

Mind Over Chatter 101 Teleclass 4

Assumptions

Crude but true:

“Well, we know what happens when you assume: it makes an “ass” out of “u” and “me.”

A more palatable way to put it:

“Find the courage to ask questions and to express what you really want. Communicate with others as clearly as you can to avoid misunderstandings, sadness and drama. With just this one agreement, you can completely transform your life.”

~Don Miguel Ruiz, *The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom, A Toltec Wisdom Book*

Where assumptions show up in our lives:

Assumptions about other people at the very least put walls between us, and at the most, they do tremendous harm.

These assumptions come from:

- personal experience
- information you’ve gotten from others
- stereotypes that have emerged from society and that you’ve accepted as true

Important Point: You cannot assume that the words you use mean the same to you as they do to me.

From benign to hot-button words and topics (think: family, stress, balance, success, Christian, progressive, conservative, feminist, love, relationship, divorced), making assumptions about shared meaning can lead to major communication break-downs.

In short, we create stories about others and who they are based on bits and pieces of information that they offer. And assumptions are made when those stories are not challenged. At their worst, these types of assumptions become judgments.

“It ain't easy to break out of a mold, but if you do your work, people will ultimately see what you're capable of. Too often, people find it easier to make assumptions and stick with what they believe. They put you in a place and it makes their job easier. The good people constantly search for something different.”

~ Christopher Meloni, Actor, *Law & Order: SVU*

Assumptions about ourselves puts limits on us. We make assumptions about what we can and can't do, what we know and don't know, what we'll like and won't like. Gone unchallenged, these assumptions morph into limiting beliefs, which really stop us in our tracks (see previous teleclass).

Then, a combination of these two types of assumptions comes when we assume others should know what we want or need, or that we assume what others want or need. We place responsibility on someone else for knowing what we want. “Well, you know me, so you should know what I would want/say/do/think/expect.” We assume that we don’t need to tell someone what we want, need, expect or desire, because it’s their responsibility to know it as our partner or friend. And when that person doesn’t meet our expectations, we respond “I shouldn’t HAVE to tell her.”

Finally, at its worst, making assumptions can come across as arrogance. We make decisions and take action based on bias or fear and without evidence. At least to others, we can appear to believe we have all the answers and that we know best. We don’t ask questions, we just act.

What do assumptions do for us?

As Christopher Meloni said, it’s the EASY way to live. We don’t have to ask questions that could cast doubt on our tightly held beliefs. By staying safe with our assumptions, we don’t have to learn that we might be WRONG!

What is the simple solution for this simple liability?

Challenge the stories – the assumptions – we have about ourselves. **KEY WORD = CURIOSITY.**

An assumption is an opportunity to become curious.

What are some of the assumptions you’ve been making? Use these questions as a guideline to process through any assumptions that have been holding you back.

Name the Assumption

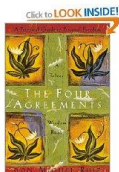
Is it really true?

What will tell me if it’s true?

What choices do I have?

What is the true statement?

Take action and reveal the truth. See what is freed up and opened up because you’re now living within the truth rather than an assumption.



Recommended Reading: Don Miguel Ruiz, *The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom, A Toltec Wisdom Book*

TELECLASS SCRIPT (February 16, 2010)

Welcome to the call! I'm so glad you've joined me today, because I am super excited to share today's topic with you. My name is Beth Buelow, and I'm a Certified Professional Coach, serving clients nationally from my home base in the beautiful Pacific Northwest.

My focus is supporting people as they recognize old stories that no longer reflect who they are and what they want. Through coaching and workshops, I help people write a new story for themselves, one that represents their values, intentions and truth.

Today is Tuesday, February 16, 2010, and this is the fourth in a series of teleclasses called Mind Over Chatter 101: A Crash Course in How to Talk to Yourself.

Today we're going to explore assumptions: what are some ways that assumptions show up and hold us back? You'll walk away from this teleclass with heightened awareness of assumptions in your life and how to disconnect your inner psychic so that you can trust your truth. Someone read that as "inner psycho" which is true too, so as an added bonus, the ways that assumptions can make you and others crazy will be revealed!

When I'm finished sharing some ideas with you, I'll turn off the recording and take you off mute. If you want to stay on the line, you are invited to share your comments, questions and reflections about the information.

So let's get started!

My first job was as a business manager for a small dance company in Milwaukee. I was young and energetic, and as the only full-time employee, I had a lot of responsibility. Most days I held my own, until one particular day, when I made an assumption about the logistics for a meeting, that we "probably" would have everything we needed. That false assumption resulted in a mad scramble and a rough start to the gathering. When I told someone what had happened, he said, "Well, we know what happens when you assume: it makes an "ass" out of "u" and "me." It was a crude but effective way to make the point that making an assumption is not the way to go.

The Language Liability of making assumptions is a simple concept, yet it shows up in various disguises that sneak into our daily lives unnoticed. I called this teleclass "1800MEPSYCHIC" because when we assume, it's like we're predicting the future. We look into our crystal ball and we believe we already know what's going to happen – what the person is going to think, say or do; how easy or hard something's going to be; or what will happen to us.

Even as I prepared for this teleclass, I was holding an assumption! I did have this complicated way of breaking out different types of assumptions, assuming that I needed to bring some fresh angle or idea to the table. I had this assumption: "everyone knows what assumptions sound like and that they don't serve us. I have to say something new!" It's true, I want to present fresh ideas, and what's also true is that some

of the most simple, basic ideas can be the most profound. So I'm going to share my thoughts and trust that we can never hear these things too many times!

Throughout this class, I'm going to be combining my own observations with those of Don Miguel Ruiz (rooeez) in his book "The Four Agreements" – this topic is so important, he designates one of those agreements as "Don't make assumptions."

Here's what I know:

Assumptions about other people at the very least put walls between us, and at the most, they do tremendous harm. Listen to me share some things about myself, and notice what assumptions might be coming to mind.

I am a woman.

I am a life coach.

I don't have children.

I am a Christian.

I grew up in Kentucky.

I am an introvert.

I don't talk to my parents very often.

I have two masters degrees.

Listening to any one of these, you might jump to conclusions – or make assumptions – about who I am and what I believe. These assumptions would be based on your personal experience, information you've gotten from others, and stereotypes that have emerged from society and that you've accepted as true.

And chances are, some of those assumptions may be true, and most won't be. Because my definitions or experience with those truths is different from yours. Perhaps your experience tells you that someone without children is selfish or is going to regret it later in life. Perhaps saying I'm a Christian conjures up a specific image of someone who goes to church regularly or looks to the Bible as an authority.

You cannot assume that the words you use mean the same to you as they do to me. Coaching has taught me about not assuming (or accepting without questioning) that the client's definition of a word is the same as mine. For instance "family," "stress," "balance," "success." I could be doing my clients a huge disservice if I move forward accepting that those words have a shared meaning between us.

And as you may have experienced from the list of things that are true about me, assuming shared meaning can have even bigger implications when we get into hot-button topics and labels, such as someone using the words “Christian,” “Conservative” “Progressive” “Feminist” “Love” “Relationship” – If I assume, because of a label that someone has slapped on a person or situation, that those words mean the same to me as to the person to whom it’s being applied, I would miss out on some great conversation and learning.

In short, we create stories about others and who they are based on bits and pieces of information that they offer. And assumptions are made when those stories are not challenged. At their worst, these types of assumptions become judgments. And they contribute heavily to an “us vs them” culture. Ruiz pages 68-69

I’ve a huge L&O fan, so when I found this quote, I had to share because it fits so well with what I just spoke about. It’s from Christopher Meloni from L&O:SVU:

It ain't easy to break out of a mold, but if you do your work, people will ultimately see what you're capable of. Too often, people find it easier to make assumptions and stick with what they believe. They put you in a place and it makes their job easier. The good people constantly search for something different.

Assumptions about ourselves puts limits on us. We make assumptions about what we can and can’t do, what we know and don’t know, what we’ll like and won’t like.

Here are some assumptions I’ve made in my first year of business:

- I can handle everything on my own.
- I can’t afford to hire someone to help me.
- I don’t have anything new to offer; everything’s already been said or written.
- I’m not important enough for that person to talk to me.
- I won’t make any money my first year.

Wow, there are some major stories around those assumptions! I’m making assumptions about my own skills, credibility, financial potential... dangerous! Gone unchallenged, these assumptions morph into limiting beliefs, which really stop us in our tracks (see previous teleclass)

Then, a combination of these two types of assumptions comes when we assume others should know what we want or need, or that we assume what others want or need. We place responsibility on someone else for knowing what we want. This is especially true in close relationships. We think, “well, you know me, so you should know what I would want/say/do/think/expect.” We assume that we don’t need to tell someone what we want, need, expect or desire, because it’s their responsibility to know it as our partner or friend. And when that person doesn’t meet our expectations, we can even get to the point when we’re saying “I shouldn’t HAVE to tell her.”

Here's what Ruiz offers us in The Four Agreements: (read from pages 66 and 67)

We also make assumptions about our situations, where we're either accepting or rejecting something based on scant evidence. For instance, we think, this is what happened before, so this is what will happen again. We want to accept something as true without digging, because if we actually had hard evidence, it might not support staying where we are – it becomes an excuse for not changing, moving or going deeper. "That's just the way things are." "I always get sick on boats." "She never let me help her before, so she won't now."

In addition, we use assumptions to project our fears onto a person or situation. He won't like it. They will probably think it's a silly idea. She probably hates me. It's going to be difficult. They won't listen to me. You can tack on "I'm afraid" to any of these statements and that is really what's true! It's another way of making excuses not to change or take a risk.

Finally, at its worst, making assumptions can come across as arrogance. We make decisions and take action based on bias or fear and without evidence. At least to others, we can appear to believe we have all the answers and that we know best. We don't ask questions, we just act.

To others who are around someone who is assuming responsibility, it can seem like that person is confident, decisive and acting on his or her gut. And those things may be true on occasion. However, making assumptions *to appear* like one is being confident, decisive and intuitive can lead to major miscalculations, misunderstandings and missed opportunities.

What do assumptions do for us?? As Christopher Meloni said, it's the EASY way to live. We can put labels on people and situations. For instance, because things can be more black and white – we don't have to ask questions that could cast doubt on our tightly held beliefs. They keep us safe in our beliefs about who we are, who others are, what we're capable of and what's true. By staying safe with our assumptions, we don't have to learn that we might be WRONG!

The simple solution for this simply liability? Challenge the stories – the assumptions – we have about ourselves. How important is this? Page 64 "All of the sadness and drama..."

All assumptions are based on guessing and not knowing. They are like building your house on the sands of assumption rather than the rock of the truth. Again, to look to Ruiz page 64: we create a lot of emotional poison...

So the key word that serves as an antidote to assumptions is CURIOSITY.

This is so well said in "The Four Agreements," I want to read directly from the book, page 72

Assumptions can be proven or disproven through honest self-reflection and asking questions, which is really evidence gathering. Once you have obtained evidence, you can make an informed choice based on reality.

An assumption is an opportunity to become curious.

Let's take a simple example – “I probably can't afford it” – I had this assumption when preparing for a retreat I was hosting; I took on responsibility for something that might have been contracted out, because I assumed I couldn't afford it. The result was extra stress and loss of focus, and one of my only regrets about the experience: I should have challenged the assumption. If I had, here's what it might have sounded like:

Is that really true?

The truth is, I don't know (often a sure-fire sign an assumption is on the loose!). It depends on a few things that I don't have enough information about yet. I go back to my L&O reference and a phrase they use all the time “facts not in evidence” – the truth is out there, and it's not been gathered as official evidence yet.

What will tell me if it's true?

I need to know how much it costs, how much money I have, how important it is to me, and if it's the best way to spend my money.

What choices do I have?

I can get the exact cost, balance my checkbook, check my bank statement, do a cash flow projection and comparison shop. Based on that information, I can decide if it's my only option; if I can make payments; if I need it right now; if I should save up for it; if there's a better deal somewhere else; if it's really important to me; if I want it.

What is the true statement instead of “I probably can't afford it”?

I need more information before I can decide if I want to spend money on it.
Based on my resources and interests, I have a choice about what I can afford.
That would be nice to have/experience; I am going to get more information.

Those new true statements empower you, remind you that you have a choice and put you in the driver's seat. Rather than making the assumption that you don't have enough money for the fabulous trip or beautiful shoes, choose to use language that reflects your ability to gather information and make an intentional decision.

What are some of the assumptions you've been making? Use these questions as a guideline to process through any reverse thoughts that have been holding you back.

Name the Assumption

Is it really true?

What will tell me if it's true?

What choices do I have?

What is the true statement?

I leave you with a challenge - came up in book discussion – think of one assumption you have about yourself, something that’s part of your story about yourself. It could be something you can or can’t do, know or don’t know, like or don’t like. For me, it’s mushrooms or improv.

Allow yourself to ask: what would happen if I challenged that assumption?

Then, set an intention that you are open to finding out the truth, whatever it is (because it just might contradict your assumption and that would mean you were wrong!). Run the idea through the questions (repeat).

Take action and reveal the truth. See what is freed up and opened up because you’re now living within the truth rather than an assumption.

I’ll close with these words from Ruiz, which sum up the message of this class:

Don’t Make Assumptions: “Find the courage to ask questions and to express what you really want. Communicate with others as clearly as you can to avoid misunderstandings, sadness and drama. With just this one agreement, you can completely transform your life.”

Thank you so much for joining me today for this third teleclass in the Mind Over Chatter 101 series. The next call will take place on March 16: How to Get What You Don’t Want (negative framing)

In addition to these teleclasses, there are free and low-cost resources and opportunities available through my website, www.bethbuelow.com. You can also get information about personal coaching and a really exciting offering I have called Living Your Vision. Feel free to contact me anytime – I’m happy to answer questions, provide information and share resources.

This concludes our teleclass for today. I invite you to join me for the next call on March 16, and until then, enjoy stepping into this new awareness, putting these ideas into practice and claiming your magnificence!

--- I invite you to stay on the line if you want to chat for a few minutes...