

Metacognition: Thinking about Thinking

This impressive word refers to ‘thinking about thinking’. It involves the active monitoring and regulation of cognitive processes.

These are things like how you process information, how you apply your knowledge and how you change your preferences. All very interesting but what does it mean for you.

Everyday Cognition

Events happen to us all day every day, trains are late, we burn our toast, co-workers behave badly, we go on holidays. When events occur we interpret them. That is we compare the current event to our past experience and other knowledge and we then attach a meaning to the event (all this usually happens with no conscious awareness on our part).

For instance the train is late, so we conclude we will be late to work. Once we attach this meaning to the event we go on to load it up with emotion. Using the train example: ‘I will be late to work, so I get anxious and uptight’.

Cruise Control

Most of the time this all happens automatically, seemingly outside of our control and influence, yet this is not the truth and this is where ‘thinking about thinking’ steps in.

Events do happen that we did not prepare for, however from then on we are in the driver’s seat. Using the train example again, by taking greater control of over our thinking and broadening our perspective, we could interpret the event as ‘I will get to the office at 9.15am and I have an additional twenty minutes to prepare for a more effective day’.

The emotion I attach is gratitude for some uninterrupted time to prepare for the day. Gratitude for a late train – are you joking? Well yes and no, anxious and uptight will not speed up the train or change the event and arriving at work uptight and anxious may interfere with our work. Whereas being better prepared for the day may actually help our performance.

Automatic Emotions

That rather glib example underlies more serious issues. By automatically applying knowledge and information without conscious thinking, we respond to all similar events in the same manner, regardless of whether our interpretation is correct or even useful. Often our reactions are based on information passed on from our parents or other sources and we have never questioned it since. **Break Free**

Begin the practice of thinking about thinking. Check that assumptions and information you apply to events is appropriate.

Look around and see all the real life examples that break your old assumptions. For instance, have you ever heard the saying ‘it takes money to make money’? Do you believe it? Where did you hear it from? Then think of all the people who have made money from nothing: Warren Buffet and Bill Gates spring to mind.

Get control over your thinking, your *metacognition*.