



# Finding Your North

## Self Leadership Toolkit

January 2022



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“Your external world predicts  
10% of your long-term happiness,  
**90% of your happiness is dictated  
by how your brain processes  
the external world.”**

**Shawn Achor**

Author of *“The Happiness Advantage:  
Linking Positive Brains to Performance”*

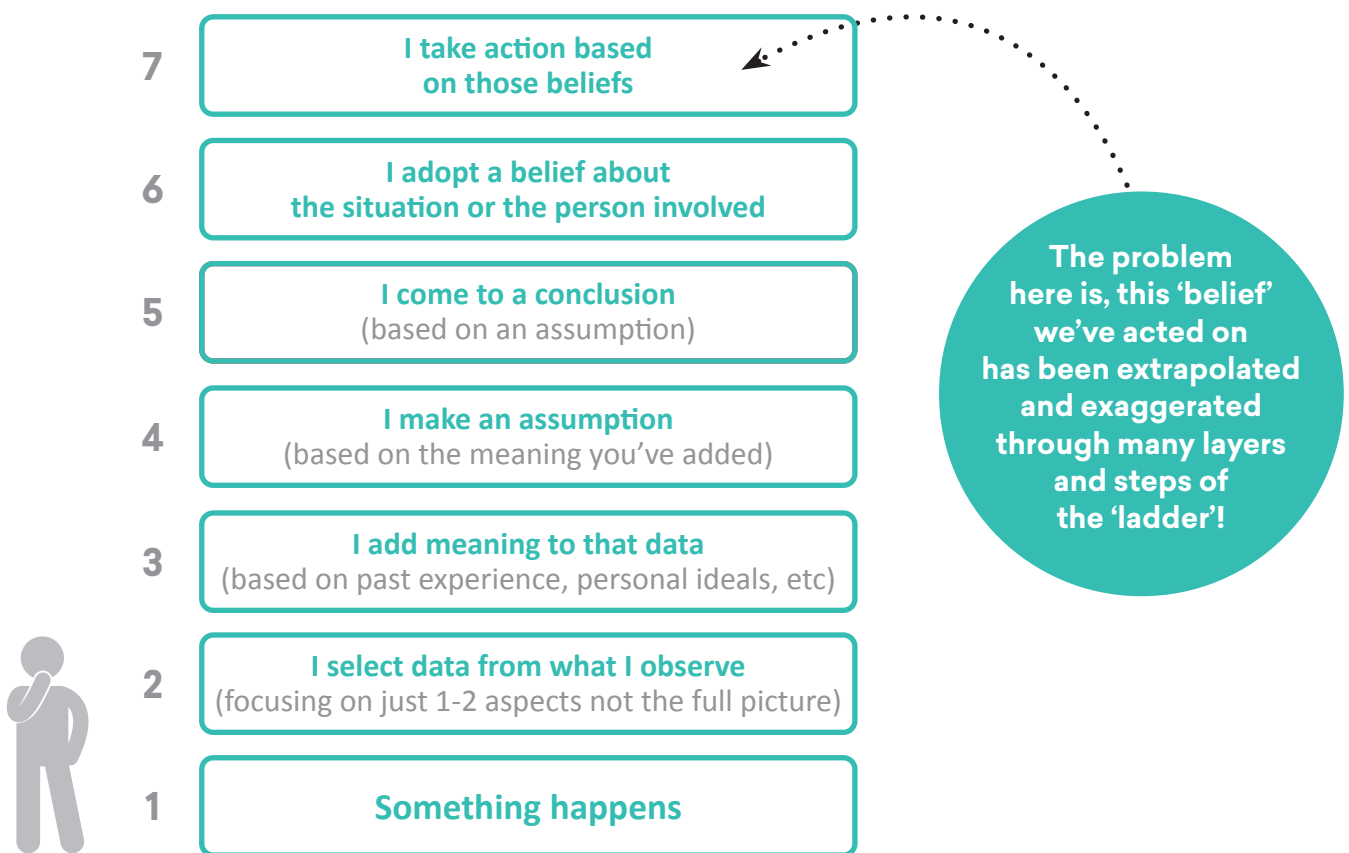
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# How interpretation can lead us astray



It's important to be aware of how we are interpreting the world around us and how that interpretation is not always right. It's not just *what* we're seeing but also *what we're telling ourselves about what we're seeing* because this narrative is influencing our decisions in life.

When we find ourselves having exaggerated feelings about events or situations, it's very easy to continue to layer on further meaning and before we know it, we often find ourselves in an extreme version of where we started! Let's start by breaking down the steps:



Climbing 'up' this ladder can happen instantaneously, over a few hours, or even a few days – we often don't even realise when we've applied all those layers. What's important is that we learn and practice how to come back from that kind of exaggerated thinking, which we refer to as "The Ladder of Inference."

# The Ladder of Inference



To best illustrate how the 'ladder' works, see the example below. Start with the red column to see how exaggerated thoughts can get, then move to the green column to see equally if not more plausible thinking on the same situation!

What happened was... <b>I SENT IMPORTANT EMAIL TO MY BOSS</b>	
I observe that... <b>MY BOSS DIDN'T RESPOND</b>	But what I didn't see was... <b>THEY WERE IN 3 DAYS OF TRAINING</b>
So, I decided this meant... <b>IT'S BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T AGREE WITH MY OPINION</b>	But it could have also meant... <b>THEY WERE JUST BUSY</b>
Because of this I assume... <b>THEY ALWAYS TAKE A LONG TIME TO RESPOND TO ME, I THINK THEY JUST DON'T VALUE ME</b>	But I might've been wrong because... <b>IT'S AN IMPORTANT TOPIC AND THEY WANTED TO SPEAK TO ME RATHER THAN SEND AN EMAIL</b>
I then conclude... <b>THE ISSUE IS WITH ME... THEY DON'T VALUE MY WORK... THEY DON'T EVEN LIKE ME...</b>	But I could have equally concluded... <b>THEY JUST NEED MORE TIME</b>
Which made me believe... <b>I THINK THEY THINK I'M NOT THAT GOOD AT MY JOB</b>	But it's also possible that... <b>OTHER THINGS ARE TAKING PRIORITY RIGHT NOW</b>
And so I... <b>ACT STRANGELY AROUND THEM... START DOUBTING MY WORK... START LOOKING FOR A NEW JOB!</b>	When I could have... <b>SIMPLY BOOKED A MEETING WITH THEM TO DISCUSS IT</b>

# What can we learn from this?



As we challenge our thinking by filling in the different prompts of the ladder (e.g. ‘But what I didn’t see was...’ ‘But it could also have meant...’), it’s this new thinking, reframing and opening of perspective that allows us to see the previously unseen.

It’s easy to become selective in our focus, then add layers of meaning and end up in an exaggerated thought process. But when we take the time to open up our perspective it can lead us to better quality thinking (one not tainted by emotions) and ultimately to better actions, which gets us better results in life and in business.

Try it for yourself on page 23 in the Module 1 Exercises section!



# Ladder of Inference

**Part 1** To stop an emotional response from getting us even deeper into frustration, it's important to pause, and try to see things from more than one angle. Use the template below to examine your thinking, either on a current or past situation and reflect on how your actions are being or have been impacted by perception.

What happened was...	
I observe that...	But what I didn't see was...
So, I decided this meant...	But it could have also meant...
Because of this I assume...	But I might've been wrong because...
I then conclude...	But I could have equally concluded...
Which made me believe...	But it's also possible that...
And so I...	When I could have...



# Ladder of Inference

**Part 2** Once you've completed your Ladder of Inference, either for something you are experiencing now (in the moment) or as a reflective piece (something that has already happened) – try answering the below questions to help you see the new possibilities or how you can evolve your thinking for the future.

**1** Looking at the ladder I now realise...

**2** What I could have thought / assumed / acted on differently is/was...

**3** In what way could the outcome be/have been different?

# Common thinking traps



Negative thoughts tend to happen automatically, half the time you don't even realise they're happening. The mind has a habit of projecting our fears, many of us even tend to catastrophise.

**Why is that?**



# Common thinking trap examples



## Personalisation

Believing that things others do or say is a direct, personal reaction to you – when it's likely nothing to do with you at all!

### Example:

*"My boss seems irritated and distant today... I must have done something to make them angry with me."*

(When, in reality they may just be jetlagged and catching up from that week-long business trip!)

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## Catastrophising

Exaggerating how badly something will turn out and how you'll be unable to cope with it.

### Example:

*"My doctor asked me to call the office. There must be something wrong with my test results. I just won't be able to handle it if I'm seriously ill."*

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## Mind-reading

When you believe that you know what others are thinking (even though this isn't possible!) and assume the worst.

### Example:

*"She hasn't met me for dinner in weeks even though I've asked 3 times. She probably thinks I'm annoying now and is avoiding me because of it."*

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## Filtering

Only paying attention to the negative aspects of a situation while ignoring all the positives. This stops you from drawing a more balanced conclusion.

### Example:

*"My boss looked so bored... my presentation must have been awful!"*

(Even though other colleagues looked engaged and gave feedback on how useful they found it)

# Our tendency to think negatively



“The brains of humans and other animals contain a mechanism that is designed to **give priority to bad news**.

By shaving a few hundredths of a second from the time needed to detect a predator, this circuit improves the animal’s odds of living long enough to reproduce.”

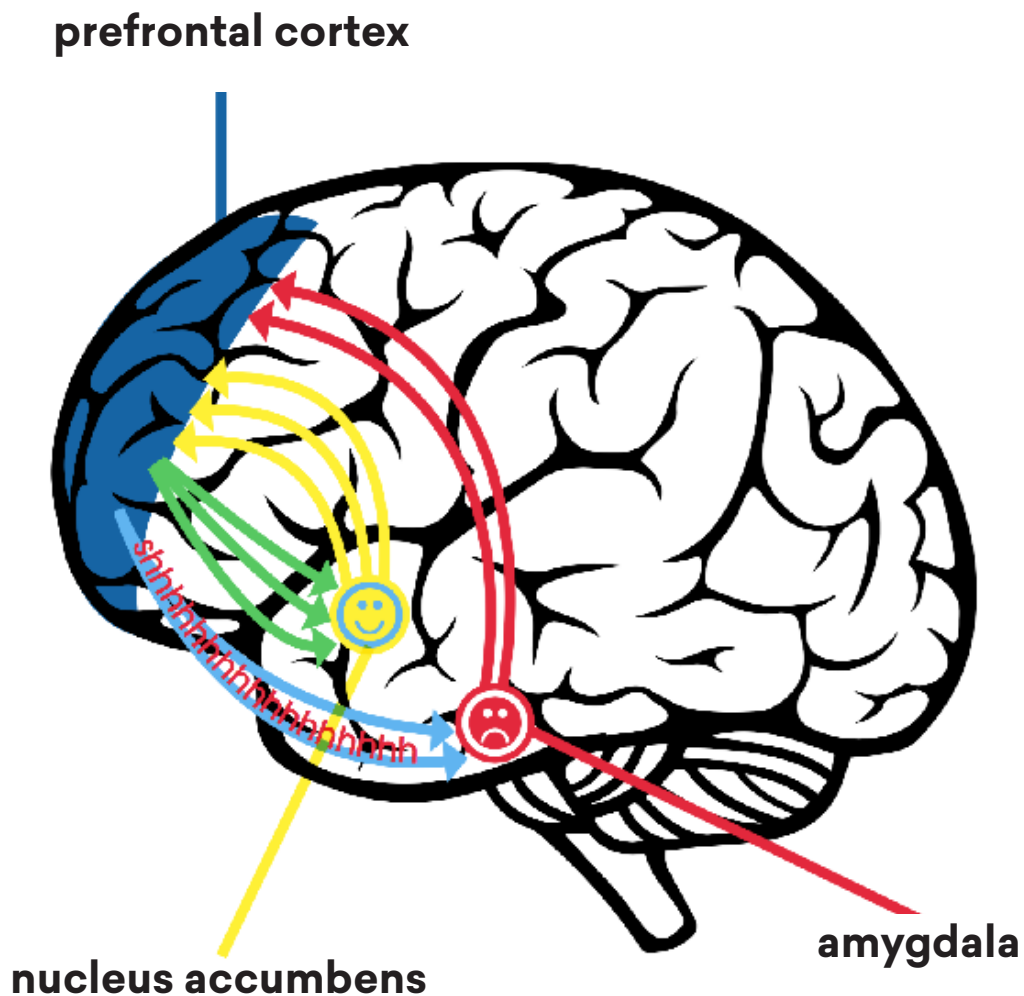
**Psychologist Daniel Kahneman**  
**“Thinking, Fast and Slow”**

# What is neuroplasticity?



The concept of neuroplasticity has replaced the formerly-held position that the brain did not change after childhood, and was hard-wired and fixed by the time we were adults.

Neurobiologist Richard Davidson of the University of Wisconsin, Cognitive & Emotional Brain.  
Elaine Fox, Cognitive Psychologist & Author of *Rainy Brain Sunny Brain*



# From visual illusions to cognitive illusions



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“What if the way we perceive a problem is already part of the problem?”

Slavoi Zizek

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Whether we’re aware of it or not, all people keep a running account of what’s happening to them, what it means, and what they should do about it.

In other words, our minds are constantly monitoring, interpreting, and deciding. That is simply how we stay on track.

## But sometimes the interpretation process goes awry.

Some people put more extreme interpretations on things that happen—and then react with exaggerated feelings of anxiety, depression, or anger!

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“There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so”

William Shakespeare, ‘Hamlet’

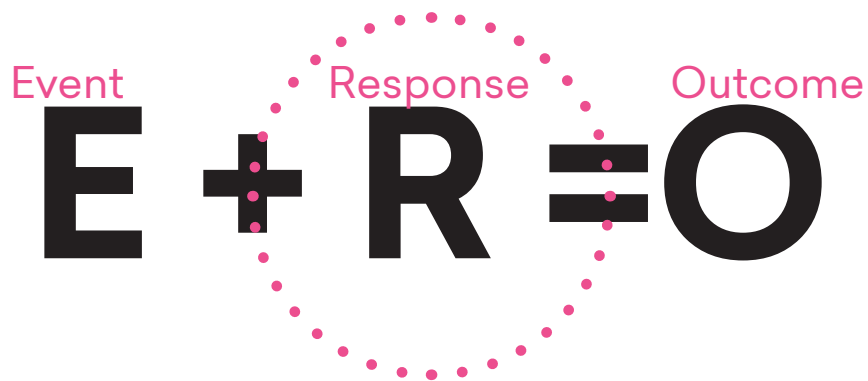
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Your ability to respond  
is based on the meaning we give to things.

**You have a CHOICE.**



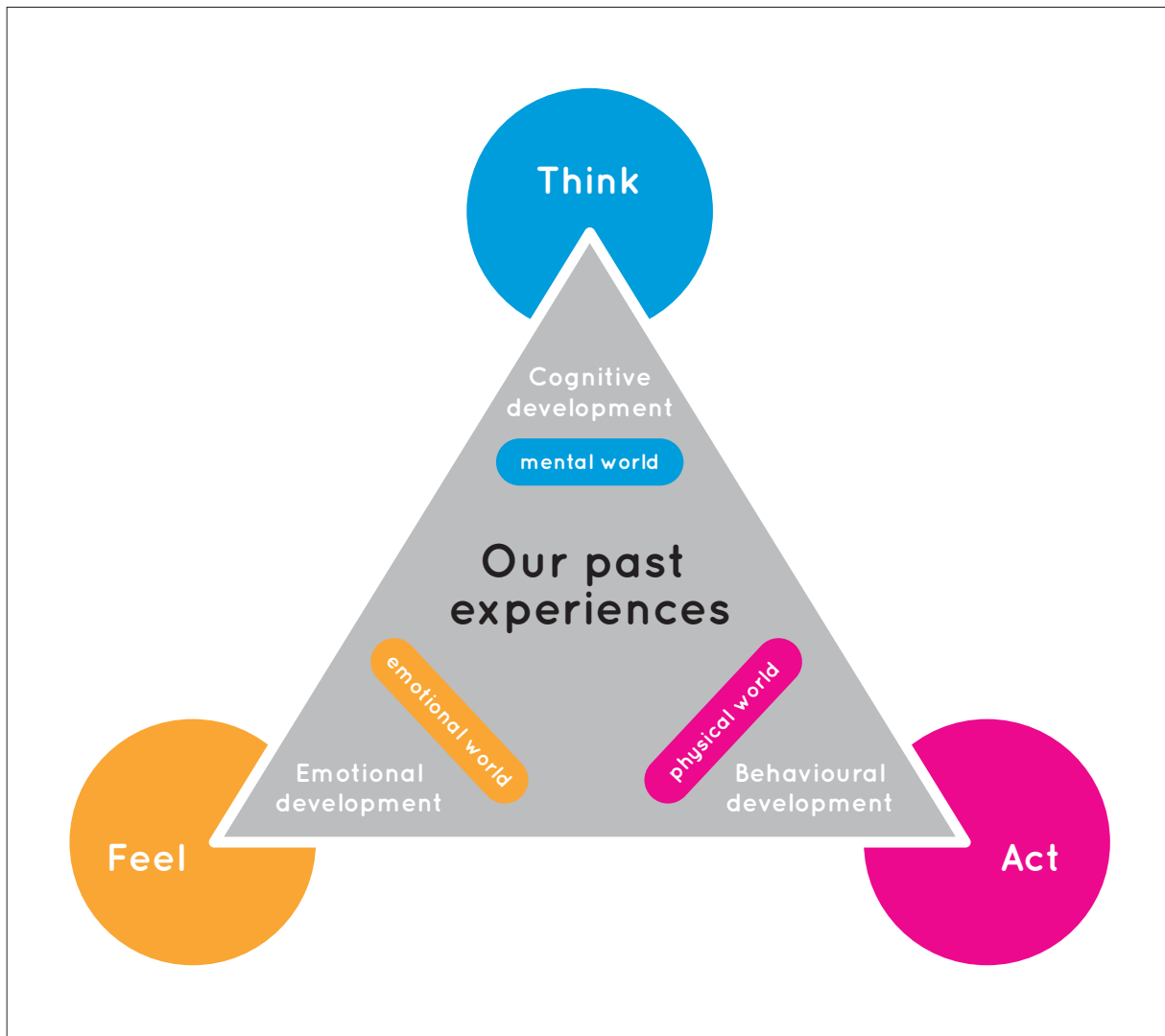
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“If you always do what you’ve always done,  
you’ll always get what you’ve always got.”

**Jack Canfield, *The Success Principles***

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# The Attitude Model



When thinking about behaviour it's important to not consider it in isolation. Too often we think that the brain 'stuff', our heart 'stuff' and our physical 'stuff' are all separate. The reality is that everything is connected. If we ever want to change anything we need to affect it at all levels: cognitive, emotional, and behavioural.

# Thank you

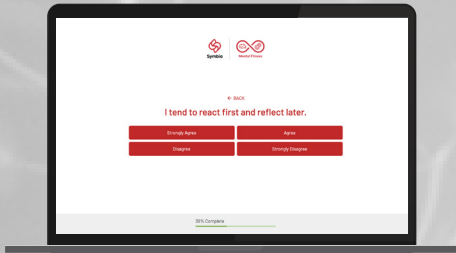
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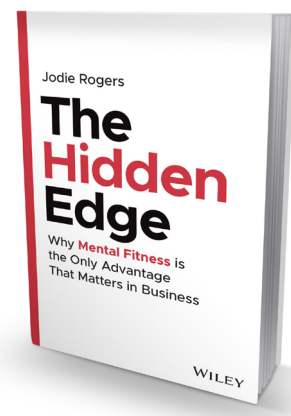
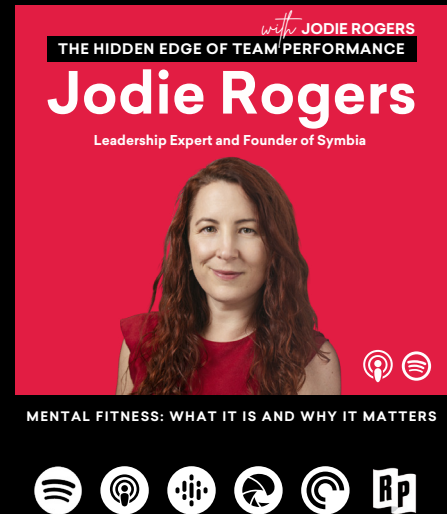
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