

How to Become Unstoppable

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How to Become Unstoppable



Glenn and Sharon Livingston have sold over \$30,000,000 in consulting and/or coaching services. Glenn has worked with over 1,000 coaching clients and directly supervised many coaches and therapists. (And Sharon has worked with over 60,000 people in a group format!) The Livingston's previous work and theories have also appeared in dozens of major media like those listed here. And Glenn was raised in a family of over a dozen helping professionals (psychologists, social workers, counselors, therapists, etc)... it's in his blood!



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Introduction

People come to coaches often because they are stuck. They are at a point in their careers, education, or relationships where something is keeping them from moving forward. In my experience, the most common reason clients come to coaches is to help them break that logjam.

I've been a successful coach for more than fifteen years, and I've found my clients are inevitably the ones holding themselves back. It's not the clients' job, spouse, or lack of resources. It's the things they tell themselves day in and day out that keep them stuck. They have tapes of core beliefs and values that play in their heads, and they are unable to change them. Helping them learn to change these tapes is one of the keys to a successful coaching practice.

You know those tapes, right? We ALL have them! They play messages to us all day long telling us what to do or not do. The voices may belong to your mother, your ex, or even your fourth-grade teacher. In psychology, they are often called "core beliefs" – things we've believed for so long we don't even question them. It's OK to have core beliefs as long as they serve us well. But when they become outdated, don't pertain to our lives anymore, or weren't positive to begin with, they've absolutely gotta go!

But frequently clients tenaciously (*and unconsciously*) hold onto core beliefs and "old tapes" which stop them from achieving success. You might even do it yourself...

They say things like, "You don't have enough money for that," or "You're not smart enough." They kill our clients' dreams with thoughts like, "You're too old to start a career," or "You don't have enough experience to do that."

But what if I told you there was a way to stop those voices with their negative mantras in their tracks? What if there was a way to turn those negative thoughts into positive, productive statements to help your clients achieve their dreams and goals? Statements that could make your coaching clients—*and maybe even YOU!*—unstoppable?

There IS a way to change the way your clients think to help them build self-confidence and tackle whatever obstacles lay between where they are now and true happiness. It may not be an overnight cure. You'll both have to work at it. But if you can convince your clients to redirect their thoughts for a few weeks, they'll have a whole new outlook. It just might make them unstoppable... and that goes a long way towards fueling your practice, your coaching income, and preventing burnout. (*There's nothing better than looking at a schedule full of unstoppable, inspired clients!*)

Becoming Unstoppable Always Involves a Paradigm Shift

My most passionate hobby is hiking the White Mountains of New Hampshire. I've climbed almost all of the 48 four thousand foot mountains we have here... and by the time you read this you'll almost certainly be able to eliminate the "almost" from that claim!

One of the most challenging hikes for me last spring was gunning for the peak of Owl's Head Mountain. During the first attempt I found myself facing a raging river which looked like I'd have to go waist deep to cross...

But I couldn't imagine the hiking book I read would have wanted me to cross in these conditions. It's written for the general public and they always seem to have safety first and foremost in mind. In the 40 or so mountains I'd climbed to date, I hadn't ever had to even get my boots wet... plus the bottom of the river was VERY rocky, slippery, and sharp in places. So even if I was supposed to take off my boots and ferret my way across, putting bare feet on the bottom for that distance just seemed wrong! Without a firm grip on the bottom it seems like the current would just knock you right over and/or you'd slice your feet up on the rocks.

So after spending some about an hour looking for a way to cross the river, I hiked out, thoroughly dejected that I didn't make it to the top. I should probably mention that this river was about 5 miles from the trailhead, so this meant a 10 mile round trip hike without success...

And I went back again the following week with the very same results :-)

My THIRD attempt at Owl's Head Mountain could have also been doomed to failure. I found myself at the same spot again, pondering how to cross the river. Although the water had gone down a bit, I'd still definitely have to go in at least up to my thighs.

But this time while I was trying to figure out what to do, a couple of teenage boys approached the river and WALKED STRAIGHT THROUGH IT IN THEIR BOOTS. They'd apparently decided they'd just dry out their boots later.

That was a paradigm shift for me – it's OK to get my boots wet. What a concept!

After I realized the belief my boots needed to stay dry was holding me back from reaching my goal, and I had to shift OUT of that paradigm to become "unstoppable" and conquer that river!

A paradigm shift is a "breaking away" from those core beliefs which limit how we see the world. It's usually a radically different way to think about something we wouldn't have considered previously.

Learning to think in ways that will help *your* coaching clients come up with their own paradigm shifts will help them become unstoppable in meeting their goals. And it will help YOU become unstoppable as a coach. We all are limited by our thoughts at times, but we don't have to stay that way!

Reframing

Cognitive reframing, often called simply, reframing, is a tool used in psychology to help patients experience a paradigm shift in their thinking. Although most coaches are not trained psychotherapists or counselors (*and are not legally permitted to diagnose, treat, prevent, or cure any disease, disorder, or mental condition*), some of the techniques employed by these practitioners are appropriate for the

coaching setting. Reframing is one of them, and I believe it is essential for every coach to know. Reframing is the process of teaching your client how to change their frame of reference. If a paradigm shift is the destination, reframing is the car that drives you there.

Coaches and therapists use reframing often to help clients switch from negative thoughts to positive thoughts to help them grow. Even the most optimistic person you know has negative thoughts from time to time. It's a normal human condition. Although most people may feel some fear or shame for having so many negative thoughts, it's not something to beat up themselves over. It's a common thing all people do.

Most of the time we may not even pay attention to the messages we tell ourselves day in and day out. But thousands of times every day we make decisions based on our experience, which can be positive or negative. Negative thoughts tend to be based on fear – fear that we're not good enough, that we don't have what we need, and that we won't get what we deserve.

Sometimes negative thoughts are self-sabotaging, but not always. Most negative thoughts are trying to help us out – to keep us safe or secure. Negative thoughts are not the bad guy. They simply need to be modified to move people forward rather than holding them back. You work with your client to modify them in a way to find positive intentions behind every thought.

Your clients may know they have negative thoughts because someone may have told them something like, "You're always so negative!" Or maybe they've realized on their own that the thoughts running through their heads on a daily basis aren't helpful, and often are even self-defeating. Most of the time, though, negative thoughts slip by unquestioned. That's because they've become part of who we are.

Before you start teaching your clients how to reframe, you may suggest that they take a week or two to simply observe their thoughts to get some insight into their most frequent negative messages. Instruct them to tackle this observation like an anthropologist or a scientist, without judgment. All they are doing is recording their thoughts and creating an awareness of what goes through their head on a daily basis.

One of the best ways to help clients get a handle on their thoughts is to keep a journal. Suggest that they keep a little notebook with them throughout their day that is easy to slip into a front shirt pocket or handbag. Or, if they have a smartphone, they can choose to take notes on it. Instruct them that anytime they have a negative thought – a thought that tells you that you're not good enough, don't have what you need, or that you won't get something you deserve, or something that just plain worries or scares them, to write it down. After a while your clients may start to see a pattern.

You can also work with them on the frequency of their negative thoughts. Journaling helps here as well. Your clients may find that act of journaling itself may help to erase the negative thought from their heads. Just the act of writing it down seems to turn thoughts in another direction for many people.

Some people recommend putting a rubber band around the client's wrist and snapping it each time they have a negative thought. This might be a good way to cut down on the frequency of negative

thoughts in some cases—and a purely masochistic exercise in others!—but ultimately your client will need to learn to find something positive to REPLACE their negative thoughts... that's the real goal!

Common Negative Thoughts

Here are some common categories of negative thoughts. All of these categories can help keep us from becoming unstoppable. Your clients may be worried after tracking their negative thoughts for a week or two that they'll never be able to conquer them all. The reality is, there are really just a few different kinds of negative thoughts, and most of them fit in these categories:

- **Mind Reading:** This is an assumption that may or may not be true. An example would be assuming your boss is mad at you because (s)he hasn't spoken to you today. Another may be believing your sister doesn't like you because she never wants to come to your home.
- **Over-Generalization:** Ever hear that old saying, "Don't make a mountain out of a molehill?" That's called over-generalization. It's the thought that ONE experience represents reality from here forward. An example of an over-generalization would be, "Nobody respects my opinion." Another might be, "Everybody is out to get what they want without thinking about other people."
- **Projection:** This type of thought is predicting a negative outcome based on your experience, or even the experience of someone else. For example, you may think to yourself, "My Uncle Fred went bankrupt when he opened a restaurant, and I will, too." Another could be, "I can't handle that."
- **Discounting The Positive:** These thoughts focus on the negative of a situation rather than the positive. An example would be, "I'm too young to open my own tech business." There are many positives about creating new business when you are young. Another might be, "I'm not available to date because I have children."
- **Self-Pity:** These negative thoughts put you in a place where you feel like everything is beyond your control or in the hands of other people. You may think, "I work the hardest here at my job and my boss never notices." Another may be, "I do everything for my children and they don't appreciate me at all."
- **All-Or-Nothing Reasoning:** These sorts of negative thoughts usually contain the words "never" or "always." They are statements like, "I always screw up my relationships," or "I never get the jobs I want."
- **Limiting Thoughts:** These are negative thoughts that start with, "I don't have enough ..." – time, money, education – you fill in the blank. These may be the negative thoughts that hold us back the most from becoming unstoppable. When you accept your limiting beliefs, you reduce the chance of reaching your goals.

Changing Your Thoughts

Some of you probably never realized that you can help people change their thoughts, but you can. It's all about coaching clients to change the way they look at how they perceive their problem. That's what the process of reframing is all about.

The reason reframing works is because events in our lives don't have meaning on their own – they only have the meaning we assign to them. You may perceive that a rainy day is negative experience because you had outdoor plans, but if you were living in an area experiencing drought, it would be a positive experience. Thoughts work that way, too. Rain, in and of itself, isn't good or bad. It depends on what emotion you assign to it. Every negative thought you have is only negative because of the way you look at it.

Every thought has a frame – your personal beliefs and assumptions based on your life experience. You may think, "I can't go back to school because I'm too old." Part of the frame is that you hold a belief that age limits your abilities.

It's important to listen to your clients express what the voices inside their head are saying to them. As you create a safe environment for them to be themselves and build a relationship with them, they will begin to share these thoughts with you.

After two or three sessions, you'll have a good idea about some of the negative thoughts that are holding each client back. Depending on the client's trust in you, it may be time to attempt some reframing of the thoughts and beliefs that are keeping your clients from fulfilling their goals and dreams.

How to Reframe Thoughts

Reframing thoughts requires you to choose a different point of reference than the frame you've chosen to put around the thoughts. You can teach clients how to change their point of reference with a few tools:

- **Avoid strong language.** Years ago someone told me to stop using the word "hate" when I was describing things or people. I started paying attention to how often I used "hate" and started choosing milder words, like "dislike" or "aren't fond of" instead. Start replacing negative words with less negative, or positive, choices. Here is an example: "When it comes to math, I'm stupid." Try to replace stupid with "challenged" or "less comfortable."
- **Focus on the solution, not the problem.** Focusing on the problem keeps you stuck right where you are. But if you think about the solution there are possibilities. Ask your client the question, "What's the best way to accomplish this?" By asking this specific question, you acknowledge there IS a solution and begin to figure out a positive frame.
- **Question your client's assumptions by investigating the frame.** Although the reason someone is thinking negative thoughts isn't necessarily always helpful to get at in a coaching session, it can sometimes help your client update their old assumptions. Encourage your clients to ask themselves questions that identify where the assumptions come from. Are challenged when it comes to math because your sadistic fourth-grade teacher told you so? Isn't it interesting you developed so many other great abilities in the absence of those experiences?

Questioning the frames—*the assumptions your clients make about each situation*—is the most powerful technique for reframing negative thoughts. Remember – your clients' negative thoughts didn't get in their heads overnight, and they won't leave immediately. It may take some time and effort to reframe each negative thought, and more time to change them for good. But over time you'll find they are slowly but surely thinking more positively.

New Frames for Old Ones

Now, let's take the categories of negative thinking and apply the techniques to them. Ask your clients to start leaving some space in their journal entries so they can write reframes underneath. That way if you don't have the time to think through the reframe you can do so at the end of the day or when they meet with you next...

- **Mind Reading:** The thought, "My boss is angry with me because she hasn't talked to me today," assumes you can read your boss' mind. You really don't know why she isn't speaking to you. She may be angry, but she may also have a personal problem with which she's preoccupied. Or she may simply be too busy to speak with you. She *could* be angry with you, but it's a possibility amid many, many others. Reframing mind-reading thoughts requires opening your mind to other possibilities.

Here's another example: "*My sister never wants to come to MY home... she obviously doesn't like me.*" Some of the questions you might ask your client to reframe this kind of mind-reading might be:

"Have you ever asked your sister why she doesn't come to your home?"

"Does your sister see you outside of your home, like at your parents' home or at a restaurant for lunch?"

"How in the past have you known your sister didn't like you, and how is this like that?"

"How is it different today as compared to the past? Has your sister always not come to your home? What changed?" Your sister may not like you because of something completely different, or she may like you and not like your cat jumping in her lap when she visits. (*Damn cats!*) Or it may have absolutely nothing to do with you at all why she doesn't visit. She may not like driving the 40 miles to your house. Or maybe she used to be able to make the trip, but now that she's getting older it just takes too much out of her.

- **Over Generalization:** "Nobody respects my opinion." With over-generalization, there's always a significant kernel of truth to the thought, but it's applied way beyond the context in which it is true. Perhaps there are a few people, in a few contexts, who genuinely don't respect your client's opinion. But at some point in their life, someone has respected their opinion. In fact, in virtually every client's life you should be able to find SOMEONE who really valued what the client had to say at some time... maybe even someone who hung on every word!

- To overcome this over-generalization, you'd encourage the client to focus on times when people *did* respect their opinion rather on the times that they didn't.
- Being specific can also help. One potential reframe might be, "Your friend didn't respect your opinion this particular time."

Here's another example of over-generalization: *"Everybody is out to get what they want without thinking about other people."* That's a sad way to look at the world, isn't it? So press your client for specifics. What examples she can give you of people being out to get what they want without considering others? Then ask her to think of a time when someone went out of their ways to consider her or somebody else. The reframe could be, *"Sometimes people are selfish, but if you pay attention, you'll find people are willing to consider your needs once you've communicated them."*

- **Over Identification:** *"My Uncle Fred went bankrupt when he opened a restaurant, and I will, too."* You and your Uncle Fred may share some of the same genetic makeup, but you are entirely different people with your own special talents and gifts. Instead of focusing on his failure, encourage your client to focus on what gifts you have and how they will help him fulfill his dream.

Another common over-identification might be: *"I can't handle it,"* or simply, *"I can't."* Most parents are intuitively excellent at reframing the "I can't" monster! Some examples might be "How do you know you can't until you try?" or "You've done new things before, so why can't you do this?"

Similar reframes can work for coaches too! Remind the client of some difficulty they've "handled" very well in the past.

Now, during the course of reframing things for your client they may realize that instead of not being *capable* of handling something, they simply aren't *willing* to do it. (*Maybe they just don't want to pay the price*). Many coaches get stuck here, but you don't have to... simply look at it as an opportunity to help the client understand what's holding them back.

Asking questions such as, "Is there a particular reason you're unwilling to do this today?" or "What might have to change for you to become willing?" should uncover more negative thoughts you can successfully reframe. (*Including Limiting Beliefs, which we'll discuss later!*)

- **Discounting the Positive:** *"I'm too young to open my own tech business."* Everything about us, our age, our gender, our gifts, ALWAYS has both positives and negatives. Instead of focusing on the inexperience of youth, focus on the exuberance, the energy, and the freshness that young entrepreneurs bring to the business world.

Another example might be *"I'm not available to date because I have children."* Start by asking your client why (s)he thinks having children precludes them from dating. Lots of single parents

do have a social life. Assign them to think about the positive side of having kids and dating. For example, most responsible single parents take relationships more slowly because they aren't completely available all the time... so you're less likely to engage in an impulsive affair that ends badly. Another is that single parents may have more well defined traits they're looking for in a partner than they might have in the past... which makes the possibility of making a permanent match more likely. And some single parents say meeting potential partners is much easier when you've got kids because you can easily meet other single parents at children's activities.

- **Self Pity:** *"I work harder than anyone else at my job but my boss never notices!"* When we have a pity party, it often involves giving our power away to something or someone. In this thought, the power is given away to the boss and to other coworkers who aren't working as hard. The key is to help the client take their power back! The reframe is, *"I'm the hardest worker at my job, and the experience I am gaining will pay off, if not here, somewhere down the line."*

Here's another example: *"I do everything for my children and they don't appreciate me at all."* You might start by asking your client how she expects her children to show appreciation. Have they ever shown appreciation in those specific ways? Has she ever even told them exactly what kind of appreciation she wants? Where exactly does she feel appreciated? How does that make her feel as compared to her experience with her children? What DO her children think, exactly, about the things she does for them? Are they things they would rather be doing themselves? Could she equip her kids to do those things? The reframe could be, *"My kids sometimes take me for granted. But sometimes I take them for granted, too. It's my job as the mom to show them how to appreciate people, and I need to talk with them about how we can better respect each other."*

- **All-or-Nothing Reasoning:** *"I always screw up my relationships,"* or *"I never get the jobs I want."* This is an easy reframe. You simply stop using the words "always" and "never." Your client likely had periods during a relationship which they did NOT screw up, and they've probably at least come close to getting a job they wanted. Encourage them to focus on what's previously worked to motivate them to action towards their goals. Ask them to consider the things they've done—or *not done*—to not to meet goals and determine what they can change to create a new outcome the next time.

Limiting Thoughts

I want to talk about limiting thoughts separately from the other forms of negative thoughts because, in my experience as a psychotherapist and business coach, they are by far the most restrictive when it comes to moving people toward success. These are the annoying, difficult to dislodge thoughts which, unexamined, keep us perpetually stuck exactly where we are.

Limiting thoughts usually revolve around the perception that you'll never have "enough," when the reality is there usually IS a way to get what we need. At minimum, there's almost always a way to focus on what we DO have which can easily—and often more satisfactorily—substitute for what we THINK we need.

Here are 10 examples of the most common limiting thoughts, and the reframes which typically help to dislodge them...

"I don't have enough money"

Whenever I hear this, I automatically think "red herring."

Listen, for the majority of the people in the world, there is NEVER enough money. But that doesn't keep them from passionately pursuing—(and often accomplishing)—their dreams. Because we always find ways to pay for the things we prioritize in our lives.

What you're really thinking when you say "I don't have enough money" is that you don't believe in yourself enough to go forward. It's more often a confidence issue than a real financial issue.

For example, many people considering going through our Certified Professional Coach program (www.BecomeARealCoach.com) tell me they don't think they can afford it... but I usually counter with some form of "When we're done talking, you're probably going to tell me you can't afford NOT to!"

Here's why...

- ❖ Nobody has money burning a hole in their pocket these days. You've got to MAKE the money for the goals you want to accomplish...
- ❖ Getting the wrong training can leave you floundering for a lifetime while you try to get paying clients and get them the results they're after...
- ❖ Doing NOTHING is really not an option if you have the striving to be a coach. Because nobody is "coming to the rescue" and if you want to make it happen you're going to have to ...
- ❖ Giving high quality advice to casual friends and colleagues—(and I know you're doing this already!)—without getting paid for the results you help create is costing you a fortune. Not just in money, but morale and momentum too! You need to learn how to develop these opportunities into long term clients and referral sources for your practice...
- ❖ Going to the cheapo "get certified in a weekend without any real life experience or live supervision" is probably worth what you pay for it... wouldn't you rather be supervised by people with our level of experience and success?

I usually proceed to tell them that if they don't BELIEVE we can deliver what we promise then I fully accept their rejection. But I dare them to read our site and/or listen to a few of the audios on the blog and come away thinking we don't! (www.BecomeARealCoach.com)

But do you know what many of these clients often say? "Hey Doc... I believe YOU can do it, I just don't believe I can"...

So what looks like a financial issue on the surface is really a lack of self-confidence when you dig into it, which is exactly what coaching is designed to fix! (*Our program in particular emphasizes developing confidence for our graduates*)

Now, here's another technique you can use to battle the "not enough money" limiting belief in YOUR clients...

When my coaching clients used to tell me they didn't have enough money FOR COACHING SESSIONS, I always ask them to consider this instead, "If you believed it was impossible to fail, what would that look like?" By getting them to focus on what they do have and the things they can do to move themselves forward, often they experience a paradigm shift. Money no longer holds them back.

"I don't have enough time."

Not having time is a red herring, too. What I hear when someone tells me they don't have enough time for something is that they aren't willing to make it a priority yet. Everybody has at least a few minutes every day that they can spend toward something that is priority in their lives. The reframe is the same as the one about money – "If you believed it was impossible to fail, what would that look like?" I would ask them what they would spend their time on. Often they find a solution they haven't thought of before.

(By the way, our coach certification program can be taken in self-paced modality with access to live supervisors during flexible office hours. So you make a few hours whenever you can, connect with a supervisor to review your progress, and move on to the next module. It's possible to complete our certification in under 12 weeks, but you can also stretch it out at no additional cost if this better suits your schedule. OK, enough selling... I just wanted to make the point for those who might be considering joining us at www.BecomeARealCoach.com)

"People don't support me."

There are always people out there who pooh-pooh our dreams. Granted, it hurts when our friends and families aren't willing to support us on the way to our goals. The way to reframe this limiting thought is to think about people who will support you. (*Duh, right!? But sometimes you just can't see this one when you're in the thick of it yourself.*)

Often my clients can name a friend or relative who does support them. If they really have no one, we brainstorm where they could find supportive people. They could be from trade organizations or special-interest groups that being involved in would move the client closer to their dream. With the internet these days it's almost impossible NOT to find support if you look for it!

"I may not have what it takes."

One of the most common negative thoughts we ALL have is that we aren't "good enough" to achieve our dreams. (*Whatever the hell that means!*)

There's always SOME truth to this: The reality is all of us are deficient in something we need to make our dreams happen.

But the flipside is we've also all got AMAZING GIFTS to bring to the table. Focusing on what we DO have, whether it's love, or energy, or time, will help us move forward. Eventually we may have to face our deficiencies, but even so, there are most likely solutions that will temper them.

"I don't have enough education."

My answer to that always is, "Good! Now you don't have to unlearn as much!" As a coach, I'm always trying to create an environment where people can feel comfortable thinking new thoughts. Maybe the client needs to go back to school or do some reading to make their dreams reality. And even if not, we are all learning every single day of our lives. No one's education is over until they die.

This is one of the reasons, by the way, why we don't have ANY educational pre-requisites for our Certified Professional Coach program. If you're willing to dedicate yourself to helping others within moral, legal, and ethical bounds... you're in!

It has always been like this, and it will always be like this.

This limiting thought is VERY damaging. It's unfortunately also a very common over-generalization which also encompasses some self-pity and all-or-nothing reasoning.

To reframe this negative thought, I remind my clients that doing the same things will almost always render the same results. If they want to engender a different outcome, they're going to have to DO something different.

So what is it they *can do differently* which might change the outcome?

Whose approval do they need to let go of to make the necessary changes to accomplish their goals?

When HAVE things been different in their lives? What were they doing that they aren't doing now?

If you're feeling particularly stuck in your life at present, please go back and read these again!

"I'm too old."

As we grow older—and we all do!--and come to realize we aren't as capable in some areas as we were when we were younger, it's natural to over-generalize that we are too old to accomplish our dreams.

But the reality is you aren't going to get any younger whether you decide to pursue your dreams now or next year. And there are gifts you've acquired thanks to age, like thinking before you speak, experience, wisdom, and patience... all gifts that make the possibility of accomplishing your goals MORE likely, not less!

(I forget who said "failure only exists in the grave", but he was right!)

"I'm too young."

I mentioned a version of this negative thought as the "discounting the positive" category of common thought types. The reframe is the same as thinking you are too old – there are gifts young people have that can help them achieve their dreams. Investors love to work with young, energetic, optimistic entrepreneurs, for example. Young people have drive and are often not tied down with responsibilities that would keep them from achieving their goals.

Now, I often speak to young men and women who ask whether they'll be capable of coaching people older and wiser than they are. I remind them that the willingness to dedicate your brainpower, empathy, and communication skills to another person for a period of focused time is invaluable regardless of age. You can't pick yourself up by your own shirt collar... you need another person to get that leverage.

I also usually tell them the story of my early days as a psychology intern. I was a VERY young doctoral student, but they assigned me married couples who were generally in their 40s and 50s. At first I would think to myself "what the heck does this pimply-faced Ph.D. student know about helping people who've been married with kids for twenty years"... but that was an extremely limiting thought.

It turned out all I needed to do was take the job seriously and they were willing to take me seriously...

Oh, and there was one more trick...

Occasionally a couple would object to my age. I would quickly respond that I was VERY sorry and it was entirely my fault. Puzzled, they'd ask what the heck I meant, to which I'd reply "Oh, well if I had been born sooner for you, then you wouldn't have to be concerned about my age. So it's really my fault and I do have to apologize"... they'd laugh and we'd move on.

And you know what? It turned out I DID know what I was doing. This pimply-faced-Ph.D. saved a lot of long term marriages in his twenties. Go figure!

"I'm not healthy enough."

I hear this negative thought a lot from aspiring coaches. They're frightened that because they haven't solved all of their own problems that they aren't qualified to help other people. The reality is none of us are ever going to be 100 percent healthy and problem-free. The reframe is that you've found ways to deal with at least SOME of your problems, and having the ability to do so qualifies you to help others solve do the same. *(And we always encourage coaches to develop networks of specialists to support them)*

"I don't know the right people."

I hear this from entrepreneurs looking for support, both financial and otherwise, especially if they are shy. This could also be a red herring, especially if the person has the common fear of public speaking and realizes (s)he may need to do this to help achieve their dreams. The reframe is usually that you *can* know the right people by taking concrete steps to find and get to know them. Then we can discuss networking techniques, ways to improve their public speaking ability and other ways to get to know people who can help the client achieve his dream.

Events That Trigger Negative Thoughts

More often than not there are specific events which trigger a given negative thought. This is particularly true of coaching clients who are learning to cope with a medical condition or a major transition in their lives. Their thoughts may virtually paralyze them from moving forward. These kind of events—*which the client often sees as failure and/or catastrophe*—can cause them to go into a downward negative spiral.

This is especially true with clients with chronic medical conditions that produce a lot of pain. And it's also very often true with clients experiencing grief from a profound loss.

People with these issues understandably need to experience the negative emotions associated with their journey. Negative thoughts and emotions are not bad in and of themselves... it's only when they get "stuck" and cause you to cycle downwards that we have to attack them. For example, attacking the sadness associated with the natural and normal grieving process would be a big mistake.

In these situations you'll want to think more in terms of "adaptive" thoughts rather than positive ones. Adaptive thoughts are reframes which help the client accept the reality of their situation. *(Adaptive thoughts are also helpful for clients who are not completely convinced that cultivating positive thoughts will help them reach their goals.)*

Here's an example of a long-term negative situation which requires adaptive thinking as opposed to purely positive thinking:

Joan is undergoing chemotherapy for breast cancer. For a day or two after her treatments she's finding herself too exhausted to go to work. Three days after her latest treatment, she's still too exhausted. It's the longest period of time she's taken away from her job since the mastectomy. Joan begins to think:

"My boss was OK with a day or two, but if have to start taking three days off, she'll fire me. I'm only two-thirds through my chemo. By the time I'm almost done I'll probably need four days off.

I'll lose my job for sure then. If I lose my job, I'll lose my medical benefits. I'll have to stop chemo because I can't afford it."

The reality is, Joan actually MAY lose her job over her illness. She may also lose her insurance benefits. However, there's no way to know this now. Furthermore, her coach has explored all possible actions Joan could take to prevent it and has determined there's nothing else to be done besides following her doctor's (*and nutritionist's*) advice. Worrying about the future in this case is further sapping Joan's energy and morale. So instead of focusing on whether or not this horrendous event is going to become reality down the road, her cancer coach can help Joan choose more adaptive thoughts which avoid going down that road until she absolutely has to.

Adaptive thoughts will often focus on the present and the not-too-distant past. Maybe Joan's boss told her that she could take off all the time she needed. Her adaptive thought may be: "My boss said that I could take off all the time I need. I'll call her and tell her I don't feel well today. I'll also ask her to clarify what she meant by that."

"Maybe I could do work from home a couple of hours later in the day. I may feel better this afternoon.

"I'm most likely not going to lose my job today. But if I lose my job before my chemo is completed, I'll be eligible for COBRA insurance coverage. It will be expensive, but I can pay for it with my part of my retirement savings and finish my chemo."

Here's another situation which required adaptive reframes...

Mark's wife and children were killed in a car accident 18 months ago. Megan, his wife, was the primary breadwinner in the family. Although Mark is employed, he can no longer afford to live in their four-bedroom home in the nicest neighborhood in town. Mark needs to sell the home before he loses it, but whenever he thinks about doing so, he can't bring himself to do it. He begins to think:

"My life is in this house."

"I'll forget how my wife smelled if I move."

"I'll have to leave the children's tree house I built for them if I leave. I can't do that."

"My family is dead. I can't cope with anything else."

A bereavement or grief coach could work with Mark to determine what his life was like before he lived in the house... before he had a wife and children. Where was his major passion at that time? Was it in his job? Friendships? An adaptive thought after exploring this might be, *"My passion has previously been in other places in my life and it can move there again. It could be in my job again or in golf. I don't need the house to have a life."*

The coach could also work gently with Mark to think of other ways he could remember his wife and children without the tree house, without being able to smell his wife, and without being in the house. An adaptive thought might be: *"I'll make sure I spray some of my wife's perfume on my bedding*

wherever I live, at least for now. I'll take one of the stairs for the tree house with me to remember the fun we had building it."

Not being able to cope with anything else is similar to the "I can't handle this" projection. The reality is, Mark has known this day was going to come. It's been lingering somewhere in the back of his mind over the last 18 months. The coach can ask Mark how he handled everything else up to this point. Ask how selling the house will be different from those other things. The coach could also help Mark put together a plan based on the people and coping skills which HAVE helped him since the tragedy.

Reframe Your Client in Six Easy Steps

You may wonder how you bring up reframing with a client. It's obviously not something you want to start out with in a coaching relationship. As you build trust with your client, (s)he will become more willing to let you address patterns you've observed in their thinking over the time you've gotten to know each other. Or you may have asked her to keep a journal, and you've uncovered some unhelpful thinking patterns together.

Clients need to become willing to let go of their worn-out, useless core beliefs. Working through this process will help you prepare them for the reframing. It's a gentle way of helping them to try out a paradigm shift.

Many coaches introduce reframing toward the end of a session. That gives the client time to think about it before they return for their next session. It also helps the client know that you've truly listened to everything currently on their mind about the situation, so they'll take you more seriously and be more inclined to change. (*"They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care"*)

1. Start by bringing up the thinking pattern as an observation you've made *in relationship to the goal they are hoping to achieve.*
2. If you haven't explained reframing, tell them how sometimes negative thoughts hold us back. Tell them how there are always ways to rethink thoughts to make them more productive for us. Ask the client for permission to let you ask some questions to help him.
3. Explain, specifically how changing the way they current are thinking about this issue will help them meet their goal.
4. Ask your clients detailed questions about the negative thought in a quest to find the potential paradigm shift. Ask about specifics, when things worked in the past, and other questions I've covered here.
5. Once you've come up with a possible paradigm shift, ask the client if he is willing to try to think about this issue in the reframed manner.

6. Make sure that the client is feeling OK about implementing the reframe. Discuss their feelings around making the change. You'll often find there are additional negative and limiting thoughts which underlay the first issue addressed... if so, you'll need to reframe those too!

Here are a Few More Questions to Help You Discover the Right Paradigm Shift

Here are some helpful questions that you might use to help your client in the reframing process:

- What would your most cherished role model think instead of this thought?
- What beliefs are you challenging by changing the way you think about this?
- How would you think about this if you were the boss, a woman, a teacher?
- If you were the coach, what would you be asking yourself right now?
- What would you be thinking about this thought if you had already met your goal?

Conclusion

One of the primary jobs you have as a coach is helping people move forward to achieve the goals they wish to achieve in life. Simply reframing the way they look at challenges will help them think differently, opening them up to all sorts of possibilities that can help them find ways to overcome any obstacles. And often they will find there are no obstacles there to begin with – except for the negative thoughts.

After you've practiced reframing thoughts with your clients for a month or so, you'll both notice that they are positive about life. You'll also find that they are beginning to make some progress to fulfilling their life goals. You've helped them to become unstoppable!

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Glenn Livingston, Ph.D.

How to Become Unstoppable



Sharon Livingston, Ph.D.



Glenn and Sharon Livingston have sold over \$20,000,000 in consulting and/or coaching services. Glenn has worked with over 1,000 coaching clients and directly supervised many coaches and therapists. (And Sharon has worked with over 60,000 people in a group format!) The Livingston's previous work and theories have also appeared in dozens of major media like those listed here. And Glenn was raised in a family of over a dozen helping professionals (psychologists, social workers, counselors, therapists, etc)... it's in his blood!



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