

## Are you an “above the line” or “below the line” thinker?

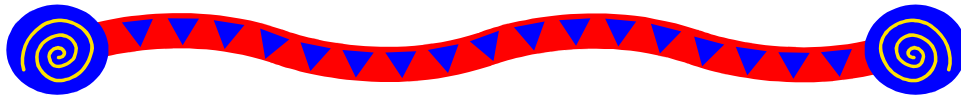
### **ABOVE THE LINE THINKING:**

“I know I can handle this....”

“This looks like the best option available for me”

“What options have I got to handle this situation?”

What is happening? What is the reality of my current situation?”



### **BELOW THE LINE THINKING:**

“If I just wait and hope, something will happen”

“I can’t...I’m too busy / unwell /incapable of handling this....”

“It is all his /her /their fault this is happening to me.....”

Unaware that something has even occurred

When one of life’s events happens to you – how do you react? What do you say to yourself? Do you take a positive approach and a “can do” attitude, or do you feel unable to cope or overwhelmed as your first reaction?

This is a simple tool to assist you analyse your own response to different situations you face. Look at the above diagram and choose a response that seems the most like something you would say to yourself when some event occurs that you do not want.

Let’s look at some of the possible responses, starting with the bottom one:

#### **Unaware that something has even occurred:**

- This is a response that we can observe in others more easily than in ourselves! However, if you find that you have to have certain things pointed out to you all the time, your “sensitivity radar” may be rather low. People who are unaware that something has even occurred do not often take much responsibility for the situation. They are more likely to blame others, once their awareness is raised.....

#### **“It’s all his/ her / their fault this is happening to me.....”**

- This is a very common human response. Stop and listen to a group of people talking at work or in a social situation and you often hear a comment about a situation they are dealing with and they start blaming the government /their boss/ their husband/ wife/ children for the situation.

Blaming someone else means that we don’t have to take any responsibility for the situation – however, in blaming someone else we give them a lot of influence and power over our life.

**I can't...I'm too busy / unwell /incapable of handling this...."**

- This reaction again leaves us in a position of non-responsibility, and reduces our ability to handle the situation we are facing. It is a great excuse for not having to take any action and leaving it to someone else to take care of.

**"If I just wait and hope, something will happen"**

- Again, if we react this way we are aware that something is not right, and we just wish it will go away – or that someone else will deal with it and fix it for us.

**What is happening? What is the reality of my current situation?"**

- This reaction is one of taking notice of what is happening, and starting to gather evidence about the situation. It is being aware and starting to take some responsibility for gathering facts.

**"What options have I got to handle this situation?"**

- This response is a positive, creative and a thinking response, and means that we are aware that we want to change something AND that we have more than one option. Assessing the situation and generating possibilities allows us to have choice – and that frequently feels pretty good – having more than one option.

**"This looks like the best option available for me"**

- Having generated possible options – and this may include seeking advice from other people – friends, family and appropriate professionals, this step means identifying what is best for you having researched the possibilities and making an informed choice.

**I know I can handle this...."**

- This is a positive response as it acknowledges that you have the skills and the knowledge of how to handle the situation you are facing. It also shows a sense of personal responsibility, and a willingness to solve the problem. Telling ourselves that we can handle the situation we are facing is also very encouraging and supportive self talk.

**Know Yourself Fieldwork**

- a) Next time you react to an event – look at this diagram. Acknowledge how you are feeling about the situation, and listen to your thoughts. Where would you place your thinking on the diagram – is it above the line or below the line?**
- b) If it is "below the line", stop and use this chart to assist your thinking.**
  - 1. Read the first option just above the line – "What is happening? What is the reality of my current situation?" Move away from your feelings towards the situation, and start observing and taking notice of what is happening.**
  - 2. Then go to the next line: "What options have I got to handle this situation"? Find out all your options – what practical steps can you take to improve the situation? Who can you talk to? How will you**

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take care of the feelings you have around the situation so they are not “bottled up”?

3. Think of all the possible options and then select the most relevant, positive and supportive options. For bigger events in our life, we may need other people to assist us in clarifying our options as we may not have enough information – so do consult a health professional, legal advisor or other specialist for major life events.
4. Plan what your steps are and then take action. Support yourself by telling yourself that yes, *I can handle this* situation. This does not mean you have to handle the situation on your own. Part of your plan may be to enlist the support of a friend, a life coach, a health professional or other person to assist you – and this is a positive way to manage the situation you are dealing with; however it is done from a position of choice.

I'd love to know what you thought of this article. Please email your comments to [lizholland@xtra.co.nz](mailto:lizholland@xtra.co.nz)

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