

Transformation Technique

Bringing balance, clarity and compassion to difficult situations

This is a coaching technique that can be used internally (with oneself) and/or used to facilitate another individual as well as an entire group. It is primarily designed to bring about balance and integration into situations of conflict and suffering.

This 4 step technique can support us to:

- Acknowledge and verbally express the challenges in a particular circumstance/situation. Expressing in this way (verbal/spoken) appears to have a calming effect on the Amygdala. *Sources below.**
- Recognize the desired outcome, vision and positive traits that one could access and bring to that particular circumstance
- Release any thoughts or beliefs that might be blocking our capacity for approaching the situation with greater clarity and compassion

Examples of how the technique could be used:

- In dealing with a difficult person or circumstance
- For working with uncomfortable emotions, especially helpful with worry, nervousness and frustration.
- In preparing for a challenging situation, eg the fears that might arise when going on a job interview, a first date, executing your capstone projects, giving a speech/presentation

Benefits of the technique:

- Allows the expression, acknowledgement and verbal release of difficult thoughts and feelings. By verbally naming and speaking out thoughts and emotions, especially any fears, concerns, frustrations, etc, we are able to release feelings which can often get pushed away.
- Creates a 'bridge'—integrating the inner division/conflict we're feeling with the capacities and traits within us to meet those conflicts.

- Re-trains our brain's natural predisposition towards negative thinking (negativity bias) by enhancing and absorbing the positive side/emotions of the situation/vision.
- As we allow both sides of the situation/equation to exist (the difficulty/suffering and the vision/goals/positive traits), we find more integration and a greater sense of peace.
- Finally, it helps us arrive at a place of both acceptance for *what is* as well as skillful and intentional action towards *what could be*.

Notes:

- This technique has been used in many environments, corporate coaching, as part of group facilitation processes, work brainstorming, as well as in personal situations to support family/loved ones through a difficulty or a group visioning process.
- The practice is usually done sitting across from someone (if used in a coaching/facilitation capacity) in a chair.
- When doing the technique internally or with a friend, the participant could also recline/lie down.
- Raising the lower forearm/hand or lightly tightening the wrist acts as an anchoring device during the practice.

*When we put what we're feeling into words, studies have shown there's a reduction of activity in the amygdala and increased activity in the prefrontal region of the brain. This can produce a calming effect and help us deal more effectively and skillfully with challenging situations and our reactions.

*Sources:

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/06/070622090727.htm>

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17576282/>

The results indicated that affect labeling diminished the response of the amygdala and other limbic regions. Additionally, affect labeling produced increased activity in the right ventrolateral prefrontal cortex (RVLPFC). Finally, RVLPFC and amygdala activity during affect labeling were inversely correlated, a relationship that was mediated by activity in medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC). These results suggest that affect labeling may diminish emotional reactivity along a pathway from RVLPFC to MPFC to the amygdala.

THE TRANSFORMATION TECHNIQUE (4 Step Practice)

Step One: Expressing Fears/Concerns/Upsets

1. With the right arm/hand raised, or a light fist, verbally express all your concerns, worries, fears, and thoughts or feelings about the issue/situation out loud.
2. Speak out loud, even if you are doing it alone. Allow anywhere from 1-10m for this step, depending on the time you have available.
3. If emotions arise, pause the speaking process and revert to the *Compassionate Presence and Inquiry Practice*. The rule of thumb here is to allow feelings to arise, exist, and be experienced as sensations in the body until they subside or become less intense.

Example of supporting a person who is nervous about an upcoming job interview: *“I’m afraid that I’ll freeze during the interview. I’m worried that I’ll be asked questions I don’t know how to answer...what will they think of my background... I’m not entirely qualified for this position. I should have gotten that advanced degree...I’m worried I’m just too old to compete with the younger generation that’s in the running for this job. I hope I don’t look like an incompetent fool. What if I mess up terribly? Oh gosh...I feel my stomach tightening up and my heart beating just talking about this.”*

Notes:

- If feelings arise, know that this is actually beneficial and therapeutic.
- Instead of pushing away any thoughts or emotions, in this step allow that which is arising to be expressed.
- What is of great help is when we can guide ourselves and others to experience the emotions as sensations in our body (Use techniques described in *Compassionate Presence and Inquiry*)
- Once the first step seems complete, move on to step two.

Step Two: Connecting to Vision/Goals/Positive Traits

1. Lower the right forearm and take a few deep breaths, then raise the left forearm/hand as an anchor.
2. Speaking in the present tense, speak out your vision for the situation—what do you want/desire? How would you like it to be? What is your intention? What are the positive qualities/traits you're now able to access in yourself? Speak this out in the present tense, as if it's already happening. This works to train our mind out of its negativity-bias and instead, shift the focus to the positive side of our intention or future situation.
3. Speak these out loud, even if you are doing it alone. Allow anywhere from 1-10m for this step, depending on the time you have available.
4. After you've spoken this, allow yourself to experience what it feels like in the body. Usually speaking in the present tense brings about positive sensations, and a sense of joy, warmth, openness, and even peace or calm internally. Allow yourself to rest in this experience as fully as you can, especially feeling it at the physical level.
5. When you feel complete, lower the left arm/hand, then take a few deep breaths.
6. Proceed to step three.

Here's an example of the same person who is going in for a job interview: *"The HR person stands up as I come in, shakes my hand warmly, we both smile, I feel relaxed and confident. A sense of inner strength comes over me, warming my body and giving me a sense of solidity and calm. As the HR person asks me some questions. I feel assured and present as I answer her. I can feel that what I say is well received. She seems engaged and interested in my background and experience. At the end of the interview, she says that she's very appreciative of what I have to offer. As we shake hands goodbye, I feel calm and fulfilled. The next day she calls me to offer me the position. I feel a sense of peace and joy at receiving this news."*

Notes:

- The vision needs to be realistic and, at the same time stretch yourself or the person you're working into the intentions/goals that you/they want/aspire towards/dream about.
- Share the vision in present tense, as if it's already manifested.
- As you describe the vision, allow yourself to experience how it feels to have received/achieved what you wanted. Feel the excitement, the enthusiasm, the joy, and the sense of being fulfilled in an embodied way (not only mentally but also emotionally and physically).

Step Three: Bridging and Integrating with Compassion

1. Take a few slow and deep breaths into your heart, the place of acceptance and compassion, activating this powerful center.
2. Gently place your right hand, representing the worried aspect of your mind, on the middle of your chest, the heart center.
3. Allow the heart of compassion to hold all of the worries and fears that this situation evokes. Breathe as you practice surrounding those challenging emotions and thoughts with an attitude of kindness and compassion.
4. Stay for a short while to integrate this experience.
5. Now place your left hand on your heart center, next to or on top of your right hand and with that gesture, symbolically welcome the other side, the visioning side of yourself into your heart. Practice meeting those feelings and intentions with kindness as well.
6. Stay for a short while to integrate this experience.
7. Hold both hands on your heart and continue to rest deeply.
8. When it feels complete, continue to step four.

Notes:

- The heart symbolizes the place of compassion and non-judgmental attention that can hold our fears, concerns, and challenging feelings with kindness and care.
- For some, opening our heart to our vision and intention can be equally challenging. If so, take some additional time to feel the vision side held by the heart center.
- Bringing the hands together connects the two hemispheres of our brain and causes a symbolic 'bridge' between these two seemingly divided parts of ourselves. Many people have reported that this step produced a profound sense of relaxation, wholeness and peace.

Step Four: Skillful Action and Acceptance

1. Lower both arms on either side of the body with palms facing upwards and gently take a few deep breaths.
2. Reflect now, from this clearer and calmer perspective, what is the most skillful action you could take to move this situation forward?
 - This could be an *inner* action/response to the situation
 - Or, an *external* action/response to the situation.
3. Once you have an action, speak in your own words something like:
"Here are my fears and concerns, here is my vision, and here is the most skillful action I can and will take. The result of all this, I turn over to life itself. I cannot control the outcome."
4. After speaking this, rest for a few minutes in a posture with your palms up, inviting acceptance.
5. Take a couple of deep breaths to complete this process, and bring yourself back slowly, opening your eyes, and taking a moment to notice what is present in your experience. Journal if appropriate.

Notes:

- This physical position of our open palms symbolizes acceptance, openness and surrender.
- In any situation, we can only do our best. And, there are so many variables that we will never be able to control. Coming to terms with this can produce relaxation and peace.
- Choose a language that reflects your own (or the other's) belief system. If the person is more worldly you might encourage wording like: "*What will be will be*" or "*I put this into the hands of Life*". If you or the person you're working with has a strong spiritual or religious orientation you could use words that are reflective of that, eg. "*I surrender to Spirit/God or Thy will be done.*"

(NOTE: CONTINUE TO NEXT PAGE FOR USING THE TECHNIQUE IN A PARTNER EXERCISE)

TRANSFORMATION TECHNIQUE PARTNER EXERCISE

Together with a partner, you'll each have a chance to practice going through the steps of this process during our ACT retreat. You'll do two rounds-- in one you'll get to be a facilitator and in the other you'll get to be a participant. Both roles are helpful for practice and learning. Decide who wants to go first as facilitator. **For the purpose of practice and learning, please adhere to the times indicated for each step. You have 20 minutes per round. (15 minutes for the practice, 5 minutes for debrief). Facilitators please set a timer to keep track of time.**

STEP 1. EXPRESSING FEARS AND CONCERNS: (3 minutes)

Please sit in an open body position with your eyes open.

Participant: Please begin with eyes closed or gaze downwards.

- Think of an issue that you'd like to explore
- Raise right forearm/hand or make a light fist with right hand.
- Monologue out any fears, concerns, worries, frustrations you have about the situation.

Facilitator: Guide the participant to anchor right hand/fist and then monologue out any concerns, fears, frustrations, challenges or any other feelings they may have about the situation or issue.

- **IMPORTANT:** Your role is mostly to be a silent witnessing presence. For the purpose of this technique, please refrain from conversation.
- Throughout this practice, you're encouraged to practice listening with presence and compassion. And, to occasionally ask, ***Are there any other fears/concerns/worries/emotions to express?***
- If emotions arise, pause the speaking process and revert to the *Compassionate Presence and Inquiry Practice*. The rule of thumb here is to allow feelings to arise, exist, and be experienced as sensations in the body until they subside or become less intense.
- **At the end of 3 minutes,** ask them to lower the right arm/hand, and then take a few deep breaths.

STEP 2. EXPRESSING VISION AND POSITIVE TRAITS: (6 minutes)

Facilitator: Guide the participant to anchor left hand/fist and then monologue out their intention/ how they would like the situation to be.

- Encourage them to speak in the present tense, what they want or desire in this situation, AS IF IT'S ALREADY HAPPENING.
- NOTE: You can paraphrase back what you hear, in present tense. Practice mirroring back their level of excitement, joy, fulfillment, etc.
- Encourage them to continue to speak their vision for the situation, AS IF IT'S HAPPENING NOW...
- ***After a few minutes, Include asking, What are the positive qualities/traits you're now able to access in yourself?***
- Encourage them to speak these out in the present tense, as if these traits are already present. You can paraphrase back what you hear in present tense.
- ***Towards the end of this step, for the last minute or two, encourage them to be present to the experience in their body.***
- Usually speaking in the present tense brings about positive emotions, sensations, and a sense of joy, warmth, openness, and even peace or calm in the body. Encourage them to rest in this experience as fully as they can. Not much talking is needed at this point, just occasional encouragement to return to their experience.
- **At the end of 6 minutes**, ask them to lower the left arm/hand, and then take a few deep breaths.

STEP 3. INTEGRATION (3 minutes)

Facilitator: Here are the steps for guiding the participant through the integration phase of this practice. **NOTE: *Below is suggested language for this step for learning and practice purposes during our retreat. The more you become familiar with this technique, the more you'll discover and use language that is natural to how you would coach/guide yourself/someone.***

Facilitator, practice offering this to your partner as follows:

1. Take a deep breath into your heart, the place of acceptance and compassion, activating this powerful center.
2. Gently place your right hand, representing the worried aspect of your mind, on the middle of your chest, the heart center.
3. Allow the heart of compassion to hold all of the worries and feelings that this situation evokes in you. See if you can practice surrounding those challenging emotions and thoughts with an attitude of kindness and compassion, as if you were embracing a sad or worried part of yourself. *(Pause for a minute or so and allow them to experience this)*
4. Take a deep breath to soak in that experience.
5. Now keeping your right hand on the heart, bring your left hand onto the heart as well. You could place it next to or on top of your right hand. With that gesture, symbolically welcome the other side, the visioning side of yourself into your heart. Practice embracing what you want, your vision and intention with kindness as well. *(Pause for a minute or so and allow them to experience this)*
6. Take a deep breath to soak in that experience.
7. Feel both hands on your heart, and see if you can practice recognizing that the heart can hold opposites, the heart can hold both sides of the equation. Our fears and worries, our vision and goals, BOTH are welcomed into the heart. *(Pause and allow...)*
8. **At the end of 3 minutes,** proceed to step four.

STEP 4. SKILLFUL ACTION AND ACCEPTANCE (3 minutes)

Facilitator: Here are the steps for guiding the participant through this part of the practice. **NOTE:** *Below is suggested language for this step for learning and practice purposes during our retreat. The more you become familiar with this technique, the more you'll discover and use language that is natural to how you might coach/guide yourself or someone else.*

Facilitator, guide the participant as follows:

1. Now lower both arms on either side of the body with palms facing upwards and gently take in a few deep breaths.
2. Reflect now, from this clearer place, what is the most skillful action you could take to move this situation forward?
 - This could be an *inner* action/response to the situation
 - Or, an *external* action/response to the situation.
3. Once you have an action, speak in your own words something like: "Here are my fears and concerns, here is my vision, and here is the most skillful action I can take. The result of all this, I turn over to life itself. I cannot control the outcome. **NOTE:** invite the participant to use words that are reflective of their orientation, eg. "I turn this over to life itself, What will be will be, I surrender the outcome to a higher good, I put this into the hands of Spirit/God or Thy will be done."
4. After speaking this, rest for a few minutes in a posture with your palms up, representing acceptance.
5. **After 3 minutes,** Take a couple of deep breaths to complete this process, and bring yourself back slowly, opening your eyes, and taking a moment to notice what is present in your experience.

After the practice, you'll have a few minutes left to debrief and acknowledge each other. Watch for the message to switch roles for round two of the practice.