

## **Behind the Scenes: Identifying the root source of emotions**

Have you ever watched the “behind the scenes” of a movie? Sometimes that can be as entertaining as the actual movie. What’s interesting is that we also have a “behind the scenes” in the movie that is our life. However, we’re not usually aware of what’s happening because these scenes are driven by unconscious patterns causing root issues hidden beneath the surface.

### **The Driving Force**

It is important to know that every reaction and thought we have has a driving force—an unconscious belief that influences how we think, feel and act. This driving force is also either taking us away from perceived pain or driving us towards perceived pleasure. When experiencing pain, most people would assume that their driving force would be to get away from the pain; certainly they’re not moving toward pleasure. However, sometimes fear of change, uncertainty, and the unknown are actually perceived as MORE painful than the pain of our experience, since we are already familiar with the current pain. And this causes us to continue to endure the pain in order to avoid the change and uncertainty we fear. (See the Pain and Pleasure video for more.)

### **The Root**

Sometimes, a belief we hold as the root cause of our pain can seem inaccessible because we feel like the cause of this belief is out of control. Feeling trapped or unable to change painful situations over time creates an experience of “learned helplessness.” We feel powerless over it, and so we simply allow this root belief to remain below the surface. Rather than dealing with the problem, our mind distracts us by focusing on “safe” problems.

For example, I once worked with a counseling client that had severe anxiety and was hearing voices and seen things. She had self-injuring behaviors and her life was spinning out of control. However, those problems were actually an accumulation of “safe” problems that her mind had created to help her avoid having to face the situation that she was dealing with at home. People around her were trying to treat the anxiety and other issues, but these methods were not addressing the root cause of her emotions and behaviors. The root cause was that she was living with a man who had sexually abused her as a child. He was still putting cameras to spy on her and doing other things to invade her privacy. To top it off, her mom was aware of what was happening but was choosing to side with her stepdad. Therefore, it was easier for her (and her family) to focus on her having an anxiety disorder rather than having to confront the fact that the people that were supposed to be protecting her were actually harming her. Once she realized that this was the root of her anxiety and self-injuring behaviors, she faced the real issue, moved away, and made changes to her environment. The anxiety and voices had been driven by a need to protect herself. Once she dealt with what she needed protection from, the anxiety and voices stopped because they were no longer needed.

Another client found that she was constantly creating drama with her husband, for no apparent reason. She did not know why she did this, but she knew that it was destroying her relationship. However, after looking at her driving force—and asked herself “what belief or drive is causing me to want conflict with my husband?”—she realized that she had associated “love and connection” with “arguing and making up” because that is what she saw with her parents. Once she realized this, she found other, better, ways to connect to her husband, rather than relying on creating a fight just to enjoy the “make up” period. Getting to the root of the issue helped her save her marriage.

These examples may seem extreme, but we all have a “behind the scenes” in our unconscious mind that influence the way we act and think.

## **Quality and Safe Problems**

There are two types of problems in life: quality problems and safe problems. A safe problem is an issue that lingers and affects our life but the solution *is within our control*. A quality problem is a problem that, if changed, would significantly affect our identity, environment, or quality of life. However, we choose to keep the “safe” problem around as a way of avoiding dealing with the quality problem. This is because quality problems have high perceived risk, while safe problems carry low perceived risk, even though they can destroy our life and emotional state. For example, anger is a lot easier to express than sadness because we feel empowered by anger and sadness makes us vulnerable. Plus, anger is often more acceptable, especially for men. Therefore, anger is often seen as “safer” than sadness. In this case, we may continue to find things to be angry about (safe problems) rather than deal with what’s causing the sadness (the quality problem).

We have belief systems that create our identity, thoughts and behaviors and affect every aspect of our lives. If we do not take a look at what’s going on behind the scenes and get to the root, we will keep creating problems so we do not have to deal with it.

### **Deeper questioning:**

So, the question is, how do you change this? It starts by asking yourself “why” repeatedly until you get to the core issue and there is no other WHY to answer. This will help you dig deeper and discover what is causing the emotion you are feeling.

Ask yourself, how do you feel?

Why?

Why does this bother you or affect you?

Why do I feel that way about it?

Why?

**And here are additional questions to ask to discover where the belief came from:**

Are there any benefits from feeling or reacting this way?

What are they?

Where or who did I learn it from?

What benefits did they receive from it?

Are they right? How do you know?

Keep probing and asking yourself until you get to the core of the issue.