clients: Our perspective creates our reality. What I mean by that is the perspective we're in about someone or something directly affects what we do next. It affects what we think and don't think, what we notice and don't notice, what we say and don't say, and what it feels like in our body.

Perspective is the most powerful tool our brain has to change how we think about our work, our life, and the people around us.

Take a moment and think about your life – and the parts of your life that cause negative thinking. What are those situations and who are those people who undermine your calm and happiness? And what if you had a concrete strategy to change how you felt about them and responded to them?

Perspective is that strategy, and today, I'll share a 3-step approach for how to shift a negative perspective into a more positive one.

Because when we shift to a positive perspective, it automatically calms our body down, helps our brain think more effectively, and allows us to view others with more compassion.

Our perspective creates our reality, AND – here's the bold part – our perspective is a choice. Now, I know it might not always feel like a choice. You might be thinking, but Deb, this person on TV always says things I don't agree with, don't I have to feel annoyed with them? I'm going to say no. The perspective our brain is in is a choice that we have control over; it's a strategy we can use if we want to see people and situations more positively.

I want to share a personal example about how a simple shift in perspective can quickly shift thinking from stuck to optimistic.

Years ago, when I was exploring coach training programs, I was offered a coaching session with an experienced coach. In our 30-minute call, she did a quick perspective exercise with me that I still think about today. Here's what happened:

In this conversation, I was bemoaning the fact that I didn't know what to do next with my life. I had a business that I was getting a little tired of and I felt like I needed to have the perfect next career figured out in my mind before I made a change. The coach said, it sounds like you're in a perfectionist perspective. That you have to have it figured out perfectly before you take any action. I agreed. When she asked about the impact of that perspective, I realized that it had a huge negative effect. My self-talk was very critical; I was constantly turning over the same thoughts in my mind. I felt like I couldn't talk to

anyone else about my worries because I didn't have it all figured out. And when I thought about what I would do next, I tensed up and had a pit in my stomach.

This perfect career mindset was creating a reality of worry, pessimism, and limited thinking.

Then the coach took me through an exercise to try out a new brain perspective. She offered the idea of a scavenger hunt perspective, and asked how I generally approach scavenger hunts. I said that I'm curious, that I ask people for help, that I see it as an adventure. Then she asked me: what would it be like if you approached your next career like a scavenger hunt?

My brain paused. This was a brand-new way to think. Well, I said, I'd reach out to people, I'd try this coaching class, I would enjoy the exploration. And voila, my reality shifted. I signed up for the coaching class, I brought an open mind, and I gave myself permission to see what it was like before making any next decisions.

Changing our perspective is a choice, and it takes attention, intention, and often a whole bunch of reminders. Because it can be hard, and our brain often wants to return to that old, familiar perspective.

So, let's talk about how to change the way you think. There are 3 main steps. The first step is to recognize and name the perspective you're in. Because we can't know where we're going until we know where we are.

Step 1 is about pausing and asking yourself, what's my current perspective and what name would I give it?

This step immediately helps your brain, by engaging your prefrontal cortex, that part of your brain that does your higher-level thinking. One higher level way of thinking that our prefrontal cortex does is to make thoughtful choices. When we ask our brain to name our current perspective, we are asking our brain to choose a descriptive label. This immediately engages our higher-level effective thinking.

After you have recognized and named your current perspective, it's time for step #2, choosing a new perspective. This step also really activates your prefrontal cortex.

Now, you might ask, how do I choose a new perspective?

Here's where I might start. I'd ask yourself, what if I took a 180-degree different perspective? What would that be like?

Let me share an example. Suppose there was someone who irritated you every time you had an interaction with them. You might call this perspective: "thorn in my side." I'm sure you know the reality that perspective would create – judgmental thinking, maybe avoiding the person, maybe using a harsh tone, and seeing all of their flaws.

An opposite perspective you might take could be "compassion". What if this person were an opportunity for you to practice and grow your compassion? If you truly came from compassion perspective, you'd likely feel calmer in your body, you might be a bit more patient, and you might seek other ways to help them. I'm guessing that different words and a different tone would come out of your mouth.

When you choose a new perspective in step #2, be sure to also engage your prefrontal cortex by giving it an interesting and fun name. For this example, you might call it “Mother Theresa perspective” to channel someone who’s known for her compassion.

So, here’s where this perspective changing process can get derailed. It can be hard for our brains to adopt a new perspective, especially when they are used to seeing people and life through a certain lens. Old neural pathways can be hard to rewire, and so that’s when you really need step #3.

Step 3 is solidifying your new perspective with reinforcement. To learn a new perspective, we need to give our brain lots of reminders. Like when I was in school and studying for a test, I would make flashcards to remind me what I wanted to remember. It’s the same thing when you’re learning a new perspective, although these days, I tend to use sticky notes instead of index cards.

Want to keep practicing compassion? Find a picture of someone who embodies compassion and put it near your computer. Want to remember to slow down and breathe? Write the word Breathe on a sticky and put it on your wall. Want to feel inspired by your new perspective? Choose a theme song to listen to, to remind your brain.

When I had that coaching session years ago, the coach asked me to find a small bowl, and label it Treasures. Then she encouraged me to write down the things that I learned along the way of my career scavenger hunt and put them in the bowl.

Reminders help our brain, and we can and should use them liberally.

So, let’s bring this to you. If you are committed to improving your tough relationships, feeling calmer and happier in your life, and problem solving more easily, I invite you to practice the tool of perspective.

Remember the 3 steps? First, when you find yourself in a negative perspective, stop and name it. Step #2: choose a new perspective, like gratitude, compassion, or adventure. Define this new perspective and give it a fun name to engage your prefrontal cortex thinking.

Step #3: surround yourself with reminders to help your brain learn.

And see what happens to your thinking, problem solving, and communication. You will be creating a reality that makes you feel calmer, kinder, and more intentional.

Thank you so much for listening and being part of my community. If you found today’s podcast helpful, please share it with a friend. And if you have an old perspective that you’d like to change, email me at deb@debelbaum.com. I’m here to help you think more effectively, so that you can show up in a way that makes you feel proud of yourself.

Until next time!