

## **MINDFULNESS IN POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY COACHING: TWO ACT INTERVENTIONS FOR DEALING WITH INNER CRITICS**

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Many Acceptance Commitment Therapy strategies can be easily woven into positive psychology coaching to enhance mindfulness or awareness.

The basic premise of ACT is that we need to **accept** that we will have negative thoughts and to **commit** ourselves to actions that lead to a vibrant, meaningful life.

*In short, we learn to live with our inner critics but don't believe or obey them, and instead take positive, constructive action in order to flourish.*

Unlike cognitive behavioral approaches, there is no arguing or disputing or substituting involved: just acknowledgement of the thought as a mental event, and then a pivot to constructive action.

Here are two ACT-based strategies that I have found to work very well with coaching clients.

### **(1) Your Mind as a Bus—AKA “The Bullies at the Back of the Bus**

Imagine the mind as a bus full of passengers, representing thoughts, feelings, memories, etc. You can't control which thoughts enter your mind—only how you relate to them.

Here's how I present this intervention to clients who report feeling paralyzed by constant inner critic voices, adapted from the original to include elements of positive psychology. Feel free to further adapt this script

**Coach:** *Imagine your mind is a bus. You are driving it to your destination, in this case your graduation or certification. There are passengers at the back who start criticizing you. Let's call them the Bullies at the Back of the Bus. These bullies wander up front and start harassing you. How will you deal with them--without giving them the wheel?*

**Typical Client:** *I'd kick them off!*

**Coach:** *Sorry, you cannot kick them off—these kinds of thoughts cannot be stopped. Have you noticed how they just pop up all on their own? You can't just wish these away. [If useful, ask them to NOT think of a white bear.] But you can change how you relate to them.*

*What strength could you use?*

**Actual client answers:**

- *Love: I would say Thank you for sharing and just keep driving.*
- *Humor: I will threaten to cover their mouths with duct tape. [Client then carried a roll of duct tape with her in her backpack wherever she went—and become amused rather than upset at the voices.]*

**Coach:** *What inner allies—your strengths personified and your actual supporters—could you put in the front seat?*

**Actual Client Answers:**

- *My partner*
- *My advisor*
- *My mother*
- *My coach*

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**(2) Facilitating Diffusion Intervention: “I’m having the thought (or feeling) that....”**

When clients stuck in cycle of negative thoughts or feelings, they can get unstuck when they realize that a thought is just a mental event—not something they must accept or believe.

**Coach:** *So what is your mind telling you that makes things difficult for you? Can you repeat the thought or thoughts as they naturally occur?*

**Client:** *My writing sucks.*

**Coach:** *So now write that down: “My writing sucks.” [Wait until they finish.] Now I want you to add a little phrase as a prefix: Put “I am having the thought again that....” [Wait until they finish.] Now read it the first way, without the prefix, then read it again, with the prefix.*

**Client:** *My writing sucks. I am having the thought that my writing sucks.*

**Coach:** *[Listen and you’ll almost always here the second assertion lacks the negative energy of the original inner critic attack.] I thought I heard a shift in energy there. Do you sense any difference between those two statements?*

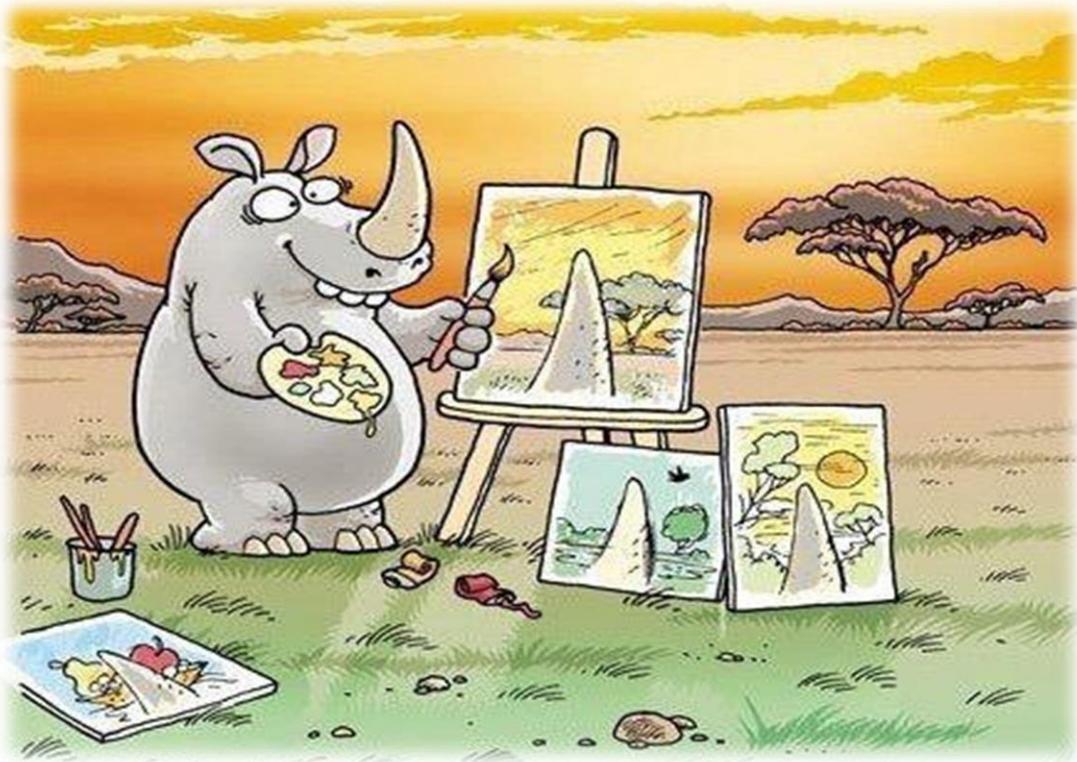
**Client:** *Yeah, when I add that prefix, I feel like I am stepping back and just noticing the thought, not really feeling caught up in it.*

For more, see Russ Harris’s book and website, *ACT Made Simple*.

For clients with really wicked inner critics, I recommend Kristin Neff’s website, [www.self-compassion.org](http://www.self-compassion.org), with a self-test, an explanation of what self-compassion really is and why it matters, and tips for enhancing it.

## “Mindful coaching is better coaching.”

Douglas Riddle, Center for Creative Leadership



Mindfulness belongs in coaching—in both parties. **We can't grow our client's awareness until we grow our own.** We can only do that when we get past the limitations imposed by our histories, our expectations, and our assumptions. Only then can we fully manifest empathy and presence.

And the best way to do that is to cultivate mindfulness is through regular meditation. Not ready to commit to that? Ask yourself, “How good a coach would I like to become?” and see where it takes you.

Interested in coaching or mentor coaching that includes a strong component of ACT, Positive Psychology, and Mindfulness? Contact me at [gayle@essencecoaching.com](mailto:gayle@essencecoaching.com) or [gayle@mcp.com](mailto:gayle@mcp.com).