

LS101: Developing the Healthy Leader

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### Toxic Thinking Patterns

Dr. Caroline Leaf, in her book “Who Switched Off My Brain” said “our behavior follows our thoughts and not the other way around.” [ CITATION DrC09 \l 1033 ]. A person who is living a life that is causing harm to their overall well being is stuck in a pattern of thinking that is toxic in nature. Symptoms of toxic thoughts are pride, anger, rebellion, self pity, complaining and ungratefulness. Habitual thinking patterns that cause intense feelings of fear, anger, shame or guilt are not only toxic, but also addictive in nature. They can cause intense fear based feelings that cause worry or impending danger and have other affects on the body that drain our energy.

In recent years, neuroscience studies have increased our understanding of the processes that lead to the formation of healthy and unhealthy habits, to include addictions. It is a destructive pattern of thinking that stimulate the reward centers on the brain, and that method of thinking gets stored away in the brain. These thoughts are often triggered by a perceived threat that heightens stress levels that throws us into protective mode. Fear becomes the driving force behind these patterns.

These patterns can be repeated over and over again whenever we experience any event that causes a fear based flight or fight condition. Our bodies now respond in the same manner as a person who is addicted to drugs as a means to calm down. If these patterns persist it will lead to everything from low self-esteem to unhealthy relationships. Measures must be taken to effectively eradicate these patterns to stop thinking in toxic ways. It is a matter of how willing you are, how much you want to break their hold, and ... what you believe is possible for you.