

choice

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THE POWER OF CHOICE

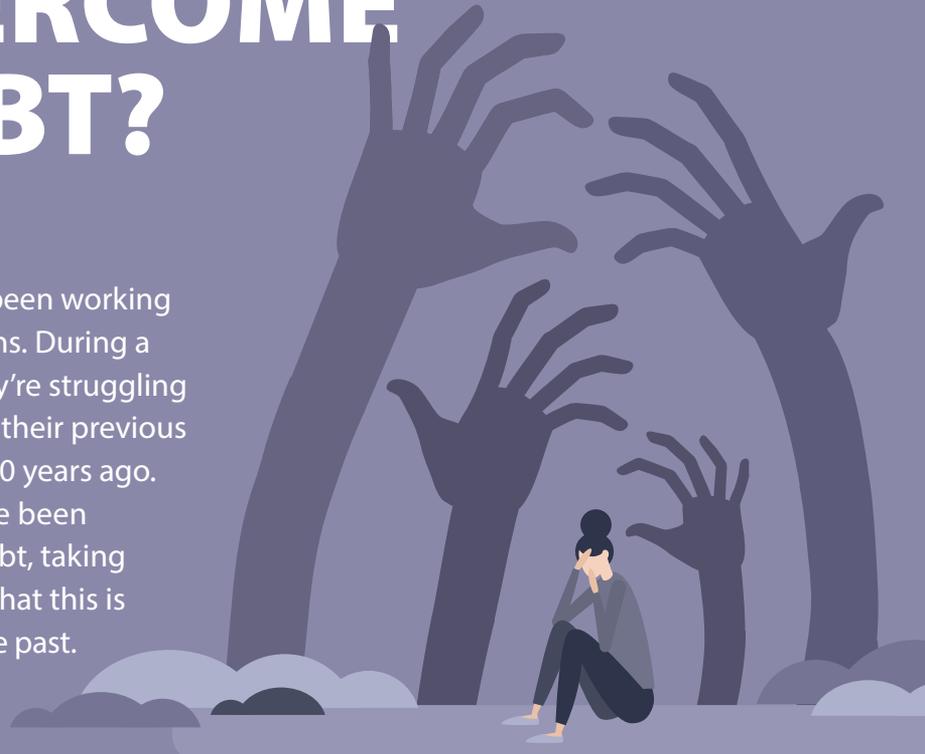
Designing empowering conversations



HOW CAN I HELP MY CLIENT OVERCOME SELF-DOUBT?

The Situation:

"I'm a seasoned executive coach who has been working with a high-performing client for six months. During a recent session, the client revealed that they're struggling with making choices because they believe their previous decisions led to a failed business venture 10 years ago. Though outwardly successful now, they've been operating from a place of fear and self-doubt, taking the 'safe' route in decisions. They're aware that this is holding them back but feel paralyzed by the past. How can I help this client move forward?"



By Suzi Pomerantz, MT, MCC

We must meet our clients where they are. Since this client is embedded in the past, shifting their attention out of the past is not the first step. There is work to do with them in their past-based view before opening the door for them to choose a present view or a future view.

"Success leaves clues," according to Jim Rohn. Staying in their past perspective, what examples can they share about prior wins or previous good decisions they've made? What risks have they taken that led to positive outcomes or happy surprises? What are the choices and decisions they've made in the past that contributed to their current outward success?

Let's also examine what 'safe' means to them. How do they define it? How would they know they were safe? How do they assess and determine any of their choices to be safe versus not? Would somatic safety exercises like breathing, meditation and self-soothing (either bilateral or with a hand on their heart) be helpful to this individual? What are the fears and self-doubts, specifically, that show up for them when considering something with a bit of risk?

Taking a page from Byron Katie, write down and look at each of the fears and self-doubts through a lens of "is it true?" and explore how they know. Next, unpack what would be possible

if those fears and self-doubts were not true? What would they choose then?

Do any of the fears and self-doubts have a useful, helpful message for them? What are these internal parts telling them that is important and relevant? What are they protecting themselves from with these thoughts?

Since they are aware of an experience of their paralyzing thoughts to be "holding them back," what might being freed of those shackles look like? How would they know?

After all that analysis, ask them what they'd like to keep and what they'd like to let go. What do they want to consciously choose to believe to be true that will serve them better? The goal is not to remove their negative self-talk, but rather to allow them to choose thoughts and beliefs that align with who they want to be.

It boils down to freedom of choice. Like an old FM radio dial, if your radio is always set to country music, that limits expression. We have the ability to turn the knob of our internal radio to other channels and perhaps choose oldies, rock or classical music instead.

If your thoughts are always "tuned" to the fear and doubt station, you're stuck in that limited channel. We always have the power to choose a more congruent thought-station.

By Craig Carr, PCC, CPCC

I've realized that when a client feels stuck because of their history, it's not the past event itself that holds them prisoner, but their relationship to it.

The important breakthrough to celebrate before starting is that your client realizes that attachment to the past and the choices they previously made need to be addressed. Together, you can rewrite the future with intentional, meaningful and empowering choices.

As an experienced coach, I'm confident that you've already had a thorough "designing our relationship" conversation. If not, now would be a good time to do so. When you revisit your alliance from a "we're re-designing" perspective—and re-establish a foundation of trust and permission—you create a space to explore the protective beliefs and inner dialogue they may have adopted since the business failure.

Patterns like "I won't take risks" or "I must not fail again" indicate caution, but silently limit options and ultimately weaken their ability to make choices. The goal, set by you and your client, is to help them re-engage in the decision-making process from a place of resourcefulness rather than reaction.

This begins by restoring their ability to choose again. Many models are available for coaches to work with. My favorite is based on the principles of Systemic Intelligence, which reminds us that patterns are often inherited or unconsciously adapted.

You can explore: "Whose story are you carrying?" or "Whose voice says you failed?"

These questions help uncover loyalties or survival strategies rooted in family or organizational systems. It's common for people to overcorrect after failure by ignoring their intuition and only choosing what seems rational or safe. Of course, safety isn't the same as wisdom, and most high achievers I've known prefer a legacy that values their wisdom, not their caution.

To break through, you need to challenge their current strategy. You might start with, "You've created tremendous success by playing it safe. What do you suspect you've left behind in the process?" or "What choice would your fully empowered Self make here?"

Empowered choice is like a muscle. If you feel like confidence needs rebuilding, look back with them at past choices that turned out well. Reinforce their inner compass by focusing on the values and strengths that contributed to their success. Then follow up with: "Which of those values still guide you today?" and "What wants to re-emerge now?"

If fear still dominates after this redesign and rebuild, consider creating a failure scenario together. Sometimes, knowing we can get through the worst helps us aim for the best. Ask, "If this next move doesn't work out, how will you recover?" and "Who and what will support you?"

By Victoria Trabosh, CDC, CEC

Let's talk about the ghosts in the boardroom. Not spooky ones, but the ghosts of decisions past. You know the ones. They whisper reminders of that one time, 10 years ago, when a business venture went south. Now, even though they're a high-performing executive, they find themselves playing it safe, paralyzed by the fear of history repeating itself.

I once coached a brilliant leader who was haunted by this very ghost. On the surface, they were the picture of success. But in our sessions, they admitted to being stuck, which took incredible vulnerability. Every major decision was filtered through the lens of a 20-year-old failure, leaving them choosing the "safe" but uninspiring path. This fear was their silent co-pilot, and it was steering them away from incredible opportunities.

It reminds me of my own spectacular failure in a speaking engagement. A colleague asked me to step in and present his material, which I did not know well. The dull, glazed and unresponsive gazes made me think I'd never do another speech again. The memory of that speech kept me from even trying to prepare another speech for a long time. It was silly, but the fear of a repeat disaster felt very real.

So, how do we exorcise these ghosts? As a coach, the first step is to reframe the narrative. That failed venture of the executive, and mine, wasn't a life sentence; it was a masterclass. We must unpack the lessons learned. What did that experience teach about resilience, market timing, team dynamics, or preparation?

We transform the story from "I failed" to "I learned." Bring your own humility and great questions to the table to help your client banish those ghosts.

Next, we take small, calculated risks. We don't jump straight to betting the farm. Instead, we identify low-stakes decisions where you can practice trusting your judgment again.

Think of it as business-decision physiotherapy. Each small win rebuilds the muscle of confidence that has atrophied over time. We might create a "decision journal" to track outcomes, proving that your instincts are sharp and the past is not a predictor of the future.

By helping your client separate the past event from their current identity, they can start leading from a place of strength and wisdom, not fear. Author Roy T. Bennett says it best: "The past is a place of reference, not a place of residence." •

Are you grappling with a sticky situation?

You don't have to go it alone. Let our senior coaches give you some different perspectives to consider. Email your situation to submissions@choice-online.com and put "sticky situations" in the subject line.