

Challenge Negative Thinking with 4 Critical Questions

Dr. Ron Kaiser January 24, 2014 No Comments

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Hi this Dr. Ron Kaiser with your Mental Health Gym podcast for July 2011. While I obviously always think these podcasts are important, I believe that today's podcast is especially important because it kind of offers you a glimpse into many session of goal achieving psychotherapy. Those of you who've worked with me may be quite familiar with the fact that I ask a few critical questions sometimes one or two or three or four in the course of my work with individual patients. Today I'd like to go over what I consider to be the four most critical questions that can help in the achievement of goals.

As you know the purpose of approaching psychotherapy from the Mental Health Gym stand point is to get better at what we wanna do and to move onto the next phase of our lives. So these four critical questions are ones that will get you there. The first one that I think is often important to ask ourselves is the question of am I a fortune teller? Lot of times when faced with challenges, our first impulse might be to say it's never going to work. I don't think I'm going to get that job because there're lots of people applying for it. That person who seems interesting to me won't really be interested in what I have to say so I better not start a conversation with them and so on and so on.

I've found that I'm not a fortune teller myself and I doubt that most of you are. Well I can pretty well predict that it's going to be darker at night time than it is in the day time and here in Pennsylvania where I live I can usually predict that the winters are going to be colder than summers. So if I wanted to take up a hobby of gardening I probably would wanna emphasize it during the summer months. But my gift of prophecy doesn't extend much beyond this and consequently if I'm planning to try something, to meet a particular challenge, to write

another book, to make a presentation or so on I can't predict beforehand how well it's going to be taken but I do know if I've got something to say that maybe I'm better off saying it than avoiding it because I'm not a fortune teller and I don't really know that it's not going to be well accepted. I would encourage all of you to think in those terms when faced with a challenge. Ask the question am I fortune teller? And if I'm not, then if what I have to say has integrity, then let's proceed with it.

The second question probably won't surprise you; it's what can go right. That's obviously the name of my eBook and really the basis for the entire Mental Health Gym. As I've indicated over and over again, we all may have a tendency to know or think about what can go wrong and for many people the first the immediate reaction is to think in those terms and then over think and identify various things that can go right and so on. Consequently I think it's critically important to ask ourselves what can go right and to ask that early. If we don't ask that early, in the process, then we're more likely to overload ourselves with negative thinking and that will impede any progress that we might be inclined to make. We may never get to the; what can go right question unless we ask it early and I think that that's a critically important question to ask in each and every case.

The third question is particularly important for those of you who may have survived trauma or abuse or other kinds of mistreatment. That's the question: what's that got to do with me? In other words what's somebody else's inappropriate behavior have to do with me? I may have been the recipient but by the same token I cannot take blame for somebody else's misbehavior. The same thing has to be asked if say, for example, you've had various attempts at treatment for headache condition, other kinds of debilitating medical conditions and things haven't gone right, haven't been successful in the past, if you're making a new attempt and you're starting a new course of treatment, it's very important to not start out with the assumption that

it's not going to be helpful in the future, because it has nothing to do with you if somebody else couldn't have solved your problem in the past.

So the critical question...and the third one in the list is what does that have to do with me. If it had something to do with you, then it's important to look at what you can do in terms of changing your behavior, to reduce the negative impact that you may bring into the situation. But in most cases we're talking about issues that have nothing to do with you, but you've been carrying around some blame or some guilt because of somebody else's abuse, inappropriate behavior, bad judgment or unfairness. Keep the third question in mind and be prepared to use it.

The fourth question and an extremely critical one from the standpoint of goal achieving psychotherapy is; how is this going to get me to where I want to go? It's a particularly relevant question to ask when, say, you've been a little bit lack in pursuing your dreams or goal. If you set out to accomplish something over the past week and you didn't do so. I know when I work with patients it's pretty common for me to give homework assignments and when somebody comes back and somehow didn't find the time to do the homework assignment whether it be to call a friend, whether it be to start an exercise program or a diet program, whether it be to begin a reading program or to apply for jobs or whatever it may be and you don't do it because of the fact that there's no particular time demand on it, it's not like going to work and you absolutely have to be there. I always ask people to look at their goal and to ask; how is this helping me get to that goal?

If your behavior is not goal directed, then ask yourself; do I have a good excuse for it? You know, is it vacation time? Did I decide I'm overloaded or burned out this week and its only a temporary hiatus, if

that's not the case then goal direction should be your guide and when you ask yourself how's this helping me to get to my goal, it's time to revise behaviors rather than revising goals. So there you have it, those are the four critical questions that I think are most important in trying to promote behavior change and to overcome negativism and to overcome any tendencies to stay stuck.

Remember again questions are am I a fortune teller? What can go right? What does this have to do with me? And how is this going to help me get to where I want to go? I encourage people to commit those questions to memory or to write them down and carry them with you. I think you'll be surprised how often you can find opportunities to ask those questions and how helpful they will be in helping you to get unstuck and to move forward into the next phase of your life. This has been Dr. Ron Kaiser with your July 2011 podcast. As always I'd be happy to hear from you with your comments at the website www.thementalhealthgym.com and we'll be speaking with you again next month.