

START WITH YOU

Experimenting with Change
at work and at home



How to finally give up
on changing other
people and situations,
and watch your life
transform for the
better

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Why 'Start with You'?

The clients I work with are facing a whole range of issues. They might be medical or business professionals struggling with their organisation or members of their team, or individuals faced with family fallouts, or long-running difficulties.

But there's one thing they all have in common: when there's something people want to be different in life, the chances are it looks as if either somebody, or some situation 'out there' that needs to change for things to be the way they want.

I'm here to show you that you've got it backwards! The more people I speak to, the clearer it becomes to me that the most effective route to real, lasting change, in anything at all, is to Start with **You**.

We all have challenging things come into our lives - whether professionally or personally. The way we've been trained to deal with these is by giving them a lot of thought, analysing and coming up with solutions. We search for practical ways to create change in circumstances or other people's behaviours. Whether it's your underperforming colleague, your overwhelming project, your stroppy teenager or your stubborn partner, there's usually someone involved who, if only they would be different, you're sure that would resolve your current problems.

As a coach, I've seen it over and over again; I've also done it plenty of times myself: trying to fix things on the outside.

The reason why it's such hard work, and often even impossible, is that we are starting in the wrong place. Real, sustainable change starts on the inside. The outside world is far more obvious, visible and concrete, so it's not surprising that we want to begin there. But there is a less obvious, and far more effective way to create change - starting on the inside.

This means starting with you. It means starting with the way you see your world, and therefore the way you interact with it. When you show up differently, everything changes. A shift here creates more leverage than anything else you can do.

But don't take my word for it! In this booklet, I invite you to consider some different ways of seeing the world, and ways of showing up differently. I invite you to experiment with them. You might be amazed by the results.



Transformational Coach, Thinking Partner & Trusted Advisor

Thought creates the world, and then says 'I didn't do it!'

David Bohm, Quantum Physicist

There is so much going on in the world - internationally, nationally, professionally, personally - that we feel we need to deal with. So before we begin on the experiments, I'd like you to consider the following:

Whatever is going on in your life, the only way you can experience it at all is through your own thinking. We can't experience anything directly - it's always filtered through our own ideas, beliefs, habits of thought, view of the world, stories about how things should or shouldn't be...and on and on.

Then we call it reality!

But this explains why other people can be so hard to understand: their 'reality' may look completely different from ours, because their thought processes are different. It also explains why 'starting with you' is a much more helpful way to deal with any situation than 'starting out there'. So much of any problem is in our perception of it, and therefore the leverage we have by looking there first is enormous - because our experience works from the inside - out.

I'm not for a minute telling you that there are no underperforming colleagues, tasks that stretch your skills, teenagers who behave in ways you have told them not to, wars and conflicts or all manner of other challenges in our lives.

However, your thinking, your stories, your state of mind, and your beliefs about what's going on, play a significant part in the equation.

Start there, rather than by trying to change other people or circumstances.

We are responding to a world of our own creation.

So, as we go about our day-to-day lives, our thinking creates a view of the situation we are facing, without our even realising that's what we are doing. We think what we see is intrinsically 'real' - but we are seeing a filtered version, a limited picture of reality.

We then behave in certain ways as a result of what we believe to be true, and the stories we make up about what that means.

We respond to our own thought-creations.

When you speak to a colleague who you think is annoying or lazy or incompetent, do you speak to them in the same way as someone you think is cooperative, hardworking and capable? When we're honest, I think we all know we approach people in very different ways. (I used to be a teacher - and the research on the impact of a teacher's expectations on pupils is nothing short of shocking!)

This isn't just the case with our blanket judgements of people or things. It can vary even moment to moment. I expect you've had the experience where one day something looks overwhelming or a serious problem, but after a good night's sleep or with a clearer head, it appears to be quite manageable.

Our current thinking creates our 'come from' in life. Are we coming from positive, hopeful states of mind, where we have plenty of bandwidth to support others, or are we coming from discouraged, critical states of mind where everything seems to be against us? Wherever we are coming from, that creates the backdrop for everything else we experience.

Where are you coming from: Love or Fear?

All the different states of mind we might be 'coming from' can be seen as falling into two underlying perspectives: Love and Fear.

I could spend many words describing what I think it looks like to come from love - but I don't think I need to - I think we all know what that feels like. It is our natural state, before we overlay it with fear. Anything that takes us away from love often has its roots in fear. This might look like anxiety, irritation, competition, the need to control, the need to be right, or many other guises.

Here are some underlying differences between thinking that comes from love or from fear:

LOVE

- Wants the best for everyone
- Sees us all as connected - what's good for one is good for all
- Knows there is enough for everyone - seeks to share
- Makes room for mistakes, can tolerate uncertainty

All of which leads to trust, peace and harmony.

FEAR

- Fear needs me to be OK first
- Sees us as separate - we need to compete & compare
- Thinks that if others have it, there's less for me
- Needs to get it right, control and be certain

All of which leads to stress, anxiety and conflict.

All of the experiments below help you to explore ways of living from greater love and less fear, to change your life for the better.



You are invited to experiment...

In the pages that follow you will find five experiments to try. It's up to you whether you try one each day for five days, or take a week for each. All I would say is don't try to do it all at once!

What I do suggest is that you read through the whole booklet first to get a feel for the different experiments - then pick the one that most intrigues you and dive in. It can be helpful to keep some kind of journal of what you notice as you carry out the experiments. Let me know how you get on - I love hearing about your experiments!

1 Focus on what's here, now

2 What if it's not them?

3 Which floor are you on?

4 Are you really listening?

5 Don't believe the stories

Experiment #1

Focus on what's here, now

In this section we'll explore:

- How much of your mental bandwidth is taken up with something outside of what's in front of you
- How this affects your interactions and decisions

The value to you:

- Feeling more focussed and able to deal with current issues
- Less overload and mental exhaustion
- New solutions occurring to you
- Better-functioning relationships

Typically, we all have a lot going on in our lives - whether it's at work, in our families, our health, within groups and organisations we're involved with, or what we see going on in the wider world.

Whatever is going on, we experience it through our own thinking about it.

So the first thing I want to ask you is this: how much of what you spend your time thinking about is actually happening right in that moment?

How much of it is thinking about things that are not happening right now?

And how much of that thinking is coming from fear?

That might look like: worrying about the future, or about what other people are thinking about you and what you did; it might be going over something in the past and wondering if you got it right, or could have done better; it might be planning a strategy for every possible outcome of what you just did, or what's going on in the world; perhaps you wonder whether you're really up to the project you're currently engaged in, or being a parent, or if you can handle what might happen next in some area of life.

All of those have the flavour of fear.

When we are thinking about all of these things, we are not present to what is in front of us. There are two results of this: firstly, we can get overwhelmed by our thinking, spending hours ruminating. This can create difficult feelings or even mean we lose sleep about things that are not in fact real. Secondly, in each present moment, faced with things to be dealt with right now, our mind is clouded by all this other, mostly fearful thinking that we are carrying around with us.

When we begin to realise that all that thinking is about our perceptions of reality rather than reality itself - fear starts to fall away. As it does, the clarity that emerges enables us to see what is in front of us more clearly. New ways of approaching our current situation emerge - ones that come from our natural state of love and insight.

Most people I speak with feel that overthinking is not only inevitable, but also helpful. They engage with their anxiety or self-criticism because they feel it is serving a useful purpose. I know for a fact that it does not. If you're objecting - book a conversation with me, and let's talk.

REAL LIFE EXAMPLE: Focus on what's here, now

A GP partner came to coaching feeling overwhelmed. His mind was constantly occupied with future problems: staffing issues, complaints, the reaction of his colleagues, finances, family responsibilities and all the things that might go wrong. He assumed that constantly thinking about these things was helping him stay on top of them.

He also spent a lot of time going over the past: how an idea had been received by the team; whether he'd made the right decision; what others were thinking.

As he began to notice how much time he spent mentally rehearsing future scenarios or going over the past, he experimented with bringing his attention back to what was actually in front of him.

As a result, he became calmer, more effective and more present with both colleagues and family. He became a respected leader. Problems were solved with less effort and far less stress.

He told me: "I feel as if there are more hours in the day."

EXPERIMENT #1: Your turn to focus on what's here, now

- First, just spend a few days noticing your thinking. Listen to the voice in your head. What do you hear - self-judgement, concern about the future, going over the past? Note the themes you see. Do you hear mostly love, or mostly fear?
- Take one thing that you spend a lot of time thinking about and consider that it might not be helpful to do so. Give yourself a short 'holiday' - perhaps a day or even a week - when you don't need to think about this or try to solve the problem.
- When that subject comes to mind, remind yourself that you can deal with it later - don't follow it down a fearful rabbit-hole!
- Notice what's different as a result.

NOTES:



Experiment #2

What if it's not them?

In this section we'll explore:

- How we create our experience of other people
- What it means to take responsibility for your feelings

The value to you:

- A quieter mind and less stress
- Less to do: a whole lot of fixing of others and situations will no longer be necessary
- Easier interactions with 'difficult' people

It often seems as if other people are getting in the way of our goals, or preventing us from being happy. That has the ring of fear, doesn't it? But the first thing to realise about this way of seeing things is that it keeps you so busy trying to change others, that you get distracted from doing the things **you** could do to make things better. For example, you might think that there is a problem with your relationship with your sibling, and they never call you. Whilst you're running this narrative in your mind, you're not calling them and doing whatever you could do to create a better relationship (coming from love). Or while you're chuntering in your own mind about your colleague who doesn't pull their weight, you're not getting creative about how to find ways to get them more motivated. If you're thinking 'I shouldn't have to do that' - look back at section 1 - because you are focusing own thinking, rather than what is here, now to deal with!

We are always and only experiencing our thinking - and that is particularly clear when it comes to other people or tricky situations. When we interact with someone we have decided is difficult (and I'm not denying that people do things that make our lives less straightforward), we are already half-way to a fall-out! Can you think of a time when you've been so sure you know how someone will react that you're cross with them already before they even opened their mouth?

In this way, we set up dynamics in relationships, and think it's all the other person's fault. (Remember that David Bohm quote: Thought creates the world and then says 'I didn't do it!')

When you are already expecting certain responses and behaviours from people, you tend to get those responses. You use language that sets up certain types of conversations; you look out for the first sign of their bad behaviour and then react to it immediately; you don't show up open and ready for anything new or different. Even if you don't get to speak to them, you can be running over and over in your head what you think they'll say, and then reacting to it - without them even saying a word!

This can be true for situations as well as people. If you expect dysfunction in your team, frustration in meetings, or difficulty when discussing finances with your spouse, you are likely to find it. You set it up before you even began. Remember, in any situation, we are always coming at it from a standpoint of love or fear. Fear makes it very hard to get the results you want.

As you start to notice your thinking, and the effect it has on how you see the world, it makes sense to start to take responsibility for how you feel, rather than blaming it on other people. With different thinking, the whole situation can play out differently. You've been inadvertently causing your own upset. It all starts with you!

(Of course, if the other person was reading this booklet, it starts with them! Everyone has the power to create their experience differently - but you can't do it for someone else!)

REAL LIFE EXAMPLE: What if it's not them?

A medical leader spoke to me about how she was becoming increasingly frustrated with a colleague whose performance was inadequate, and was causing problems within the team.

The more she focused on what was wrong with him, and tried to change things, the worse things became.

Experimenting with the idea that her own behaviour could make a difference, she became curious. She asked questions, listened carefully and started looking for his strengths.

Within a few weeks, her colleague's behaviour had transformed. He became more engaged, more motivated and significantly more effective - even going 'above and beyond' what was expected.

Her conclusion? "I couldn't believe how much he appeared to change before my eyes."

The biggest shift happened before the conversation even began: she stopped seeing him as the problem.

EXPERIMENT #2: Your turn - What if it's not them?

- Firstly, choose a couple of areas in which to experiment, people in your professional or personal life.
- Notice your habitual thinking around those people. What do you think they are like? What are you expecting? How do you behave towards them as a result?
- Ahead of time, consider that things could be different. Be open to the possibility that they might surprise you or that the conversation might go better than you'd ever imagined.
- Show up curious! Look out for something different, engage and respond differently from how you usually do, be open, and see what happens.

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If you're recognising yourself in these examples, and would like to discuss your own situation, you're welcome to [book a conversation with me](#). If you're gaining insights from your experiments, drop me an email and let me know what you've seen.

Experiment #3

Notice which floor you are on

In this section we'll explore:

- Our own states of mind and how to recognise them
- What to do from different states of mind

The value to you:

- More effective conversations and interactions
- Better decision-making
- Greater influence over others

We all know what it's like to be in a bad mood. This is one way of describing the low states of mind or levels of consciousness that we get into sometimes. It's completely normal and happens to us all - but do we know how to deal with it? I don't mean what to do to **change** it, I'm talking about something practical and essential - **what to actually do when you are in a low state of mind.**

Well, first let's clarify what **not** to do. What we are often tempted to do from low states of mind is blame other people for our plight, say things we regret afterwards, make quick decisions ("That's it! I'm leaving"; "I've had enough of her speaking to me like that, I'm going to..." for example!)

These decisions don't usually get us the best results. (I expect you've noticed!)

I like to think of states of mind like being a tall building, a skyscraper for example. When you're in a low state of mind, you're in the basement. It's dark down there with no windows and you can't see very much at all. From here, you have a very limited perspective. You're fearful. It could be very concerning, except that in the corner of the room there is an elevator or lift, which you can step into and ride upwards to any floor you want.

The key to a low state of mind is to know that you are in the basement **and** that there are other floors available.

The same situation, person or problem, viewed from a higher level of consciousness can look easier, less stressful, even funny. From up there, solutions are easier to come by.

You may not have access to the elevator at the moment - but it really helps to know that it's there. You've been to the other floors and you know that the view is much better from up there. Because you know that things look different, it's worth waiting. You realise that the information you're working from now, or the feelings you're stuck in, aren't the whole picture, so you know to wait till you see more.

When you're in a tricky or stressful situation, when you feel yourself worked up or angry with somebody, really any time you're feeling bad in some way, you are in the basement, or certainly a lower floor with limited visibility. Anything someone else says or does will have a certain feel to it - which would be different if **you** were in a better state of mind.

The chances are, when you're in a low state, your reaction feels justified and reasonable. But I expect you've noticed that in your calmer moments you can see more helpful ways to deal with situations like this. You have more access to loving, creative, compassionate and constructive thinking.



REAL LIFE EXAMPLE: Notice which floor you are on

An Associate Medical Director came to coaching during an investigation into her work.

At times, the anxiety, self-doubt and uncertainty around this felt overwhelming. The temptation was to make decisions, defend herself and react while in a highly emotional state.

Instead, she began to notice when she was "in the basement" and learned not to trust every thought that appeared during those moments. She started to notice that there were times when she was more settled and less fraught - with greater perspective. She reminded herself of that when she felt frazzled!

Nothing about the situation changed overnight - but her relationship with it did.

She started sleeping better, stopped ruminating and found herself showing up for difficult conversations with much more clarity and confidence. Family and colleagues noticed the difference, and she was able to enjoy life again, long before the eventual positive outcome of the 2-year investigation.

EXPERIMENT #3: Your turn to notice which floor you're on

- Think about some times when you've reacted from a low state of mind - and the results that came about. Reflect on how you see things differently now, or what other perspectives or possibilities are available.
- Start to notice your different states of mind around situations and people. Check in with your state of mind before responding or taking action.
- Consider a situation or person around which you often find yourself 'in the basement'. Imagine yourself waiting to respond until you are in a better state of mind. What difference might it make?
- Try it!

NOTES:



Experiment #4

Are you really listening?

In this section we'll explore:

- Listening for how the person you are in communication with sees the world
- What you're actually doing when you think you are listening

The value for you:

- A better understanding of those around you
- Getting far more out of every interaction and conversation
- Shorter meetings and more effective conversations
- Closer and more cooperative relationships

We all think we know how to listen. But when relationships aren't working well, it's often because we don't really understand the other person's point of view. A small change in your listening can yield incredible results in terms of rapport and connection with others, leading to increased trust and cooperation. Whatever you may think about what you perceive to be someone else's view of the world, a better understanding of their perspective can always lead to better communication.

Often when we are listening to others, we already have a lot on our minds. We want to listen for the minimum time necessary and then get on to whatever we think should happen next. We may therefore decide early in an interaction that we already know the message someone is trying to get across to us, and whether we agree with them or not. Our minds then get very busy working out how we are going to respond, preparing to affirm, contradict, or add more information.

None of these is really listening. You can't be listening fully and planning a response at the same time.

Taking time to listen closely, with effort given to keeping your own mind free of interference, conclusions, responses, even questions, creates a very different experience for the person who is speaking. They have time to express more fully what it is that they want to say; they may find words to explain something which is hard to articulate; they may even talk themselves round to your point of view! Sometimes just feeling fully heard is enough. Everyone gets more value from these kinds of interactions.

Listening with nothing on your mind also creates a very different experience for you, the listener. Free from the marshalling of previously known information and habitual responses, or trying to shore up your own position, you open yourself to fresh thinking.

We tend to think that it is the answers we come up with, or the points of view we express that are of the most value in conversations - whether professionally or personally. However, it is often not necessary to fix or solve or answer. Being fully present and valuing what someone says is powerful in itself.

When we start with our own listening, rather than blaming someone else for their unwillingness to listen, their lack of understanding or their unwelcome behaviour, it is surprising what changes.

As you become a better listener, you will create an environment where others feel more valued. The impact of this cannot be overstated: it improves effectiveness in every team. It is also something your partner, your children or your friends will pick up on: as you listen to them more deeply, your relationships will improve.

When we give ourselves time to really listen, without letting our habitual thinking interfere, different ideas can occur to us about how to interact. The results that come from this can seem miraculous!

REAL LIFE EXAMPLE: Are you really listening?

A local government leader I worked with realised that many of the frustrations she was experiencing at home and at work came from assuming she already knew what other people were thinking.

She was 'listening' in order to respond, solve and advise.

As she experimented with listening more deeply, without immediately preparing an answer, something unexpected happened: her conversations became easier; people opened up more.

Colleagues became more willing to share concerns and ideas, and her relationship with her teenage son improved significantly.

The quality of the conversation changed because she changed how she listened. (Oh - and she was offered a significant pay rise!)

EXPERIMENT #4: Your turn to really listen

- First just start to notice how much internal dialogue is going on when you are listening.
- Gently guide your mind back to genuine listening – try to get a feel for the other person's thoughts and perspective, without trying to work out what you need to do next.
- Don't jump in with a response or answer. Notice what happens when you don't respond immediately. It's likely that new ideas will arise for you, or for the other person, when you leave this space.

NOTES:



Experiment #5

Don't believe the stories

In this section we'll explore:

- How we live in a world of our own stories
- Which stories may be getting in our way

The value for you:

- Things become possible for you, that weren't possible before
- Life can become easier - and more fun!

We all live in a world of stories. What I mean by stories, is thought-creations of our own, that we take on and live as if they are real and unchangeable. Many of them we've learned from our culture, our family, our life experience in general. They are our ways of seeing the world, our views about right and wrong, how things ought to be, what's true, about us, others, and more.

I don't think we could live without stories - they can guide and anchor us so we don't have to go back to first principles with every decision we make. They can help us to express what's important to us.

But they can also trip us up or block us, making our lives very difficult. Often we've just taken them on board without noticing. Perhaps it's time to take a look at them and ask ourselves 'Do I actually want to believe that any more?' It can be a surprise to many people that the rules they've been operating from are simply made up, and that you can edit them or change them any time you want.

I love exploring stories with my clients. We all have so many of them, and they've usually just been running in the background of our minds, unnoticed.

Unhelpful stories often begin with 'people should...' or 'I need them to...'. That can cause problems because other people often don't do what we think they should, resulting in disappointment, resentment or anger.

Stories about ourselves can be equally difficult to live with. We set ourselves impossible goals and then feel inadequate because we don't reach them. We have stories about meeting other people's expectations, and then feel guilty when we let someone down or they are upset. Many people carry stories about not being good enough, leading to constant striving to get everything right and prove themselves worthy.

We tend to think it is other people who are too demanding, our job that is too full-on or ourselves who are not up to it. But it could be your stories that are the problem!

Most of our stories are invisible to us - they look so true, like bona fide reality, because that is how our thinking is designed. But I can assure you, pretty much everything you believe can be questioned, seen differently, or applied only in limited circumstances!

At any time, you can discard a story and make a fresh start.



REAL LIFE EXAMPLE: Don't believe the stories

A GP trainer sought coaching after a complaint had been made by a trainee. The tribunal process was dragging on and her decisions were all being questioned.

The situation felt deeply personal. She had lots of stories running constantly in the background:

"This shouldn't be happening."

"I've always thought I was a supportive trainer - but am I?"

"I should have been able to prevent this."

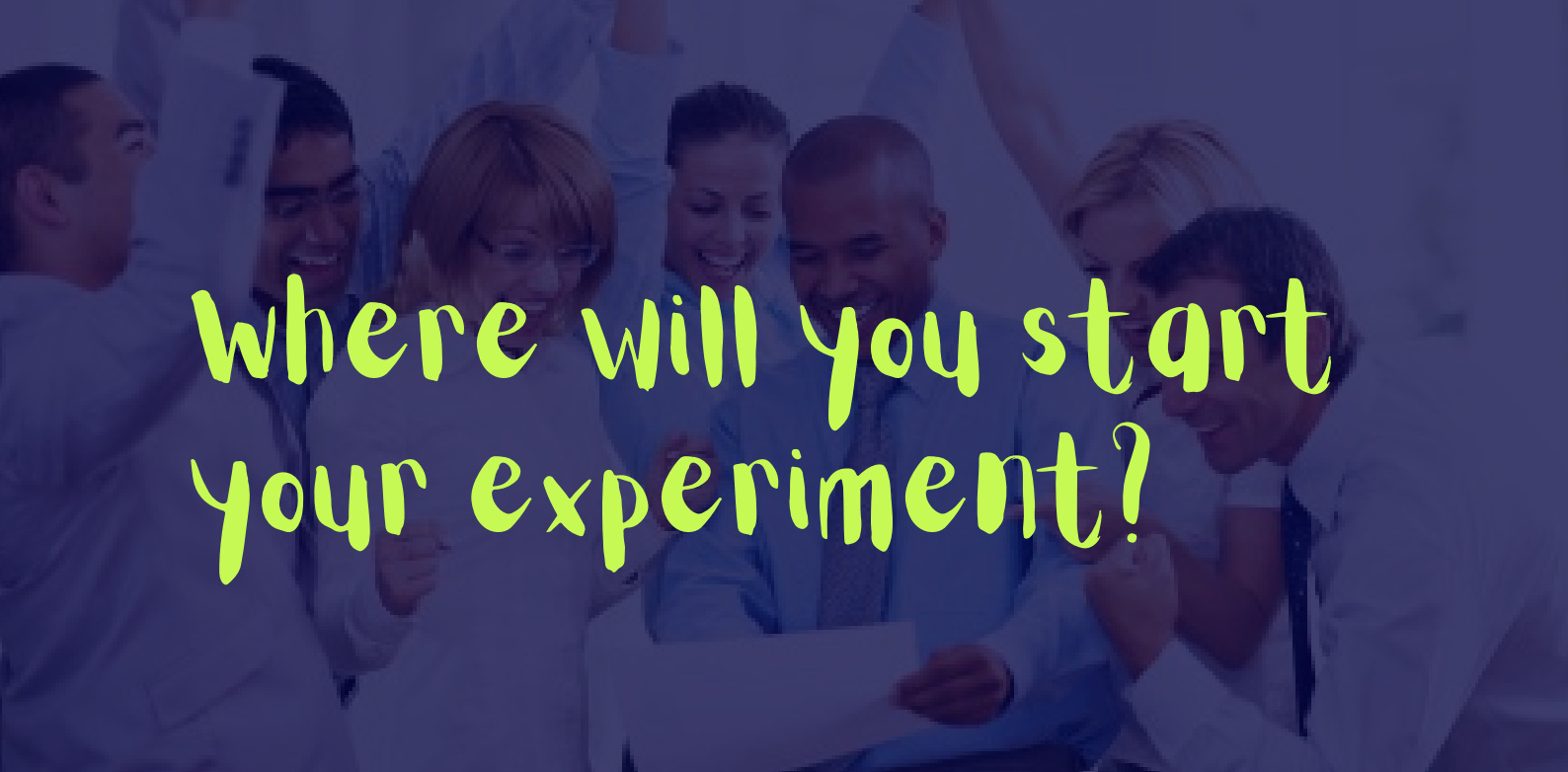
As we explored these thought-loops, she began to see how much suffering was being created by the stories themselves. She realised that overthinking doesn't solve problems: it creates more.

But most importantly, when she let go of the stories and realised that what was happening did not mean the things about her that she'd made up, she was able to handle the process with greater peace of mind.

EXPERIMENT #5: Your turn to see through the stories

- Once you start looking for stories, you'll find them everywhere. So I suggest you start by looking at one area where you are struggling. Is there somewhere in your life where you feel under pressure, limited, or stuck?
- Once you think of something, just start to note down what you believe about this situation. Here are a few patterns to look for. 'I have to xx; It would be mean not to xx; If I don't xx people will xx; Everybody does or thinks xx don't they?'
- Think about what it might be like if those things weren't true - if you didn't have to believe them, or you could do something different regardless of what you've believed in the past.
- Try acting from a new story.

NOTES:



Where will you start your experiment?

Now that you've read through the experiments, I hope you'll have a go at some of them. They are the beginning of an exciting and unending exploration!

Each experiment is just scratching the surface of the transformation that is available when we start to look at how we experience the world, and what could be different.

My coaching programme 'Start with You' includes activities such as these and many more. You can access it as an 'on demand' course, or as a one-to-one programme of regular coaching conversations to help you understand how to put these ideas into action in your own life.

If this booklet resonated with you, perhaps it's because:

- you spend a lot of time worrying, overthinking or second-guessing yourself
- there's a particular relationship at work or home that feels difficult or stuck
- you feel responsible for other people's feelings, behaviour or reactions
- you look successful on the outside but don't feel successful, and find life hard
- you've had enough of trying to fix everyone else

If so, maybe it's time for a different conversation. Go ahead and book a call with me, where we can get to know each other, and see if coaching together would be helpful. This is a no-pressure conversation - not a sales call.

[Access the self-study course here](#)

Contact me at lizzie@lizziepaish.com

Visit my website: www.lizziepaish.com

Book a call directly here: <https://app.delenta.com/ta/@lizzie-paish>



I work as a trusted advisor, thinking partner and coach to people in all walks of life, especially medical professionals and those in leadership. I believe that learning to understand yourself, and the ripples that creates, is the most powerful act of leadership of all.

I help my clients solve intractable problems without stress and hard work. I'm relentless in pointing to what is really possible and will never give up on reminding you what you have going for you. As a result, I often see miracles happen!

I offer one-to-one coaching to clients worldwide, and locally in beautiful Derbyshire, UK.

All issues, it seems, are ultimately connected with relationships - and I will help you get more out of every relationship you have - whether professional or personal. Please do get in touch to see how I can help you.

Visit my website at www.lizziepaish.com

With love,

Lizzie

What people are saying:

Our coaching work together has positively impacted many areas of my work and my personal life. I feel more at ease in my leadership role, confident in my decisions and better able to handle tricky situations at home. I also feel that there are more hours in the day, which is a real bonus for a busy GP! I cannot thank you enough for the guidance, challenge and light bulb moments you have helped me to experience. JM – GP Senior Partner

What did you do? The noise in my head has suddenly gone quiet! PG - Business Owner

I feel that my decision-making, resilience and general well-being have all improved dramatically. Work and life have become far less stressful for me, and the general day to day pressures of life which previously might have floored me aren't bothering me. Both colleagues and family members have noticed and commented on my increased resilience and ease in the face of challenging circumstances. LA Associate Medical Director NHS Hospital