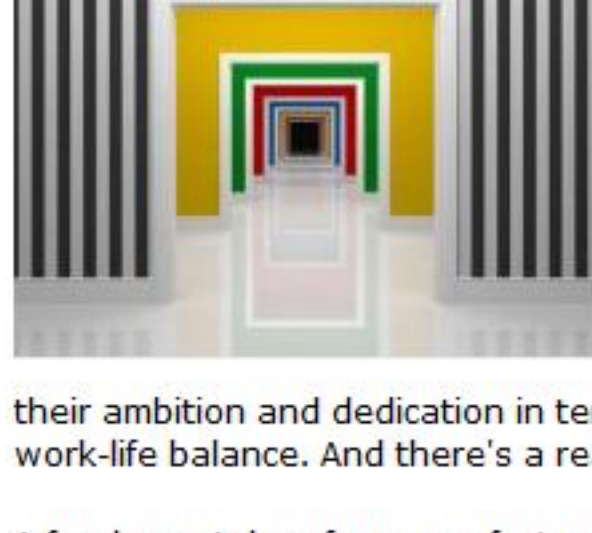


Mind over matter: Change your mindset to improve your success



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An inside-out way of thinking can improve your wellbeing, performance and success as managing partner, says Chantal Burns

Like most law firm leaders, you undoubtedly want to do a good job and to achieve great things. But, at what cost? What if your dogged pursuit of success, fulfilment and happiness is the very thing that stands in your way of achieving those things? The reality is that managing partners often pay a high price for their ambition and dedication in terms of their own wellbeing, relationships and work-life balance. And there's a reason for this.

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A fundamental performance factor is missed by the majority of organisations: leadership mindset. In our study of hundreds of leaders and workers across several organisations, four-fifths agreed that their state of mind is crucial to their performance at work. However, when asked about the main cause of their failure to perform to the best of their ability, they ranked 'state of mind' last in the list of suggested factors, after things like 'other people', 'workloads' and 'time pressures'. And, when asked to rank the main causes of a bad day at work, at the top of their list was 'if something has gone wrong'; at the bottom was 'my state of mind' and 'how I'm thinking about things'.

These findings highlight what we're all up against: the vital link between how we think and feel and, consequently, how we perform, is misunderstood. All of the issues we face in the workplace when it comes to our own wellbeing, success and satisfaction are caused by this fundamental misunderstanding.

Cause-effect illusion

Like most people, you probably recognise that your state of mind fluctuates. For example, in the morning you may feel invincible and have clarity of mind. By the afternoon, you may feel flat or fed up. What accounts for these fluctuations in your mood or clarity? Sometimes, people think it is the weather or their workloads when, in fact, it is their thinking and mindsets that are the biggest causes.

The biggest misperception about performance is the belief that there are multiple causes for why we flourish and falter. In reality, our understanding of how thought works is the primary cause of our emotional peaks and troughs; everything else is a symptom of that.

Most people believe that how they feel can be caused by something other than their own thoughts. It seems as if outside factors - people, situations, past events - can somehow impact our current state of mind. Yet, the simple and profound truth is that nothing outside of your own mind can cause you to think or feel a particular way. That's why a team of people can feel very differently about the same workload or manager. It's also why you can feel sad in one moment and be laughing in the next, even though your circumstances have not changed.

We have the cause-effect formula wrong. We think the cause is 'out there' and the effect is how we think and feel (the outside-in belief). In actual fact, both sides of that equation are internally created and regulated (the inside-out paradigm). There is a fundamental gap between how we think the human experience works and how it really works (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1: THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OUTSIDE-IN AND INSIDE-OUT THINKING

Outside-in illusion	Mixed paradigm illusion	Inside-out paradigm
The belief that something other than thought in the moment can be responsible for your feelings of accomplishment, (dis)satisfaction, fulfilment and contentment. This means that, in your mind, you've separated thought and feeling.	The belief that your feelings could be created from your thoughts and from somewhere other than your thoughts.	The realisation that 100 per cent of your emotional/psychological experience is coming from thought in the moment. Thought and feeling are inseparable; they are two sides of the same coin.

Note: Based on the Blevens-Monroe 3 Paradigm Illusion Model

Outside-in traps

Most people believe that their happiness, satisfaction or feelings of wellbeing are dependent on or caused by external factors, such as other people, situations or particular results at work.

Here are some common outside-in expressions of this belief that people unknowingly subscribe to:

- If [things go well] then [I can relax / feel good]
- If [I don't get the result I want], then [I'm not okay]
- I couldn't be satisfied unless _____
- I need _____ to [feel confident/happy/secure]
- If [result doesn't happen] I can't [feel happy/ be okay/ have peace of mind]

If we think our state of mind can be caused or taken away by something outside of us, this will have important implications for how we work and live. It automatically disempowers us; it creates controlling or defensive behaviours and it generates feelings of judgement, jealousy, anxiety and self doubt.

Here are four of the most pervasive outside-in traps that affect leadership and performance.

1. Toxic goals

It's wonderful to have goals and dreams, whether they are professional or personal. But, if we believe that the achievement of our goals or targets is the source of our self worth, happiness or fulfilment, it will create illusory need and unnecessary urgency.

The outside-in belief that supports this is "I need to achieve this in order to be okay/happy/ content" or "I'm not okay unless I achieve this". This perspective will automatically fill our heads with a lot of unnecessary thoughts, which reduce our clarity and perspective. Having less clarity and perspective means we might not make the best decisions or do our best work.

Deeper feelings of fulfilment, connection and wellbeing don't come from the achievement of goals or results. They can only come from one place - our own moment-to-moment thinking - which means that all the feelings we desire are available in an instant. One new thought can automatically change our state of mind, bringing a renewed perspective.

It's important to understand that life doesn't happen to us, it happens through us. We objectify our thinking - we turn thought into a thing. Anything that we think has the power to make us feel a particular way becomes part of our 'outside' circumstances because, in our minds, we have split thought and feeling. We innocently attach our feelings to something out there, separate to our thoughts.

Seeing the world from the inside-out means we are aligned with the truth of how life works, rather than working against it. This allows you to feel more connected to yourself and others and to do your best work because your head isn't full of the unnecessary clutter and noise that obscures an otherwise clear and free mind.

2. Relationships with others

When it seems as though other people's thoughts and behaviours have the power to impact our own state of mind in some way, then we know we are seeing the world from the outside-in. This will cause us to think and behave in particular ways in order to resolve the illusory issues that our thinking has created, such as self doubt or insecurity. For example, people may seek external approval or validation because they think their self worth is somehow determined by what other people think of them.

When you realise that other people can never determine how you feel about yourself, it will inevitably change how you relate to others. If someone cannot make you feel a particular way or take away your good feelings, then what are you defending or controlling? Behaviours such as blame, defensiveness and judgement are then reduced, as they no longer make sense from an inside-out understanding. Without all the barriers that our own thinking creates, it's easier to create deeper connections with anyone.

3. Decisions and choices

From an outside-in perspective, everything can seem important because we mistakenly believe that our choices have some inherent power over our feelings of self worth, happiness or wellbeing. The noise of all that contaminated thinking reduces our mental clarity, making even the simplest decisions more complex and difficult and making it harder to prioritise what's really important.

When you realise that your decisions have no real power over how you feel, it instantly settles your mind, returning you back to clarity, allowing you to view the situation more objectively and to listen to your common sense. It's hard to think clearly and intelligently when the mind is full of concern and worry.

4. Pursuit of perfection

A perfectionist mindset is bound up in the belief that we're somehow not okay if we make mistakes or fall short of our own expectations. In reality, we are okay whether we make mistakes or not. Only our thinking and the value we assign to failure can impact on our own state of mind. Our results have no impact on how we feel about ourselves or about life. Only we can determine how we feel, via our own minds.

FIGURE 2: IMPLICATIONS OF OUTSIDE-IN AND INSIDE-OUT THINKING

Outside-in illusion	Inside-out paradigm
You attach your wellbeing to results and outcomes (for example, "I'm okay if this goes well" or "I'm not okay if it doesn't go well")	Your wellbeing is unconditional ("I know I'm okay however this goes")
You're driven by a toxic urgency and sense of need	You're motivated by the desire to innovate because of the sheer joy of creation and exploration
You struggle with criticism and failure – it's personal	Criticism and failure are opportunities to learn and grow – it's not personal
You are never satisfied or able to enjoy your achievements in the moment – you are always moving on to the next thing	Each accomplishment, however small, is worth acknowledging and celebrating
Your clarity or wellbeing is compromised in order to achieve a desired outcome (your results come first, your wellbeing comes second)	You operate from a sense of wellbeing and clarity which supports better performance (your wellbeing comes first, your results come second)
You have a survival mentality – thinking that your security or reputation is at stake	Security is an internal experience and reputation is made up
Or/are based on 'should', 'must' and/ 'need to' in order to resolve feelings of insecurity or lack	You recognise that feelings of insecurity are thought-created and that all actions are a choice rather than a 'must'
Relationships are neglected and stifled, levels of connection are reduced and you become self-absorbed and concerned with how you are doing and/or how you appear to others	Relationships are enhanced and connections are deepened
You are often closed to hearing new things – your focus is narrow or blinkered	You engage in open listening – your focus is broader, you see and notice more
A focus on perfection and avoidance of mistakes, which stifles creativity and progress	A focus on improvement, learning and discovery, which opens up the channels of creativity, innovation and change
Your sense of self is hinged on your achievements – you're only as good as your results	Your sense of self has no correlation to your achievements – you know that who you are is not your results

Finding fulfilment

There is plenty of evidence that what we have or what we do is not the source of our joy, confidence and/or peace of mind. If it was, then all wealthy, healthy people would feel confident, happy and peaceful (they don't). Equally, all of the people who have empty bank accounts or little material wealth would be miserable (they aren't).

We spend our lives searching outside of ourselves to satisfy something that is ultimately created on the inside. Contentment is the absence of thinking that we're not enough or that we don't have enough. Behind our thoughts of lack or inadequacy is peace of mind: that's our default setting and we innocently obscure it with outside-in beliefs caused by a fundamental misunderstanding about how life works.

Whilst we may believe that our state of mind is an indication of the state of the situation, it's only ever an indication of whether we are seeing things from the inside-out or the outside-in. All the qualities we desire in ourselves and in others are created within. Happiness, confidence, anxiety and anger are feelings; they are states of mind. That's why they're instant - they are always just one thought away.

The key to feeling inspired and to doing our best work is to understand where our moment-to-moment experience is coming from. We don't have to practice positive thinking or learn Jedi mind tricks. It's far simpler than that: we just need to understand that we are always responding to our own thoughts and feelings in the moment, rather than to the circumstances. This insight is the greatest gift we can give ourselves and others.

As you gain more clarity and certainty about how thought works (and how it doesn't and how you're feeling or performing, because you realise the cause and the solution aren't out there: they're within you.

Chantal Burns is a performance and state of mind consultant working with leaders and teams globally and author of the bestselling Instant Motivation: The surprising truth behind what really drives top performance (www.chantalburns.com).