

The difference between occurrences, positive thinking (affirmations), intuition, thoughts, alternative interpretations, and conscious assessments

The question frequently arises: How can I tell the difference between six different phenomena:

- The meaning I automatically and unconsciously give events (my occurrences),
- Making conscious assessments about the events,
- Positive thinking (affirmations),
- Thoughts,
- Alternative interpretations, and
- Intuition I have about events.

To begin with, remember how I've defined "reality/events":

What actually happens in the world. Events. What you know through your five senses, especially what you can see or hear. What you usually could capture on a video recording. Sometimes "reality" can't be "seen" because it is inside your mind, such as thoughts, memories, projections of the future, and physical sensations. We can give all of these meaning, so we can have occurrences about all of them. We can give meaning to both internal and external reality, in other words, events that occur "out there in the world" and those that happen in your mind.

Now, how does reality/events differ from occurrences, conscious inferences, and intuition?

Occurrences

Occurrences are meanings that you have automatically and unconsciously given to events as they happen. A critical aspect of occurrences is that they feel like "the truth" to us. They seem like "reality" to us. We have to look carefully to distinguish them from actual events in reality. See Handout 1 for more details.

Conscious Assessments

Occurrences are very different from **conscious assessments**—which consists of consciously looking at reality and asking ourselves: What are some of the possible implications of, and what would be the best way to deal with, the events? For example, imagine a friend walked in a room you were in and didn't say hello or even acknowledge your presence. One possible occurring might be: He is angry with me. If that were your occurring, it would seem to you as if he really is angry.

After dissolving the occurring you would realize that all that actually happened is he walked in and didn't pay attention to you. Then you could consciously ask yourself: What could his behavior possibly mean? You might conclude that it could mean he is angry, or he is distracted, or upset and doesn't want to talk to anyone, or deep in thought and doesn't want to get off track, etc. At which point you could deal with the reality of what actually happened by walking over to the friend and asking if he is okay, or by waiting until later if you think waiting would make sense.

A assessment about an event that is made consciously—that is clearly a hypothesis and doesn't feel like the truth—is different from an occurring, which is made unconsciously and which does feel like the truth.

When you act on a conscious assessment you realize you do not know what an event really meant or the best way to deal with it, so you investigate to find out. When you act on an occurring, you are certain what an event meant because you perceive your occurring as reality.

Positive thinking (affirmations)

Positive thinking is an attempt to convince yourself of something positive when you really think something negative. In other words, **with affirmations you don't dissolve a negative occurring and then create a positive meaning in its place; instead you try to cover the negative occurring with a positive thought through force and repetition.**

The theory is if you say something enough times with sufficient positive energy behind it, you will convince yourself that it is true. Unfortunately this rarely works. You still have your original negative belief and occurring underneath the positive affirmation, which will affect your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

In fact, the very act of saying to yourself in the mirror: "I am good enough," over and over often creates the opposite effect to the one you want. Why? Because people who really thought they were good enough would not be standing in front of a mirror trying to convince themselves of that. The only people who would take that type of action are people who really didn't think they are were good enough and were trying to convince themselves otherwise. In other words, the very act of saying repeatedly that "I am good enough" actually implies that I am not.

Positive thinking, which is an attempt to convince yourself of something you feel isn't true, has nothing to do with dissolving occurrences or forming conscious assessments.

Alternative Interpretations

The purpose of the alternative interpretations is to realize that the meaning you gave the event is not "the truth," but only one of several possible interpretations.

You are not trying to convince yourself that any of the alternative interpretations is correct and your meaning is wrong. By definition, an occurring seems to us to be the truth, part of reality, a fact. Alternative interpretations help us to realize that the occurring is only one of many possible ways to view an event and is not the truth.

Thoughts

The primary difference between a thought and an occurring is that the occurring seems like it is reality—it seems like the truth. Occurrences are always related to events, in other words, they are the meaning we give events. Thoughts are not necessarily related to anything. Moreover, just like we have certainty about reality, we have certainty about our occurrences, which we think are the truth. When we have thoughts we don't necessarily assume they are the truth. A thought would not produce an emotion, an occurring could (if an emotion is appropriate in that situation.)

Intuition

Another phenomenon that can be confused with occurrences is intuition. **Intuition** is a type of knowing that usually doesn't depend on the five senses; it is a feeling about something that seems to be true. According to Wikipedia, it is "the ability to acquire knowledge without inference or the use of reason." Because an intuitive thought can seem like the meaning you are giving an event, it can be difficult to distinguish between intuitive thoughts and an occurring.

I think that after making a concerted effort to identify occurrences and distinguishing them from events several hundred times, you will get to the point where they "feel different" from intuition.

Occurrences, by definition, are always the meaning you give to specific external or internal events. Intuition is not in response to an event; it is just something you "know" to be true.

For example, when I was diagnosed with cancer I "knew" I would be okay, that I had nothing to worry about. I didn't think that what I thought I knew (that I would be healed) was inherent in the event (the diagnosis). For me it was clear that this was not the meaning I was giving to the diagnosis; it was just something I "knew" about my body. I had an inner certainty.

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Draft 052814