

Vicious Versus Virtuous Stress Thinking

Stress is a choice, and it is often perpetuated by negative (vicious) cycles of thinking (Armstrong, 2019).

And yet, it needn't be this way.

Using a cognitive-behavioral approach it is possible to reframe unhelpful beliefs and thinking and adopt a *virtuous* cycle of thinking.

The following table helps you consider unhelpful versus helpful thinking regarding an event (Armstrong, 2019).

Think of an event that has or will happen and complete the following table.

In the left-hand column, capture your negative (vicious cycle) of thinking, and in the right-hand column, a more positive (virtuous) set of thoughts and feelings (modified from Armstrong, 2019):

Example:

	Vicious	Virtuous
Triggering event	Traffic is busy and you will arrive late for a meeting.	
Thought/belief	Life is so unfair. Traffic is always worse when I am in a hurry. (Focus is out of my control)	I could have left earlier to be sure I would arrive on time. (Focus is within my control)
Feeling	Frustrated by the amount of traffic and increasingly anxious about the likelihood of being late.	Disappointed that I will not create a good impression but accept that I cannot change what is happening.
Actions	Apologize, blaming the terrible traffic, and remain upset throughout the meeting.	Apologize, recognize that I could have left earlier, and add value to the meeting.
Outcome/results	Not setting off early and getting annoyed negatively impacting the meeting.	Professionally handled being late, and participating in a successful meeting.
Reinforcing thought	Life is unfair.	I am usually on time. I made a mistake but will set off earlier next time.

Complete the following for your situation or event:

	Vicious	Virtuous
Triggering event		
Thought/belief		
Feeling		
Actions		
Outcome/results		
Reinforcing thought		

A vicious cycle of thinking only adds to our stress and can mean it is impossible to salvage anything from a situation. A virtuous cycle helps us make the best of what is outside and inside our control.

References

- Armstrong, A. (2019). *Resilience club: Daily Success habits of long-term high performers*. London: Rethink Press.

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