

Breaking the Cycle

A One Day Seminar/Workshop for Prison Staff
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Cycles Everywhere!

Have you ever noticed there are no straight lines in the universe. Despite the omnipresence of curvature in the universe, we tend to try to straighten out the world. It comes from the impulse to control. We think we can straighten out other people, gardeners think they can straighten out their garden, countries think they can straighten out other countries, and our arrogance stretches as far as the weather, as we attempt to manipulate its mysterious patterns. But the world just doesn't work like that. It works in curves, or to be more precise, cycles. The carbon cycle, the water cycle, the cyclical movements of the planets are all testimony to the idea that the world goes around, it doesn't go along.

We however, are now so conditioned by linear thinking it is as if we can only see in straight lines, and if we can't, we become frustrated. And yet even the world in our heads moves in cycles - thought, feeling, action, result, thought, feeling action, result. And most mystically of all, time itself - straight lines or cycles? The day, the year, the seasons are all cycles which define the rhythm of our lives. In a cycle there is a sense of completion and completeness. There is a symmetrical beauty in the turning of a wheel, perfection and harmony in a rhythm that turns back on itself to begin again. When time itself is perceived as a cyclical movement, the past is the future, the future is the past and the present a meeting of the two, when all is contained in one singular, infinite moment. Now there's a meditation!

During this one day seminar we will explore some of the inner cycles with the purpose of understanding how the creation of those cycles is based upon repetitive patterns in our thinking and attitudes, which then have a significant impact on our behaviour. Every cycle has its own active dynamic which leads to an interactive exchange, and this means it is subject to the laws of action and reaction, sowing and reaping or karma. In many ways this is the principle upon which our world revolves - the world of our living room, the world of our workplace and the world itself. These are places of human relationship, and in every relationship there is an exchange of energy. When we stand back and observe our relationships we find that the quality of that energy, and the way it is exchanged, are both subject to cyclic patterns.

What are the cycles you currently experience in you Average Day? Identify one or two at each level below

1. Within Yourself
2. Within your personal relationships (at work or at home)
3. Within the world at large as you observe events through the media

The Master Cycle

Behind all cycles there is one master cycle which originates within our consciousness. The first step is becoming aware of this cycle, then understanding why it happens, then taking steps to interrupt or break the negative ones, then to replace them.

Awareness and Understanding

The Ingredients:

Action Discernment Thought Decide Memory Stimulation Desires Impression

These are the ingredients within the Master Cycle. They are not in any specific order. In the box below, place the ingredients in what you think would be the correct cyclic sequence.

<p style="text-align: center;">The Cyclic Sequence</p> <p style="text-align: center;">For correct order see appendix</p>

Reflection

At the level of Action

- Identify one personal habit of action which you know is not good and that you would like to change.
- Then identify the thoughts and feelings behind that habit of action

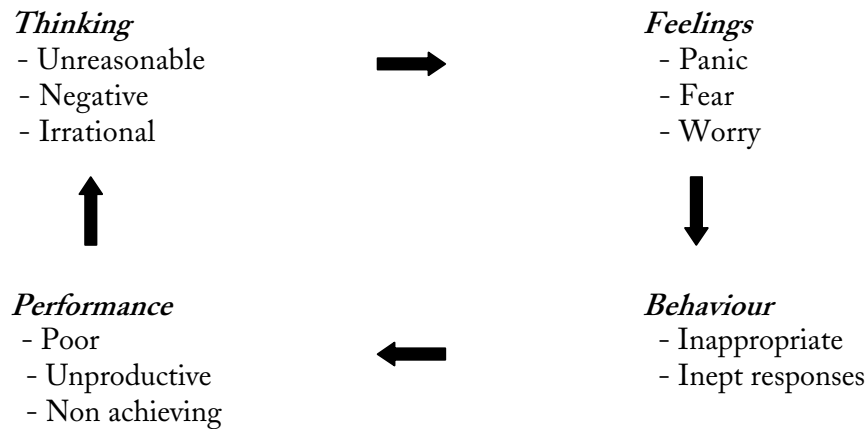
At the level of Thoughts

- Identify one unhealthy/negative habitual thought pattern which you are having about someone that you know.
- Where are the roots of those thoughts - what is generating this pattern within you?

Stressful Thinking

The more we understand the dynamic of the master cycle within our consciousness the more we see that we are totally responsible for it. This sheds new light on our understanding of stress as we realise all our stress begins with our thoughts.

Vicious Cycle of Stressful Thinking



Controlling Our Negative Thoughts or Self Talk

The way we talk to ourselves about our work can have a profound impact on our performance. Positive self-talk can enhance organisational performance but this information rarely appears in the management literature. Research has shown that eight out of ten of our thoughts are negative. Negativity dampens the spirit and creates a contagious 'emotional virus'. But once we understand the inner process of thought to action we can change what we say to ourselves, enhance our well-being, and transform the quality of our interactions. We cannot do this for others, or expect others to do it, but we can do it for ourselves.

Self-talk - What would you say to yourself?

A contract is up for renewal. You thought it was in the bag, but suddenly a competitor has turned up, and you know their reputation is good.

Which of the following responses would you have?

1. Damn! There's no point bothering now. I never get anything once others get in on the act
2. Whew! It'll be a real challenge competing against them. This is my big chance to prove myself.
3. Aha! Someone else wants this work. That's fine - I wish them well, but let me stay focused on ensuring my performance remains at its best.

We can put ourselves in a pessimistic or optimistic mood by the things we say to ourselves. This will obviously affect our performance.

Events trigger **self-talk** about the event *which triggers feelings which stimulates performance* which then triggers **self talk** about the **event** we just participated in *which triggers....*

If you change the way you talk to yourself, you can change the way you feel, and you change the way you perform.

It rarely happens without conscious effort, because our self-talk has been with us for so long that it has become ingrained and habitual. We don't even notice it. But when we do, and when we make the effort to change it, the power of the effect is astonishing. It brings confident, positive communication, which makes others confident about our ability, which improves our ability. It becomes a circular self-fulfilling prophecy.

The Voice Behind the Thoughts and the Beliefs Behind the Voice

Before we talk to the world (other people) we talk to ourselves about the world, and the way we talk about the world to ourselves is conditioned by how we talk to ourselves about ourselves, which is conditioned by what we think about ourselves, which is conditioned by what we believe about ourselves which is usually what we've been told about ourselves by the world! (simple isn't it?) And the world when we were young and forming our beliefs about ourselves were usually our parents, teachers and care givers.

In other words, how we see ourselves colours how we see the world. What we believe about ourselves will colour what we believe about the world. This is encapsulated in a simple saying:

"I know I do not see the world the way it really is, I know I see the world the way I am"

Enter Stage Left - The Internal Critic

The internal critic tends to speak loudest when we are under pressure or faced with important decisions. In these pressure moments we are not aware it is the voice of our critic which is influencing our thoughts and behaviours. We are less aware that behind the Internal Critic there is a set of beliefs, probably absorbed many years ago, which are empowering the critic to say what it says about us, and therefore about others, as we project onto others what we see in ourselves!

The following exercise may help you to be more aware of your IC and the beliefs which are sustaining it.

When you are under pressure, how like you are the following statements?

	Statement	Very Like Me	Like Me	Neither like nor unlike me	Unlike Me	Like Me
1	I get upset over the most trivial put-down or snub.					
2	I make myself anxious by constantly goading myself to do better, and then being critical of myself for not achieving perfection.					
3	In times of stress I always need someone stronger than me to rely on.					
4	I make myself anxious by imagining the worst possible outcome. I keep saying 'What if ...' and add something dreadful.					
5	I regret things as they are at present. I constantly tell myself how little progress I'm making. I feel helpless and stuck.					
6	I feel I should always be on top of everything, and not be the one to lose control.					
7	When I'm praised, I tend to minimise or discount it, and put myself down.					
8	I feel it's easier to avoid difficulties than face up to them.					
9	I just keep telling myself to keep trying harder - so I keep on going till I drop.					

The Internal Critic

Consider the items which you have rated 'Very like me' or 'Like me'. The negative belief embodied in each item is shown below. Alongside each negative belief is the underlying hope in the belief, which rarely is expressed, and the associated emotions, which block ones rational decision making.

Negative Belief	Underlying Hope or Desire	Associated Emotions
1. I must please others all the time	To be understood and liked	Guilt, withdrawal
2. I must be perfect	To be seen as good enough	Anxiety, obsessive preoccupation
3. I am dependent on others	To be cared for	Blocked from dealing with problems alone
4. I have to worry about everything	To avoid catastrophe and to feel safe	Free-floating anxiety and excessive worry
5. I am a victim of unfair treatment	To be rescued from my difficulties	Reactive, unmotivated, cynical
6. I need to be in control	To be appreciated	Loneliness, anger
7. I am unworthy	People will believe in me	Low self esteem and confidence
8. I'm safer staying put	If I avoid difficulties I won't have to face up to them	Fear of conflict, risk avoidance
9. I must try harder	To be deserving of rest and enjoyment	Exhaustion and lack of joy

Correcting the Underlying Beliefs

Negative Belief	Positive Belief or the Truth
1. I must please others all the time	
2. I must be perfect	
3. I am dependent on others	
4. I have to worry about everything	
5. I am a victim of unfair treatment	
6. I need to be in control	
7. I am unworthy	
8. I'm safer staying put	
9. I must try harder	

As to will see, the breaking of a negative internal pattern or cycle can be achieved simply by identifying, canceling and replacing the negative self talk or the internal critic. However that does not address the root of our inner challenge. It is only when we consciously correct our beliefs, usually beginning with our self-belief, (image) that the cycle is truly broken, and we no longer need to struggle at the level of our thoughts inside.

Playing the music behind the words

The typical work environment doesn't address feelings and emotions particularly well. It's almost as if feelings aren't important to the core purpose of the organisation. But everybody knows that feelings have a profound effect on the success or failure of workplace relationships. For example, expressing anger by blaming or humiliating can have an adverse effect on morale and performance. Conversely, expressing your genuine acknowledgement of someone's efforts can have a profound impact on the person's commitment. It's important to express feelings, in a way that is relationship enhancing rather than limiting. Good leaders are good communicators. They not only say what they mean clearly and briefly, but they inspire commitment by communicating with passion, being honest about how they feel and being able to tap into and empathise with other people's deeper feelings.

Taking Responsibility for Our Feelings

Feelings need to be expressed, otherwise they may fester beneath the surface. Suppressed emotions block rational decision making, and there is the danger that they will erupt, like a volcano. This brings stress, upset and conflict. It's good to express feelings, as long as it's done in an appropriate and purposeful way.

Separating Opinion, Thought and Feeling

If you have a problem, make an 'I' statement. This means express feelings by beginning with 'I', keeping the focus on me: "I feel (adjective) - (happy, sad, embarrassed) - about ..."

Saying "I feel that ..." is expressing an opinion, not a feeling. If you substitute "I think ..." for "I feel ..." it's expressing a thought.

Feelings are neither right nor wrong, they just are. 'I feel' statements do not judge, blame or threaten, put down, or try to control others. They simply report how you feel.

When you make an 'I feel' statement, you are taking responsibility for your emotions. 'I feel' statements inform others about your feelings. They don't demand change from others. They leave the other person free to decide if they will accommodate your needs.

When to use 'I feel' statements

- Any time you want to share your feelings in a frank assertive way
- When there is stress in a relationship, especially if you are feeling angry or dissatisfied; or
- If the other person is resistant to your requests if the other person is using a lot of 'you' (blaming, cynical) statements.

An 'I feel' statement can have a number of parts:

- a) self-disclosure, referring to 'I,' 'me,' or 'my'
- b) expression of a feeling
- c) description of the other's behaviour that is related to your feelings
- d) indication of what you'd like to see changed.

Remember that unexpressed emotions don't go away. They show up in your body language, such as when you say "Nothing's wrong," but roll your eyes, avoid eye contact or slam a door. This confuses the people around you, and keeps you feeling down.

Expressing Difficult Feelings

Other people's behaviour sometimes annoys us. Even though we may know and accept that we are responsible for our emotion of annoyance, it's not wrong to express how we feel as long as we are not trying to target or exert some kind of revenge through our expression. In teams, it's often more helpful to express how you feel than to allow negative feelings to get out of proportion. It also builds trust within the team as we learn to listen to others feelings and express our own more openly.

The first question to ask yourself is "What do I want to accomplish here?" If the relationship is important to you, use **SIDE**:

- Specify the behaviour you find annoying or difficult to work with.
- Identify the specific context where it happened.
- Disclose your reaction and how you felt.
- Explain your feelings.

Example:

"You want to say: "You're a slob You never tidy up the files."

Say instead: "When you leave files lying round after a meeting I feel frustrated. I've worked hard to get them organised, and I feel unappreciated."

In more complex situations use the 'I' message process:

1. **When** Describe the behaviour you don't like objectively, without blaming or judging.
2. **Effects** - Describe the actual effects of that behaviour (this is important for the other person to understand your reaction.)
3. **I feel** - Say how you feel (this is important to prevent a build-up of feeling.)
4. **I'd prefer** - Tell the person what you would prefer to happen.

Example:

"I lose my concentration if you come in and ask questions. I get a little annoyed. Can you please not interrupt me when I'm working unless it's urgent?"

ASSERTIVE ADVOCACY

The art of assertiveness is essential to express how we feel without becoming emotional. Assertive communication is the heart of creating positive interactive cycles. Good communicators at work balance advocacy (saying what you think and feel) with inquiry. More typically, communication is weighted towards advocacy.

More than ever, there is a need to ask and observe, not assume and tell. Peter Drucker, one of the most influential management consultants of recent years, said, 'the number one practical competency for leaders is empathy'.

However, leaders and others still need to influence by saying what they mean in a clear and engaging way, whilst taking account of the needs of the listener. This skill is called assertive advocacy. It starts with the premise that I'm OK and you're OK.

Passive
You're OK, I'm not OK

- Monosyllabic
- Dismissing all views, from self and others
- Letting sentences trail off

Passive people experience assertiveness as aggression

Hostile
I'm OK, You're not OK

- Vacillating facts and opinions
 - Sarcastic
 - Brusque

Aggressive people experience assertiveness as taking advantage

Assertive

See appendix 2 for answer

- 1 How do you feel and sound when you assert yourself?
- 2 What are you saying and doing?
- 3 How do you look when you're being assertive?

If you are **Passive**, it means you're suppressing your own needs. You allow yourself to be controlled by others, and prevent yourself from being effective.

If you are **Hostile**, it means you tend to violate other people's rights. You will get hostility in return, and less control over what you can do.

If you are **Assertive** it means you can choose your priorities. You don't allow demands from others to control what you do.

Five steps To Assertive Advocacy

1 Prepare your information

- Know what you are talking about.
- Know about the people you're dealing with.
- Be aware of the outcome/result you would like to see

2 Prepare yourself

- Relax before you start.
- Clear your mind of any preconceptions.
- Throw out negative thoughts.
- Bring in positive self-talk.

3 Find out how things are now

- Listen.
- Check that you've truly understood.

4 Assert Yourself

- Present your view.
- Don't try to force it.
- Don't give it up without a good reason.

5 Reach a decision

- Strive for a genuine agreement, so that the other: parties are as happy as you.

Rehearsals

Each moment and every interaction is both a performance and a rehearsal

1. What is the one thing you could do to be more assertive?

2. In what current situation in your workplace could you apply the above steps?

3. What kind of response would you anticipate?

4. How would you deal with that response if it comes?

The Cycle of Approval/Dependency

- Parents teach us to be **dependent**
- We learn to do and say thing that wins **approval**
- We get the approval and **feel good** about ourselves and life • Subconsciously our **dignity** takes another **knock**
- We need regular `Hits' of **approval** to keep our `chin up' • Which then makes us **vulnerable** to criticism
- When we are affected by others criticism they then think they can and know how to **control us** • Which sustains their **controlling** behaviour towards us
- And we become dependent on their approval to avoid feeling **hurt ...and so on...**

How many cycles are included in the above process?

How would you help someone to break them?

The Cycle of Positive Interaction

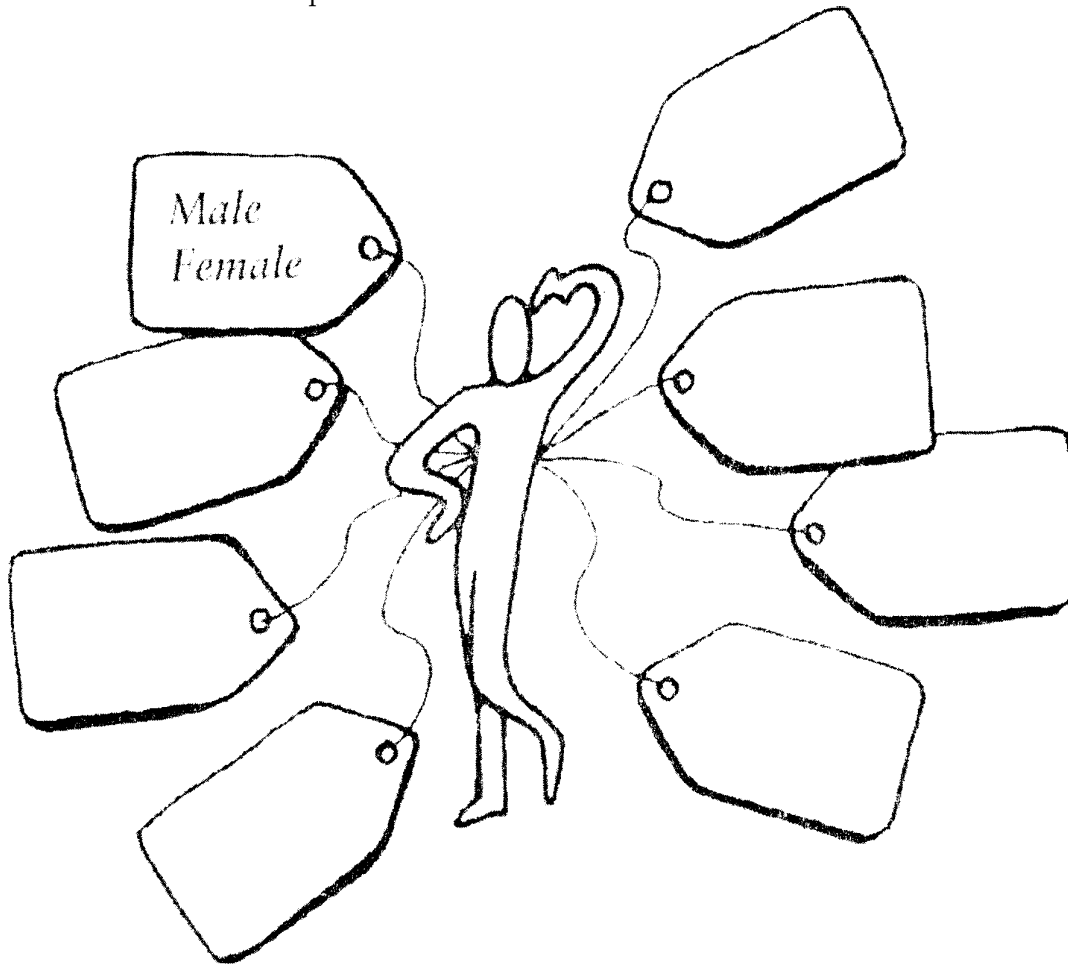
In every interaction we have the opportunity to build a relationship or add to it's diminishment. The laws of karma or sowing and reaping remind us of the one law that makes the world go round.

Cycles of Motivation

- Mental fear is used to motivate self
- Which creates adrenaline in the body
- The body becomes addicted to the adrenaline
- The self becomes dependent on fear to motivate the self
- Purpose and meaning motivate and direct our thoughts and action • Which generates enthusiasm
- Which creates positive, meaningful behaviour towards others • Which is returned as positive energy
- Which helps make our life meaningful

The Question of Identity

Life is like a department store



Our sense of self-identity is the seed of all our creativity therefore all thoughts and feelings, attitudes and actions.

Most people do not know who they truly are i.e. they are in an identity crisis. The labels we put on others we also put on ourselves and they become our Identities e.g. the labels of nationalities, profession, belief system, politics, gender, religion etc.

When we label ourselves in this way we become attached to the label and live in fear of it being challenged or damaged or lost. With each label come our *acquired* values associated with the 6 P's - Position, Power, Prestige, Possessions, People, Pay.

So Who on earth are you?

.... and what do you really value in your life?

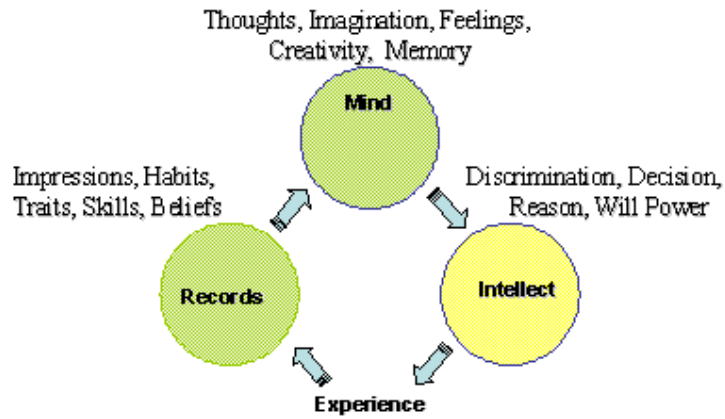
Our primary challenge is to discover who we truly are beyond the labels which only describe the roles we can play at any given moment. With inward reflection we discover we are something greater than a role. We are each an intangible, internal, invisible being of conscious energy, inhabiting and giving life to physical form. Sometimes referred to as spirit or soul.

Our natural and innate characteristics are peace, contentment, happiness, joy etc. - these are the experiences we seek/value/care about the most in life. These experiences can be accessed at any moment when we take our focus away from external events and focus inwards to the source of our own power which is our consciousness. This is not a selfish act but an essential practice in order to bring into action in our relationships the most positive energy possible. When we rediscover these experiences internally and cease to be *dependent* on any external stimulation in order to feel peaceful and content, our self esteem will be restored, and we realise our life is a gift to ourselves and to those around us.

Methods experience our true identity, access our personal power and rediscover our real self esteem include Creative Visualisation and Meditation.

Appendix 1

The Master Cycle



Appendix 2

Assertive
I'm OK You're OK

- 'I feel' statements
- Firm and steady voice
- Open to suggestion
 - Allows pauses
 - Steady pace

Assertive people are comfortable with their own rights and other people's rights