Reframing Perspectives

Reframing is an essential part of the coaching process as it helps others to see things differently and, as a result, come to different, more empowering conclusions or feelings about the event or experience.

The coach’s ability to reframe a situation for the client can provide a new perspective and, with it, new possibilities. Things that seemed impossible now seem possible!

Reframing isn’t about pretending that everything is great for the client. Rather, it offers and invites more and varied ways for clients to consider the problems they are facing and to find new ways to meet the challenges.

Perspective

Perspective is a point of view; a way of looking at or interpreting a set of events. We all have perspectives about our world and the circumstances we find ourselves in. And it’s your perspective that determines your experience in life, not your circumstances. So while we cannot always change our circumstances we can choose to change our perspective at any time. This a powerful tool to have in life!

Perspective is a little like wearing glasses. Your glasses are silver and have yellow lenses. Everyday you put your glasses on and see the world with a yellow tint. Overtime you forget that your glasses are tinted yellow and you start to believe that the world, through your eyes, has a yellow glaze to it. The trees are not quite green, more autumn in color; the sky is not quite blue but more greenish. You may even think this is due to an increase in pollution or many other possibilities.

Two years later you go back to your optometrist and get a new pair of glasses. They ask you if you still want a yellow tint and it is now that you realize you had forgotten that they had a yellow tint. In a moment you decide it is time for something different and so you decide not to have any tint. You pick up your glasses and put them on and as you turn around to see the world you are suddenly taken aback by the richness of color everywhere. Green is so green, blue so blue and the world looks vibrant and alive. Your perspective has suddenly changed.
The glasses analogy offers us a clearer understanding of how easy it is to see something in a particular way – your perspective. By changing the way we see something, reframing our perspective, everything can look very different.

Knowing what our perspective is, allows us to have a greater awareness of how we make decisions and how our perspective determines the way that we see things. What we see is based on what we believe. However with new information we can change what we believe.

Let’s look at an example. Carin was jumping from rock to rock along the shore. She was jumping very timidly, scared of falling into the water and getting wet. Suddenly, she slipped and got soaked. Once again, jumping from rock to rock, she found that since she was already wet, she had nothing to fear. She started taking great leaps and having twice as much fun as before! We might say that Carin’s point of view before getting wet was one of fear: fear of losing her “dry status” and getting wet. But once she got wet, her perspective automatically shifted to “adventure” and “freedom.”

In this example, it took an event to shift the perspective. But what if, still dry, Carin had lightened the situation by realizing that getting wet wasn’t the end of the world, but rather could be fun? She could have shifted her perspective herself without waiting for a particular circumstance to do it for her.

The problem with relying on circumstances or events to shift our perspectives is that many circumstances are outside our control. We can, however, choose to shift our perspective at any time without waiting for it to be shifted for us. We call this process of shifting perspective “re-framing”.

Re-framing isn’t about changing your mind. Instead, it is about creating a shift in consciousness to help see things in a whole new way. This shift requires that you be willing to understand that there is more than one way to look at a given situation. It’s about opening thought and showing a fuller range of possibilities. It can also be about finding “the silver lining” to a cloud.

Self Application

Dis-empowering Perspectives

Many of our perspectives are helpful and support positive life choices. However, occasionally one can feel “stuck” or “unhappy” with a situation in life and can’t see a way forward. At times like this, a dis-empowering perspective, which doesn’t allow us to see the
full range of possible options or opportunities, may be standing in our way. This is where discerning the perspective that is creating the situation and then re-framing it can be extremely powerful.

Unfortunately, dis-empowering perspectives are all too common. In fact, they are so common that writers McKay, Davis, and Fanning, have made an attempt to analyze the most common dis-empowering perspectives by putting them into 15 key groups.

See if any seem familiar to you.

- Filtering: Focusing on the negative details of a situation and filtering out all positive aspects.
- Polarized Thinking: Seeing a situation as either, good or bad; right or wrong, perfect or a complete failure.
- Over generalization: Making a general conclusion based on a single incident or piece of evidence, for example someone disappoints you once, so you can never trust them again.
- Mind Reading: Making assumptions about what people are feeling, why they are acting as they are, and how they feel about you
- Catastrophizing: Assuming that the worst possible outcome will happen.
- Personalization: Thinking that everything people do or say is a reaction to you.
- Control Fallacy: Thinking that you are responsible for everyone or everything around you or, alternatively, thinking that you are a victim of fate and have no control over anything.
- Fallacy of Fairness: Being resentful because you believe that everything in life should be fair.
- Emotional Reasoning: Believing that what you feel is the truth. For example, if you feel stupid, it means that you are stupid. If you feel guilty then you must have done something wrong.
- Fallacy of Change: Believing that you can’t be happy unless you can change those around you to behave the way you want them to.
- Global Labeling: Generalizing one or two qualities into the negative global judgment. For example, one doctor is rude to you so all doctors are arrogant and self-important.
- Blaming: Thinking that someone else causes everything negative in your life.
- Shoulds: You keep a list of rules about the way the world “should” operate and become angry or disappointed if others don’t follow your rules.
• Being Right: Going to any length to demonstrate your rightness because being wrong is terrible.
• Heaven’s Reward Fallacy: Feeling bitter when the rewards do not come that you think you deserve after working hard.

When you feel as though you can’t make a breakthrough, or achieve a goal, or solve a challenging problem, it is worth spending some time exploring your perspective on the issue. Sometimes you will find that your perspective on the issue is a dis-empowering one. Perhaps you are thinking in one of the ways outlined above, or you have internalized other unhelpful perspectives from your past or from the environment around you. If you can discern the perspective and re-frame it, then you can free yourself up to find new solutions and move on.

Empowering Perspectives

There are any number of perspectives on a particular situation, but only some are empowering and allow us to move forward. Below are some alternative perspectives to the dis-empowering perspectives listed above. Try reading each of the fifteen dis-empowering perspectives followed by an alternative empowering perspective below:

• Most experiences in life have a mixture of good and bad in them and I choose to focus on the good.
• Even the worst situations offer opportunities to learn and grow.
• Every new situation is a new opportunity. My past doesn’t have to determine my present or future.
• Living in alignment with my values is the most important thing. Relationships with others flow out of this.
• Today is going to be a good day if I choose to make it one.
• I have my journey. Other people have theirs.
• There are many opportunities in every day for me to shape my future.
• I can live with life’s disappointments and not be overwhelmed by them.
• I am a unique and magnificent human being.
• My life is the most important project I will ever work on.
• Most people are good at heart.
• I am the only one who can change my mind and my heart.
• We are all different and that’s one of the things that makes life interesting.
• We all make mistakes. It’s how you learn from them that matters.
• Virtue is its own reward.

Note that there are many alternative perspectives to those covered by Mckay, Davis and Fannings. Perspectives are not all right or all wrong. The important question is whether a perspective works for you or not. Any perspective that supports you to grow and develop and overcome the challenges of your life is a good perspective.

Coaching Application

It is possible to discern and re-frame perspectives ourselves. However, as an objective observer, a coach is in a unique position to help us identify unhelpful perspectives and to support us to re-frame them.

Have you ever been on a holiday, or taken a day out to do something totally different, and found that answers to some of your life’s most challenging problems seem to pop into your head without effort. It almost feels as if new perspectives float down from the sky.

The key factors here are distance and emotional stillness. The coaching conversation can provide both of these key ingredients to allow the mind to discern perspectives and re-frame them, so that new empowering perspectives simply “click” into place.

Re-framing is an art and when done powerfully, it can change a client’s life in an instant. Sometimes it can be as simple as asking the client to pause for a moment to reflect on what they’ve said, and what perspective it might indicate. Sometimes the perspective that will work the best for them is radically different to their current dis-empowering perspective, but sometimes they only need to shift perspective slightly to make a breakthrough.

If a client indicates that they are going through a difficult situation, try asking them: “What is your perspective on this that is giving you this result?”

Here are some powerful questions you could use to help someone discern and reframe their perspective:

What is the most enjoyable aspect about this?

If you were feeling resourceful and generous, what might be different about the situation?

What’s missing here, that if included, will make this situation flow?

What do you think is the other person’s perspective?
What can you learn from this?

In what way is the current situation absolutely perfect?

What in this situation can you find to be grateful for?

What are you doing well? What can you do better?

What is the value of your current attitude?

Introducing Lightness

One way to empower a client is through the coaching technique of play, to creatively open the client’s mind to consider other possibilities. In our example of Carin, removing the significance of falling into the water was enough to shift her perspective. Some questions you could ask to discern perspective by introducing an element of play could be:

What about this situation could be fun?

Let’s just assume for a moment that the worst thing that could possibly happen has already happened. What will you do now?

If you were twenty feet tall and had super powers, what would you think about this situation?

Often when people focus hard on a problem, they become stressed about it. If you think of the mind as a pool of water, this stress is like a churn, muddying the waters and making everything less clear. By introducing an element of play and lightness, the coach can stop the client momentarily from churning up the water. Once the mind is clear, new perspectives can appear, like small bubbles making their way naturally to the surface.

Extreme Perspective

This is a great strategy for re-framing. Have the client describe how they are not the tiniest bit responsible for a situation. How it was all someone’s fault. Then have them describe how they are 100 percent responsible. How they may have – on some level – caused or attracted everything to occur. Have them feel the difference between both extreme points of views. What opportunities open up out of the latter? What alternative perspectives lie in between? What’s the best perspective to hold in order to move forward?
Listening

One of the best strategies for helping a client discern a particular perspective and to re-frame it, is one of the simplest: listening. The simple act of providing a space where a client can be really listened to is often enough for them to explore the perspectives that lie underneath their actions. If a client comes up with a problem, just listen. If they start to explore the perspective that underlies that problem, just listen.

As coaches we believe that the client is the expert in his or her life. By providing a trusting space and focused listening, we can free clients up to explore the many perspectives that inform the way they experience life. Simply by speaking something aloud, the client can hear himself or herself. A dis-empowering perspective will jar them. It will feel wrong even as it is coming out of their mouths. Understanding will occur and, with it, the opportunity to re-frame the unhelpful perspective.

Supporting clients to discern perspectives and re-frame them is powerful coaching. This process alone will allow clients to grow and achieve their goals.

Reflection

1. When have you experienced a change in your perspective? What did it take for you to change your point of view?
2. What would be possible if you became a master at re-framing? What do you think mastering re-framing means?
3. How would you do this?
4. What is the difference between perspective and re-framing?
5. How will helping your clients change their perspective make a difference in their lives?
6. How would you get your clients to do this?
7. How can you support a client to discern their own perspectives and then re-frame them?