

Let's talk about reframing

By Lorraine Madden

Is the glass half empty or half full? What would you say? This well-known saying requires little explanation. Typically, even when we are looking at the same situation, we can see it or make sense of it in very different ways. These different ways of thinking, about problems, challenges and even people can all be described as examples of reframing.

Reframing is a useful technique that is used in social work (McCashen, 2005) and in coaching (Greene & Grant, 2003). McCashen (2005) defines reframing as follows:

'Reframing helps people think differently about themselves and the problems they are facing. It involves exploring alternative perspectives on the same event, story or experience and enabling genuine choice of a preferred description. Reframing is aimed at creating possible positive descriptions' (p. 63).

Greene and Grant (2003) describe it in the following way:

'Reframing is about changing the meaning we give to events, not necessarily changing the events themselves' (p. 41).

Both definitions highlight the potential of reframing in thinking about a current perspective in a new and different way. Reframing is also an opportunity to rethink the event or story in a more positive light. This is important because how we see a person, situation or challenge impacts on how we respond. With people we can either damage or strengthen the relationship, depending on the viewpoint we take. With situations, our perspective can stop us from taking action or alternatively, inspire us to take the first step towards reaching a goal.

Regardless of whether we are 'coaching' ourselves or someone else, reframing is a useful tool for thinking about and understanding people and situations in a different way or from a previously unconsidered perspective. For example:

- Do we describe parents as 'demanding' or an advocate for their child?
- Do we label children as challenging or having unmet emotional needs?
- Do we see our peers and colleagues as not motivated, or motivated by something different to us?
- Do we describe a relapse in making a change as a failure or an opportunity to celebrate progress to date and make some adjustments to the plan?
- Do we reprimand ourselves for being nervous, or remind ourselves that being nervous might be a very normal response in a given situation?

Below is a list of statements with some possible reframing responses. Reframing responses can be statements, questions or a combination of both. You might also like to consider some different ways to respond.

Statement

“We have tried that already...”

“It has been an absolute failure.”

“We don’t have the time to do any of that.”

“Just ignore it. That child is just doing that to get attention?”

“That parent isn’t interested in being involved. That’s just the way they are!”

Adapted from Greene & Grant (2003)

Reframe

So we have a good idea about what doesn’t work. What can we do differently this time?

An absolute failure? Which bits did work? What can we learn from what happened? What might we do next time?

What can we stop doing in order to make time? Which bits do we have time for?

I wonder what the child is trying to tell us that we just aren’t getting? What do we need to do to better understand them?

I wonder what barriers exist that might disable parents from participating fully?

Why not brainstorm some of the labels, statements or perspectives that are creating barriers to successful relationships, positive changes or goal attainment, and think about what other understandings or viewpoints might be possible. Try to suspend judgments and remain curious about different ways to understand the person, event or challenge. You might also like to brainstorm ideas with colleagues or friends, before deciding on a new way of thinking, and potentially a new course of action.

And finally, back to the question of whether the glass is half empty or half full.... perhaps the glass is always full!

References

Greene, J. & Grant, A. M. (2003). *Solution-Focused Coaching: Managing people in a complex world*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

McCashen, W. (2005). *The Strengths Approach*. Bendigo: St Luke’s Innovative Resources.

Image source

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