



Resilience In Action

ATC: Understanding How Our Thoughts Drive Our Reactions To Events

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Have you ever reacted to a situation in a way that you did not understand, or perhaps your behavior just wasn't helpful or productive in that moment?

What is ATC?

ATC or Activating Events, Thoughts, and Consequences is the key to understanding our reactions in different situations. Identifying thoughts we have in the heat of the moment about an activating event, and the consequences of those thoughts, can help us ultimately gain control over our emotions and reactions.

As we go through our daily lives, we encounter hundreds of different activating events. These are out of our control and can be big or small, and positive or negative. We may think the event itself determines our reaction to those events, but the fact is our initial interpretation or heat of the moment thoughts is what drives our response. This is why two people can react so differently to the same event.

The thoughts that we have toward an activating event drives our consequences (emotions and reactions). Sometimes heat of the moment thoughts develop patterns in how we think and react to certain activating events. These patterns influence our future thoughts, making it seem like we are looking at the world through a specific thinking lens. This can have an impact on future decisions, relationships with others, or even our work.

What can I do about it?

You can bring awareness to your thoughts, emotions, and reactions by slowing down, separating the A-T-C, and following the steps below to create more of an understanding of how you are interpreting the activating events in your life.

1. **Ask reflective questions:** Asking reflective questions helps us take inventory of our heat of the moment thoughts such as: Is that thought something I can be proud of? Do I often have the same pattern of thoughts surrounding certain situations? What might be causing me to interpret this event through this lens?
2. **Walk through ATC backwards:** Walking through ATC backwards helps us to slow down the event and take inventory of our emotions, reactions and physiology by asking the following questions: Were my emotions and reactions helpful or harmful? What am I feeling right now emotionally/physically? What is the intensity from 0-10? Does this

match a pattern in response to certain situations? What are potential thoughts that influenced the emotions and reactions I am currently feeling?

3. **Plan ahead:** If we know there is an upcoming situation that could lead to unwanted and unproductive consequences, using reflective questions to pre-plan some thoughts to handle the situation could be helpful.

ATC is a fundamental skill. It can influence more productive emotions and reactions during the situations we experience in our lives. Knowing that our thoughts drive our consequences and that we have control over those thoughts, is the key to empowering our lives.

Additional Resources

[ARD Activating Events, Thoughts, Consequences– Video](#)

[ARD Activating Events, Thoughts, Consequences– Infographic](#)

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