



Above the Line Thinking - How It Can Improve Our Relationships

A secret to success is the way we approach our thinking. Many people do not spend time contemplating the way they think. There are two types of thinking we can use to approach all areas and situations in life. These can be called “above the line” and “below the line” thinking.

Below the line thinking is about: making excuses; rationalisations and justifications; blaming others; blaming lack of money, time or other resources; being defensive; feeling the need to be right; and proving a point. Below the line thinking restricts our ability to move forward.

In contrast, above the line thinking is about: taking ownership; having accountability; being open minded; taking on the responsibility; being curious; being transparent; being present to live in the moment; questioning our beliefs; and having a commitment to learning. Above the line thinking propels us forward, towards growth.

Why is it important to adopt above the line thinking?

We need to be aware of how we perceive our reality. Everyone’s reality is different. We need to be aware of our partner’s experience of reality, which may be different to our own. If we have a problem we think we can’t solve, we need to realize that it may be possible to successfully solve this problem if we change our way of thinking, to adopt a type of thinking that is different from the thinking that created the problem. So if we experience problems in our relationship, we may need to adopt a different type of thinking.

In other words, we need to change our thinking from below the line thinking to above the line thinking. Above the line thinking helps us develop skills to get the best outcome from every situation presented to us. There is always a gap between where we are and where we want to be. Above the line thinking helps us close this gap. This way of thinking isn’t limited to one area of our life: it can be applied to any area.

How does it work?

My beliefs will determine my decisions, my decisions will determine my actions, and my actions will determine my outcomes. What makes for the best quality outcomes? We need to start with a level of accountability around our beliefs if we want to produce high-quality decisions. High-quality decisions lead to high-quality actions,



which in turn lead to high-quality outcomes for our life: we will grow and go from strength to strength.

The opposite of this is also true: if our beliefs and thinking are limited and locked-in – in other words, if we adopt below the line thinking – we will have low quality decisions. Low-quality decisions lead to low-quality actions and thus low-quality outcomes.

Why does low-quality thinking occur?

We need to look at history: to the caveman times, the hunter/gatherer times. The reptilian part of the caveman's brain reacted to danger by flooding the nervous system with adrenaline, prompting an immediate physical reaction that would ensure survival. This was a type of below the line thinking that was necessary for survival. It was designed to remove ourselves from harm and identify threats, particularly physical threats.

It may come as a surprise to realise we still have leftover “caveman thinking” today. But in today's world, it is not likely we will be confronted by a sabre-toothed tiger, so we rarely need our reptilian brain to initiate the fight/flight/freeze response. The problem is that our brain cannot distinguish between actual physical threats (like the sabre-toothed tiger), and imagined threats perceived by that part of our subconscious mind we call the ego. An example is the physical response we experience during anxiety. Imagine you are about to give a presentation in front of a thousand people for the first time. You feel nervous, you may be sweating, trembling, your throat constricts and may go dry, you notice how the blood is pumping around your body and you can feel your heartbeat pounding in your chest. Your body is reacting to your reptilian brain's interpretation of the situation as a threatening situation. This is your ego perceiving an imaginary threat.

Why does our ego perceive imagined threats? Our ego sees any type of change as a threat, because the ego perpetually seeks consistency. Fundamentally, the ego does this because it “believes” that if we keep on doing the same things we did yesterday, then we will be safe – the proof is that yesterday, we weren't eaten by a sabre-toothed tiger!

But the truth is that, in most of the decisions we make in today's world, it is simply not helpful for our ego to decide for us based on fear. If we let our ego run the show it can hijack our capacity to think, and to be creative, and our decisions will not be optimal.



Choosing above the line thinking

Consciously choosing above the line thinking when making decisions unlocks both the left and right hemispheres of our brain; our logical and our creative sides respectively. This gives us opportunities to explore situations and take ownership and responsibility. The more we operate our brain and engage in above the line thinking, the more we are able to access both hemispheres of our brain. We experience higher quality outcomes when we choose above the line thinking, and a higher quality life.

In order to be present in the moment, one needs to choose above the line thinking. I've seen this play out in my own life. In the past, if I wasn't sure where to be or how to be, I would come up with excuses rather than learning from the situation. As a result of using above the line thinking, I began to bank the results that I had learned from my experiences: I learned to trust myself and what I was going to do. I was able to deliver value.

The more often you make above the line decisions, the more the pressure will diminish in your brain. You become used to it. Your brain will move from the pressure of uncertainty to the ability to say yes to yourself. The more often you experience above the line thinking, the more playful you become and the less pressure you will have in your life. You can transition from a place of uncertainty to a place of saying yes to decisions.

We owe it to ourselves and our partner to use above the line thinking, in order to have the greatest impact on our lives and relationships. To find out more, contact Kath for your free discovery session.

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