

# David

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## Observing the Big Assumption in Action

Some of the instances where I could **observe Big Assumption in action** were pretty familiar to me and didn't necessarily lead me to any new insights.

**Big Assumption:** I assume that I need to always be in control, prepared, aware of everything or else I will be vulnerable. Feeling out of control or vulnerable is always bad.

Describe situation where Big Assumption got in your way	Describe costs to you ("what did it block, prevent or impair?")
<p>Situation #1:</p> <p>For example, I was meeting with a client last week and was very aware of wanting to focus on him and make eye contact. I was aware, though, that toward the end of our meeting, my mind was starting to focus on what was next on my schedule. I was starting to calculate when I would need to wrap up our conversation in order to get to my next meeting on time. Sometimes it is really important that I make sure I am on schedule. I might have very little time between meetings, or maybe my parking meter is running out of time. But I think it is easy for me to get into the habit of being overly conscious of time and my schedule, even when I don't have something urgent to do next.</p>	<p>Situation #1:</p> <p>In this situation, I think that getting distracted by my calculations about the time meant that I probably didn't hear a couple of things the client said. This is where all my column 2 behaviors are relevant. My response may not have appropriately addressed everything the client wants to know about. I wonder if he could possibly tell that my mind had wandered for a few moments? These are also the times when I think I start to rush the person a bit, not letting them finish all they have to say.</p>
<p>Situation #2:</p> <p>From time to time, my wife will comment to me that she notices I seem anxious. Once she said, "Be in the moment. This is an example where you need to be here."</p>	<p>Situation #2:</p> <p>When she says something like this, I really try and stop and notice what I'm feeling and why. I notice how I've stopped being present with her and hearing what she is saying because I'm tuning into my own thoughts, worries, or confusion. I'm trying to think about how I</p>

	should respond.
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Reflection Question	Your Response
What stands out to you? What do you notice most of all?	I am aware that I am often wasting my energy trying to control something I can't or shouldn't.
What does your B.A. do to you? What thoughts, feelings, perspectives, actions, & choices do you experience as a consequence of your B.A.?	It makes me feel tired, stressed, anxious.
Do you see patterns i.e., are there particular types of people, content areas, circumstances (inside yourself or in the environment) that activate your Big Assumption?	When I have a full schedule, lots to do, I get more anxious and worried about missing something. That actually distracts me from being able to focus on the thing I'm doing.
Any "ah ha"?	One "Aha" revelation I had -- a lot of my distraction is about trying to manage time, feeling like I am always on a schedule, trying to get through a list of things to do, check things off. So if I am having a conversation, it can feel like I am losing time, not being efficient with time. I think that leads me to finish other people's sentences, thinking I know where something is going.
Do you notice any additional Big Assumptions you are making? If so, add these to your 4-col map.	
What are your key take-aways? Any implications for your Continuum of Progress? If so, add these.	I don't have control over some things. So if I don't, I can let go of things, compartmentalize and have that lessen the cost of the distraction.

I have been working on trying to be more aware of when these things are happening so that I can consciously choose to ignore some of the things that distract me. I feel really good that I can recognize when it is happening and see why I am doing it. Then I can pretty quickly recognize what is going on and see why I'm doing it. It is starting to make me wonder...

- Is everything that I feel like I have to keep track of mentally as urgent and critical as it feels?
- If something isn't urgent and critical, can I recognize it and let go of it?
- What would help me to let go of some of the things I am feeling like I need to keep track of?

The more I observed, the more ***the costs of my Big Assumptions*** became clear to me. Sometimes I am wasting my energy focusing on things I don't have any control over. So, they may feel important to me, but focusing on them and allowing them to distract me from other things makes no sense.

It is getting very clear to me that I am wasting my energy focusing on things I don't have any control over. I have been allowing them to distract me from other things makes no sense. As this realization was beginning to dawn on me, I also became very interested in a couple of situations where I saw ***naturally occurring counters to my Big Assumption*** too.

## Observing Naturally Occurring Counters to the Big Assumption

**Big Assumption:** I assume that I need to always be in control, prepared, aware of everything or else I will be vulnerable. Feeling out of control or vulnerable is always bad.

Describe situation that casts doubt on your Big Assumption (including your thoughts & feelings)	How does what happened cast doubt on the absolute truth of your Big Assumption?
<p><b>Counter Observation #1:</b> I needed to book a flight for work, but I didn't have enough time in advance of the flight to make sure I got a good seat. By the time I knew I needed to book the flight, all that were left were middle seats. So, I was dreading the flight and kept finding that dread was intruding into my thoughts and general mood. But then as I was driving to the airport, I realized that it was a useless distraction. There was nothing I could do to change things, as far as I knew, and allowing thoughts about the flight and feelings of annoyance to distract me just kept me from being fully present and focused on other things. I decided there was no point in focusing on this issue any longer.</p> <p>Ironically, when I got to the airport to check in, I asked if I could change my seat, and there were much better seats available. I got the one I wanted in the first place.</p>	<p><b>Counter Observation #1:</b> That really showed me how useless it is to get so distracted by something that ended up being a non-issue. I could have easily allowed the whole thing to bother me much more. I could have been in a crappy mood, allowing this issue to intrude on the ways I needed to deal with all the issues I needed to address that day. I am more and more aware that I can make a conscious decision about how I want to handle these situations.</p>
<p><b>Counter Observation #2:</b> I drove into work and parked my car in our lot. A bit later in the morning, I was walking through the parking lot on my way to another building and noticed there was a big tarry scrape on the front bumper. I couldn't figure out where that had happened. Anyone who knows me well knows that this is the kind of thing that drives me CRAZY. I take really good care of my car – I'm like that with all of my stuff actually. Usually, something like this could easily bother me</p>	<p><b>Counter Observation #2:</b> Letting go was a major change from what I usually do, and I realized that there was nothing I could have gained from thinking about it except that I would have stayed angry. When I saw that mark again and realized that I hadn't been thinking about it (and realized that thinking about it would have just caused me more problems because I would have been angry and distracted), I almost laughed out loud. It felt like someone played a joke on me, set me up just</p>

<p>all day.</p> <p>But here's what happened. When I saw it, I was pissed off. It bothered me that there was this ugly mark. It bothered me that I had no idea where it had come from. But I had a really busy morning lined up, and so there wasn't anything I could do about it until later in the day. I said to myself, "This sucks, but I'm going to see if I can forget about it until I can actually do something about it." And I did. I just let go of it, and decided to immerse myself in the work I had to do that morning.</p> <p>And I did. I actually forgot completely about it until I was leaving work that evening. When I saw the mark on my car again, I was pissed off all over again. But I also realized I hadn't been thinking about it at all since I decided to let go of it. Ordinarily, that would stay in my head all day.</p>	<p>to learn this very thing. Like, "See!? See what you've been doing?!"</p>
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Reflection Question	Your Response
What stands out to you? What do you notice most of all?	
What thoughts, feelings, perspectives, actions, and choices did you experience in these instances?	I am feeling more aware of what it feels like to be in the moment, to let go of my anxiety. That feels good.
Do you see any patterns? Is the same doubt about your Big Assumption raised across the different instances? Is there anything in common across the examples that might account for the counter-data? (e.g., particular types of people, content areas, circumstances, inside yourself or in the environment).	I can see that I often try to control things that I either have no control over or that don't really make sense for me to try to address right at that moment. And if I can't address them, I should let go of them until I can. I'm trying to control all the time rather than consciously choosing when that makes sense and when that doesn't.
Did you act differently than your Big Assumption would have you act? If so, what	Observing myself made me more aware of what I am thinking and feeling. And

<p>did you do? What are your hunches about why you acted differently? Was it because of something “out there,” or something you said to yourself, or some combination of the two, or anything else?</p>	<p>because I was more aware, I could see I had a choice in those situations.</p>
<p>What does the counter-data suggest to you about your Big Assumption?</p>	<p>The question I was asking before was, “how can I keep these other thoughts from intruding too much on my focus?” I was assuming these thoughts were all important and useful. Now I am starting to see that they aren’t. Can I let them go if they aren’t? Can I pick them up again if I need to?</p>
<p>What are your key take-aways? Are there any additions or revisions you’d want to make to your Continuum of Progress based on these observations?</p>	<p>I will look to see if I can make choices about whether I have control, whether I should try to control something, and whether I should let something distract me or not.</p>

## Immunity Map

Creating an immunity to change map was a powerful experience for me. For a long time now, I have been working on being a better communicator. It is a big part of my job and I work hard at it. I'm very conscientious, very oriented toward success. I get a lot of feedback at work and from friends that I am a really good communicator. But my wife disagrees. She feels like I am not really present. And I think she is right. Also, I'm exhausted. Not enjoying myself as much. Feeling too much anxiety in interactions. I am committed to getting better at and being relaxed, being truly in the moment, present, listening more completely.

This is really important in the key relationships in my life – with my wife, in particular. But I also experience this at work. Much of what I do is focused on people. I experience it a little bit socially as well.

1. Commitment (Improvement Goal)	2. Doing/Not Doing (Instead of #1)	3. Hidden Competing Commitment	4. Big Assumption(s)
I am committed to getting better at and being relaxed, being truly in the moment, present, listening more completely.	<p>I get distracted and start noticing what is going on around me, or thinking about what is next on my agenda, or thinking about where I'd rather be.</p> <p>I listen to portions of what someone is saying and then anticipate how they'll finish.</p> <p>I might respond in a way that doesn't accurately address what was asked.</p>	<p><b>Worries:</b> that I will feel anxiety, that others will get the wrong impression of me</p> <p>-----</p> <p>I am also committed...</p> <p>To not letting people see what I don't want them to see.</p> <p>To not having my social and professional interactions be not on my terms.</p> <p>To not feeling out of control.</p> <p>To not having things go some way I don't want them to.</p>	<p>I assume...</p> <p>I must focus all energy on tracking the things I'm saying in the conversation so that I don't forget the thing I want to say next...</p> <p>Others are constantly evaluating me, forming impressions (as I am of them...).</p> <p>I must manage the impression others have of me or I will feel out of control, depressed.</p> <p>I must feel and come across to others as successful, charming, put-together, smart, and witty.</p> <p>I assume that silence/white space in conversations is</p>

	<p>I “fast forward” the conversation (in my mind), to move things along. (...impatience)</p> <p>I’m constantly nodding to show I understand and am with you, and hopefully to move things along more quickly (Inpatient).</p> <p>I fidget.</p> <p>I constantly think about how others who are watching the conversation might be perceiving me.</p>	<p>To not having others form impressions of me that I don’t want them to have.</p>	<p>awkward/unexpected and anxiety provoking</p>
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I can see my immune system. I can see that I am putting lots of effort and energy into having things go my way, controlling every aspect of the situation, focusing so much on what I need to achieve. That keeps me out of some anxiety – that I will be unable to shape the ways others see me, that I will feel like things are unpredictable or out of my control. So I’m doing lots of work in the conversation – trying to pay attention to so many things and be very conscious about how I want to respond, what I should say. Ironically, that also causes me some anxiety and is exhausting. It also keeps me from being able to be really present in the conversation, really listening openly to what someone else is saying. It seems like all my hard work ends up actually having the opposite effect on me – it interferes ultimately with my ability to relate to others in a way that is more relaxed, confident, and present.

I think my hard work does mean that I perform pretty well at work and in most social situations. I can be entertaining, witty, intelligent, on my game. But, it doesn’t work for my wife. She wants a different kind of relationship and communication with me. I can see she is right. She was the one who pointed out lots of the column 2 behaviors. At work, and in my social life, I get lots of feedback about how I handle these situations well. I think all my hard work has helped me do well in jobs that require me to think on my feet, to develop



relationships with clients quickly. But I also feel like the hard work has negative effects there too – maybe mostly on how I feel (exhausted), but it could be that I'm not as good at responding to what others are saying as I'd like to be.

I can't quite name how these parts of my life (work, social life, relationship with my wife and kids) are related, but I am following my hunch to focus on all of them. I think she is right that some of my behaviors are probably holding me back in other domains of my life as well. So getting better in key conversations has implications for other areas of my life.

## Feedback

I decided that the best person to ask for feedback on my improvement goal would be my wife. I think I already know what people I work with would say because my performance reviews and 360 feedback have always indicated I'm pretty skilled in this area. Because most of my interactions with clients are short and...

My wife knows me the best. She is the only person who has brought up this issue with me – seeing it not only in my interactions with her but with others as well. For that reason, I think I'm interested in turning to her for a kind of expert opinion and for a reliable sense of baseline data.

And she didn't disappoint! Not only was her survey feedback very useful, she also managed to make it clear to me how meaningful it is to her that I am committed to working on this issue since she knows it affects our relationship more than it does any other aspect of my life. I feel very grateful that she is supporting me so much and helping understand this aspect of myself.

What was most helpful about her feedback was that she was very specific, thorough, and quite clear. She let me know the things I am doing that undermine my goal in my conversations with her. For example, she noted that I don't rephrase or summarize what she has said to indicate that I understand. Sometimes when she asks a question, I don't even respond because I'm focused on something else. Often, we are trying to hold conversations while we are in separate rooms, while I'm also trying to get work done or listen to music.

When we are face to face talking, I don't maintain good eye contact, and I'm often trying to move the conversation along too quickly. My tone will sound impatient or too casual. I might even make a joke that feels to her like I don't regard the matter we're discussing as important. I'll be too quick to jump in with an answer or response as opposed to listening fully to the whole situation.

She noticed that I do some of these same things when I'm talking with other people too – especially that I'm not maintaining good eye contact and interjecting comments or other responses without waiting and listening carefully. She worries that others may be feeling

that I am not really interested in what they are saying and may feel a bit slighted or frustrated.

So, you can see, she was pretty specific and thorough! When I read through her comments, I realized that her comment about eye contact is right on! I don't make good eye contact – or if I start out looking at someone's eyes, I end up shifting away pretty quickly and looking at someone's mouth instead. I don't know why I do that (look at the mouth), except that I think it helps me feel less anxious I guess. The conversation feels less intense, less intimate. It is easier for me to stay focused on my own thoughts – about how I want to respond or about the other things that are on my mind that I don't want to forget.

I realized I should add that behavior to those in Column 2 of my map because it is something I do that really undermines my goal of being present and relaxed! So, I added that and then started thinking about what that means I should add to my map in columns 3 and 4. I realized that if I'm really engaged in the conversation in an intense and intimate way, I can feel very anxious that there are other things I should be aware of, other things I need to get done that I'm not getting done. I worry that I'm forgetting, letting something else fall through the cracks. Sometimes there ARE really important things that I need to stay aware of – like that I have another meeting coming up or something big I have to get done that afternoon. But sometimes I just react that way (feeling anxious and unable to be fully present) almost out of habit... or maybe because I haven't really thought about how important the other stuff is. I just feel this general sense that I'm not prepared, that there is something to be done. As long as there are loose ends somewhere, I tend to worry about them and not focus completely. Only if I know that I have checked off everything on my "to do" list can I relax and be fully present.

I ended up adding two new Big Assumptions to my map:

- **I assume that I need to be prepared and on my game to feel like I am meeting my standard, and to feel comfortable.**
- **I assume I can only relax when all the ends are tied up.**

These feel pretty powerful to me. I think they were important to realize, and I'm pretty interested in learning more about how they work.

1. Commitment (Improvement Goal)	2. Doing/Not Doing (Instead of #1)	3. Hidden Competing Commitment	4. Big Assumption(s)
I am committed to getting better at and being	I get distracted and start noticing what is going on around me, or	Worries: that I will feel anxiety, that others will get the wrong impression of me. <b>I</b>	I assume...  I must focus all energy on tracking the things I'm

<p>relaxed, being truly in the moment, present, listening more completely.</p>	<p>thinking about what is next on my agenda, or thinking about where I'd rather be.</p> <p>I listen to portions of what someone is saying and then anticipate how they'll finish.</p> <p>I might respond in a way that doesn't accurately address what was asked.</p> <p>I "fast forward" the conversation (in my mind), to move things along. (...impatience)</p> <p>I'm constantly nodding to show I understand and am with you, and hopefully to move things along more quickly (Inpatient).</p> <p>I fidget.</p> <p>I constantly think about how others who are watching the conversation</p>	<p><b>would not be aware of, prepared for some of the other things that are happening. Not being on my game.</b></p> <p>-----</p> <p>I am also committed...</p> <p>To people only seeing what I want them to see.</p> <p>To having my social and professional interactions be on my terms.</p> <p>To being in control.</p> <p>To have things go my way</p> <p>To having others form a positive impression of me that is the one I want them to have.</p> <p><b>To always feeling prepared and on my game.</b></p>	<p>saying in the conversation so that I don't forget the thing I want to say next...</p> <p>Others are constantly evaluating me, forming impressions (as I am of them...).</p> <p>I must manage the impression others have of me or I will feel out of control, depressed.</p> <p>I must feel and come across to others as successful, charming, put-together, smart, and witty.</p> <p>I assume that silence/white space in conversations is awkward/unexpected and anxiety provoking</p> <p><b>I assume that I need to be prepared and on my game to feel like I am meeting my standard, and to feel comfortable.</b></p> <p><b>I assume I can only relax when all the ends are tied up.</b></p>
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	<p>might be perceiving me.</p> <p><b>I don't make eye contact with people enough. I look at people's mouths instead.</b></p> <p><b>As long as there is something on the agenda or on my to do list, a portion of whatever else I am doing is always focused on what is next on the agenda and what I need to do for that.</b></p>		
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