

OVERTHINKING

A PRBLEM YOU CAN FIX

Chatter, chatter, chatter—I should **not** have done this, and I should have gone to her party, and why didn't I do that? She is so rude! Maybe I said something wrong? I should have sent Aunt Grace a thank you for the Christmas present. Why am I such a loser? Why is my life so hard? What will I do if she says something?—blah, blah, blah!

How many times have you heard someone say, “You are overthinking the whole thing?” What is overthinking? And how can you stop overthinking? Overthinking is not trusting yourself. It is the fear of doing something wrong and having to face the consequences.

But first, what are the problems you cause by overthinking? Second, what are you behaviorally trying to accomplish when you are overthinking? If you are an over-thinker, you can probably answer these last two questions quickly. Stop and think about what you are doing (thinking) when you become aware that you are overthinking. What is the purpose of overthinking? What problems or problems are you trying to solve by overthinking?

What you discover on your own will make more of a long-lasting impression and a significant change in your life. So do not read on until you have given yourself sufficient time to discover the answers to the above questions. **Stop here!** And see how many answers you can find for yourself.

Let us look at some of the answers that you have given me over the years. I overthink because:

- I do not trust myself to make good decisions.
- I am scared to death to make a wrong decision.
- If I do not make the correct decision, I will cause harm to myself or others.
- If I make the wrong decision, I will feel guilty and maybe even shame.
- Hopefully, overthinking protects me from failure.
- When I fail, I cause myself and others emotional pain.

These are just a few of the answers that clients have given over the years. Did you have any of the same responses? I would love to know if you came up with any new ones?

How is overthinking working for you? Is it getting you what you want in the long run? For you, what do you see as the significant underlying purpose for overthinking?

- ♥ “I do not trust myself.” That is probably a true statement. You cannot be trusted! Just the fact that you are human says that you cannot be trusted. Therefore, you are going to screw up and make bad decisions. “To err is human.” It is part of your genetic makeup birds fly, fish swim, and people make bad decisions from time to time. Failing is the primary way that people learn. “He who never fails never learns.”
- ♥ The question is, are you capable of surviving being wrong. Do you need to be perfect to be lovable? If you make a bad decision, are you afraid of being rejected? I strongly believe in the adage “You are not okay. I am not okay. **And, that is okay.**” The issue here is accepting yourself the way you are until you can be someplace else. Acceptance means taking the judgments off of yourself and your behaviors. If someone really loves you and you make a wrong decision, that will not change their love for you. (Acceptance does not mean approval.)
- ♥ Instead of judging yourself, substitute, “is what I am doing getting me what I want in the long run.” It is a matter of what you say and what you do not being aligned. If what you do and what you say is different, you are lying to yourself and others. Therefore, start with making sure that what you say is consistent with what you do. When what you say and what you do are not aligned, you will have trouble trusting yourself, and others will have difficulty trusting you. You will start doubting yourself and overthinking to make up the discrepancy between what you are doing and saying.
- ♥ Your fear of rejection and failure is not what controls you. Fear has never stopped anyone from doing something they strongly wanted to do. Instead, we use fear as an excuse to keep us from making decisions. Ask any first responder if they do not experience fear when rushing into an unsafe situation. For example, would you be willing to jump out of an airplane, with a parachute, at 20,000 feet? Probably not for most of you. Okay, then, your plane is on fire in is going to crash. And you are going to die unless you jump out of the airplane with your fear and parachute. I suspect I have a lot more people who are now willing to jump!
- ♥ Years ago, I worked in the Fresno County Probation Department as a student intern. Jim Macy was a probation officer, and when he had a difficult decision to

make, he would take a quarter out and flip the coin. “Heads they got out, tails they stayed in!” The quarter never decided whether the inmate got out or not. It simply made a decision to which Jim could react. Jim trusted his feelings. If the quarter came up heads (he gets out), then he would ask himself, “How do I feel about letting this guy out?” If his answer was, “I do **not feel** good about that decision,” he would **not** sign the paper that would allow the inmate to be on his own recognizance.

The rationale was to decide something, but he would look at what he felt about the man and his situation. And, what he felt determined whether he stayed in jail or was released. To be able to use this method, Jim needed to be comfortable in making the wrong decision. He needed to be able to trust that whatever happened, he would be okay.

- ♥ Nothing is forever! No one is forever! There is no “happily ever after.” Everything ends once you recognize that change is inevitable, and it is healthy to strive to live each day to its fullest. Or, you can live in fear of the endings.

Are you ready to give up overthinking? It is not going to be easy. You get through fear by doing what you are afraid to do. In this case, it is making a decision, experiencing the fear and anxiety that it might not be the right decision, and doing it anyway?

What would happen if you consciously practiced making decisions? Sometimes your decision will be right on! And, sometimes, your decisions will not result in the outcomes you were desiring. But in both cases, validate that you made the decision. And, the world did not end, and your life went on.

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