

Rethink, Reframe,
Lead:
Breaking Free from
Mind Traps to
Unlock Your
Leadership
Potential



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CENTER *for* DEMENTIA CARE

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Objectives:



Recognize the most common cognitive distortions and their impact on leadership effectiveness and organizational culture.



Apply evidence-based strategies to manage emotional and behavioral responses triggered by “mind traps”.



Develop practical tools and habits for overcoming distorted thinking, fostering clearer decision-making and enhanced professional relationships.

Leadership begins in the mind. If our thinking is distorted, our actions, behaviors, decisions and culture will be too.

- We lead and influence in our organizations, teams, homes, in the community, and ourselves.
- Senior living is high-stakes, emotionally intense, and relationship-driven.
 - Filled with people from *all walks of life, all experiences, all journeys, all personalities*
- As leaders, we must think clearly, but sometimes our brains work against us, using shortcuts that lead to poor decisions.



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Leadership Qualities

Empathy

Visionary

Effective communication

Strategic

Self-awareness

Credibility

Flexibility

Courage

Resilience

Integrity

Influence

Compassion

Respect

Collaboration



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**ACT AS IF
WHAT YOU
DO MAKES A
DIFFERENCE.
IT DOES.**

WILLIAM JAMES

**“One cannot
grow fine flowers
in thin soil.”**

-Virginia Wolf



Thoughts = Soil



Mind traps = Weeds



Reframe = Pruning



Maintain = Watering



Culture = Garden



Recognizing Mind Traps

Mind Traps are cognitive distortions—automatic, often subconscious thought patterns that cloud perception.

- Brain shortcuts that create biased, usually wrong thinking.
- Triggered by stress, fear, fatigue, uncertainty, emotion, not having all the information, past experiences.
- Common. But when they go unchecked, they can cause real damage to self and teams
 - undue stress
 - low morale
 - poor relationships
 - Falsehoods
 - increased anxiety, depression, resentment
 - poor performance and outcomes
 - criticism of self and others
 - one-sided, inaccurate views



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Common Categories of Mind Traps

- Extreme Thinking
- Negative Bias
- Faulty Assumptions
- Emotion as Truth
- Misplaced Responsibility



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Extreme Thinking

- The tendency to make unrealistic or unreasonable demands/expectations on your self or others
- Use ALWAYS and NEVER to describe situations and people
- Leaves no room for error
- Assuming the worst will happen

“I wasn’t asked to the meeting; I have nothing to offer.”

“If it can’t be perfect, why bother.”

“They should already know how to do this.”

“I shouldn’t be struggling with this by now.”

“If we’re short-staffed this weekend, residents will suffer and families will leave.”

“This family is always unreasonable.”

“This staff generation never follows through.”



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Extreme Thinking Weeds

- These unrealistic expectations add guilt, frustration, and resentment to ourselves and others.
- Judges before seeking to understand.
- Fear can escalate quickly if we expect the worst-case scenario, even from small setbacks. It increases anxiety and drains motivation.
- Avoid absolute language (always, never) –it shuts down problem-solving.
- Sets you up for failure and leads to avoidance behaviors.
- The pressure is too much
 - Increases feelings of hopelessness, worry & anxiety about your situation.
- Lowered self-worth, self-esteem self-defeatism
 - We all want things to go perfectly, but putting unrealistic expectation on things, situations and people puts too much weight to carry on yourself.



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Negative Bias

We give more significance negative experiences than positive ones even if there just as strong.

Negative bias keeps our thinking within a “box” and not seeing other perspectives or possibilities.

“Sure, my team pulled off the event—but that’s just their job.”

- We actively dwell on the negative, we are less able to appreciate the good things that happen.

- You focus on one negative comment in an otherwise positive email from your boss and obsess about for the rest of the day, week, etc.

- *“We had two complaints, so the activity was a disaster.”*

- Overlooking the 95% that went well reinforces negativity.



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Negative Bias Weeds

Gives a VERY narrow view of the situation to where we can't see the reality or see a situation in the right context.

- Feelings of inferiority for yourself or towards another
- Loss of confidence
- Less energy and joy
- Depression
- Resentment/bitterness
- Unrewarded
- We rob ourselves of the joy of our accomplishments and deny the gift of giving & getting praise, congratulations and sharing accomplishment and pride.
- Contributes to illnesses like headaches, backaches, heart disease, etc.



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Faulty Assumptions

- When we assume we know what others are thinking.
- Predicting the outcome of something before having evidence (usually predicted negative outcome) *“that’s not going to work”*
 - Inflexible expectations for how things will turn out before they happen.
- Deciding without having enough information to be sure one is right.
 - *“There’s no point in starting a diet because I’ll just break it, so I’ll have another cupcake.”*
 - *“My way is the right way.”*
 - *“Everyone knows their job and what’s expected of them.”*
 - *“I can tell the ED doesn’t respect my ideas.”*



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Faulty Assumptions Weeds

- People who rely on faulty assumptions often experience depression and anxiety.
- You can act in a way that supports your assumptions and, unknowingly, create a self-fulfilling prophecy.
- Assuming—usually negative—without checking the facts, which damages trust and morale.
 - *Clarity requires actual communication, not assumption.*
- Can lead to poor decisions that often cause more harm than good.
- Most assumptions are derived from old information. They keep you stuck in the past.
- It's lazy behavior. Instead of asking questions to get the information you need, you jump to conclusions.
- They become a bad habit. The more assumptions you make the easier it is to make them.

Emotions as Truth

- Concludes that their emotional reaction proves something is true, despite contrary evidence.
- Focuses on feelings of flaws, while ignoring strengths and opportunities.
 - *“I feel overwhelmed, so I must not be capable.”*
 - *“I feel anxious about having the hard conversation, so I’ll put it off.”*
 - *“I don’t feel appreciated or seen, I must not be appreciated.”*
 - *You feel stupid so you are convinced you must be dumb, regardless of contrary facts.*
 - *You feel lonely, so you deduce that no one cares about you, and you are unlovable.*



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Emotions as Truth Weeds

- It creates an “emotional truth,” which may be in direct conflict with the perceptual truth.
- It can create feelings of anxiety, fear, and apprehension in existing stressful situations.
- Failure to see the big picture.
- If there is something bothering or worrying us, instead of facing it, we postpone it.
- If there is an activity, we think we will fail in/at, we may postpone decision making and attempt to avoid taking risks, which confines us to our comfort zones, leaving no room for growth.
- Judging behavior of others based on how we feel and not thinking of what might be going on with them. No empathy.
- Emotions are real, but they’re not always reliable guides.



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Misplaced Responsibility



"I'm not worried because somehow all of this is your fault."

- You assume the blame and guilt for things that go wrong outside of my control.
- We see things as our fault that we could not have prevented.
- Not taking responsibility on ourselves you shift the blame on others.
- Blaming others for the way things are turning out in your life.
 - *"I should've seen this coming—it's my fault."*
 - *"This wasn't my fault at all—it's on the night shift."*
- Both blame and blame-shifting can trap leaders.



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Misplaced Responsibility Weeds

- Engaging in these thought patterns we don't get the opportunity to correct our thoughts or learn from our mistakes.
- Self sabotage
- Feelings of guilt, inadequacy and helpless
- Extreme frustration and putting yourself in a no-win situation
- Damaged relationships
- Blame is an easy out. The path of least resistance is also the path of least growth.
- They stop you from taking responsibility. They allow you hide behind your own version of the story.



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Pull the weeds!

Your thoughts becomes your words, tone, feelings, actions, decisions, your team dynamics, your organization culture.

Mind Trap Effects on Leaders

- Erode trust—others feel blamed, misunderstood, or micromanaged
- Impair judgment—decisions are based on emotion, not data
- Depletes resilience—leaders feel overwhelmed, stuck in negative spirals

Ripple Effects on Culture

- Staff mirror leadership behavior
- Emotional tone sets norms: anxiety, blame, silence vs. calm, trust, communication
- Culture of reactivity → higher turnover, poor care, staff burnout

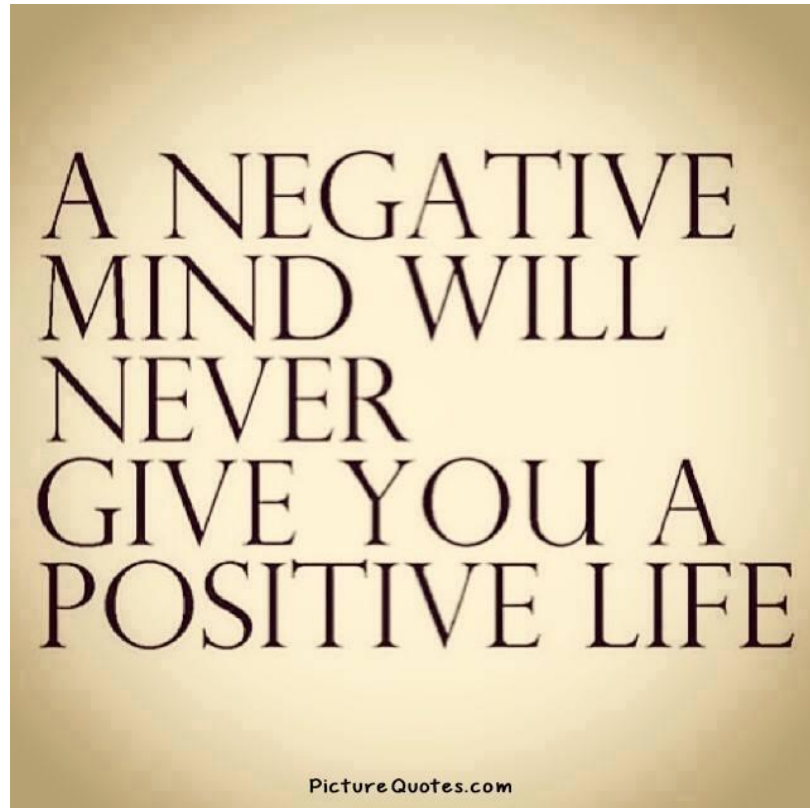


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Great News!

We have the power to reframe our thoughts like pruning a plant. This allows for growth, clarity and better leadership!



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Reframe for Clarity, Confidence & Growth

3-step method

1

Recognize the
Trap

2

Recalculate &
Challenge It!

3

Reframe It!



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Reframe for Clarity, Confidence & Growth 3-step method

- **1. Recognize the mind trap**
 - “This is a faulty assumption.”
 - Learn to spot the mind traps and negative thoughts
 - What words and language are you using? Be on the look out for these words; Always, Never, Impossible, Needs to be Perfect, Failure, Ruined




Reframe for Clarity, Confidence & Growth 3-step method

- 2. Recalculate - Challenge the trap!
- Ask the right questions
 - Is this really true?
 - Am I basing this on a past experience?
 - Write down the situation that led to your thoughts with just the facts!
 - What specific event/interaction or pattern triggered these thoughts?
 - Capture what emotions you have; frustration, angry, grief, despair, overwhelmed.



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Reframe for Clarity, Confidence & Growth 3-steps method

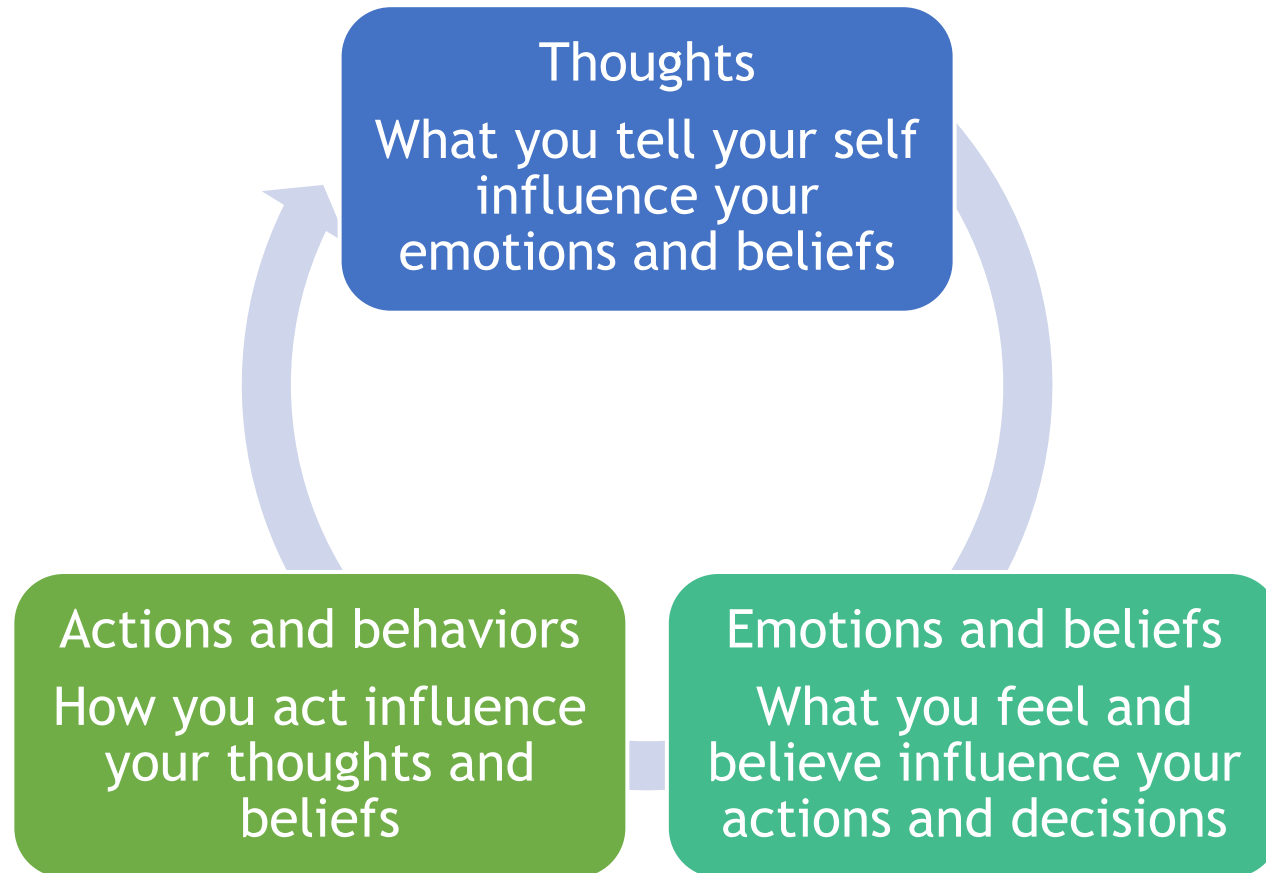
- **3. Reframe It!**
 - What is your desired goal? What outcome needs to change?
 - What's a more balanced thought?
 - What's another way to see this.
 - Use optimistic and positive words/language



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When you change your thoughts, you change how you feel, and you will change your actions!



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Maintain the Garden

Daily tools for mental clarity

- **3-Minute “Thought Check-In” journal:**
 - What happened?
 - What did I think?
 - What’s a more helpful way to see this?
- **Grounding questions before reacting:**
 - What’s another possible explanation?
 - What do I know to be true?
 - What would be helpful or NOT helpful in this situation?
 - What would a wise mentor say?



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Tending to other gardens Leading others out of mind traps

- Normalize reflection and reframing in team meetings.
- Model it out loud: “I was starting to assume incorrectly—glad I questions.”
- Invite others to challenge their own distortions.



Your thoughts are the soil where you garden grows. You must have healthy soil for a healthy garden.

Mind traps are like weeds—they sneak in when you're not looking and can overtake your mental space if not addressed. Just like a gardener pulls weeds regularly, leaders must learn to spot and pull distorted thinking.

Reframing mind trap is like pruning: you're not destroying the plant, just reshaping it so it can grow better.

Maintaining is the watering can for your leadership. It is regular reflection that keeps your mindset fresh and helps you notice what needs attention.

Your culture is the garden bed. If the soil is neglected, toxic thinking spreads. But if it's nurtured—with clarity, honesty, and thoughtful leadership—your team and your outcomes will bloom.”



The best leaders aren't perfect—they're present. They tend to their thoughts, relationships, and teams with care, just like gardeners tending a beloved plot.

- ▶ What's one mind trap you'll reframe this week?



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James L. West is a faith inspired, not-for-profit organization serving persons impacted by dementia. As a trusted expert, we provide personalized, innovative care and support for families, as well as specialized education for caregivers, healthcare professionals and the community at large.

The West Center

Residential Services - Short-term Respite Stays -
Short-term Rehabilitation

Senior Day Program on Harris Parkway

Family & Professional Education

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