

## FLIP - FOCUS AND LANGUAGE

In this cheat sheet, we learn how to *FLIP* our 'Focus' and 'Language' to achieve more positive outcomes, when faced with challenges.

We all have patterns of thinking, and sometimes these may be less than accurate. They may impact on our emotional state, the way in which we react and the way that we explain situations that have happened.

As leaders, when we think about Focus and Language, our aim is to really understand what is driving our own and other people's thinking and behaviours.



## FOCUS

Learning to recognise 'wonky thinking' in ourselves and others increases our ability to ignore the negative thought or actively change it. For example, if someone believes that they can't do a task, they might focus on feeling overwhelmed by it. By recognising this, and changing the focus to how they will succeed with the task, they are more likely to be successful.

Other common wonky thinking includes:

### All or Nothing Thinking:

Putting experiences in one of two categories – 'The project will either be perfect or a failure.'

### Jumping to Conclusions:

Deciding how to respond to a situation without having all of the information – 'That person interrupted me in the meeting because she's just ignorant!'

### Mind Reading:

Believing that you know how someone is feeling, or what they are thinking, without any evidence – 'I know that customer doesn't like me.'

## LANGUAGE

Listening to the language that a person uses, when explaining a situation, will help you to understand how they are seeing it, and the wonky thoughts they might be having. Always listen out for the pessimistic 3 Ps:

1. Pervasive and Universal - One problem generalises to all areas of life.
2. Personal/Internal – Tends to blame self, think it's 'all about me'.
3. Permanent – Feels like the situation will last forever.

Person: "That was a complete disaster. I never do anything right."

In this sentence, for example, the I is personal, the never is permanent and the anything is pervasive.

As leaders, we can help them to limit the impact of the negative experience by saying something like:

"So, that customer was a bit tough today, huh?"

By saying this, we are not negating the experience. Instead, we are helping the person move forward in their thinking, as the language is:

- More optimistic
- More specific
- Impersonal/External
- Temporary

## Give it a go...

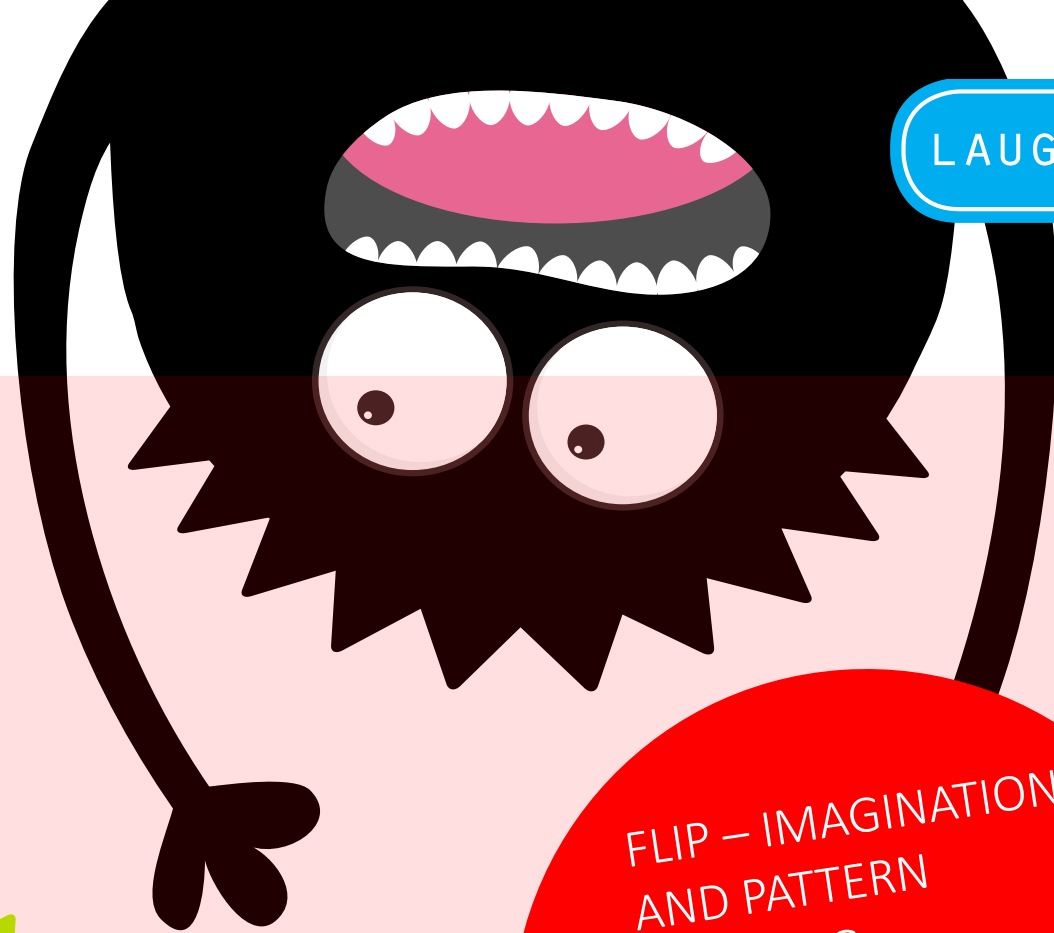
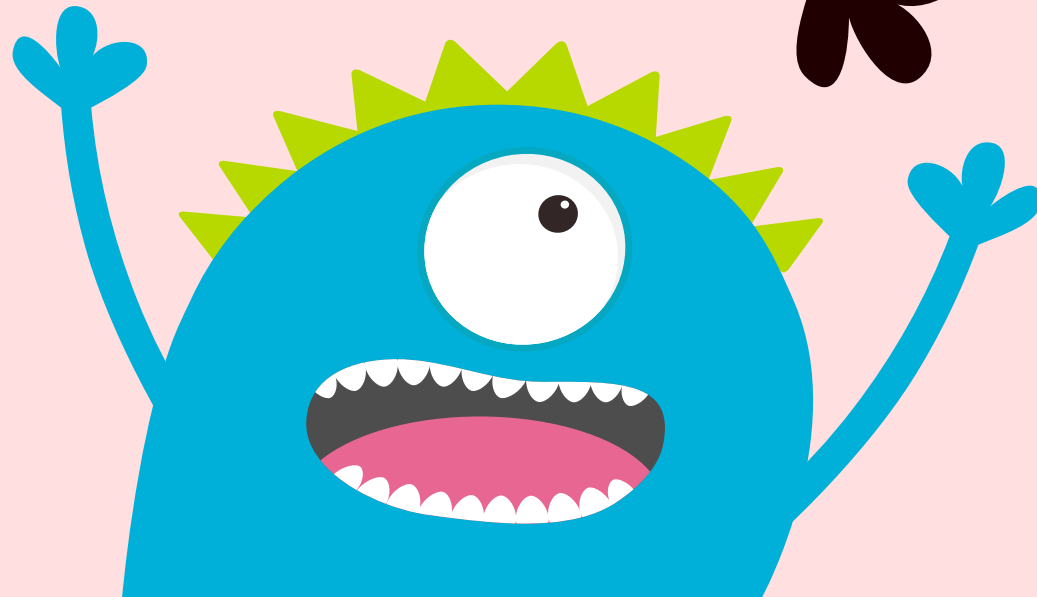
Ask people to check their natural first response and what they focus on when situations happen. If they are being feelings-led, encourage them to FLIP their thinking by asking questions like:

"What assumptions are you making about yourself or the situation that are causing you to think like this?"

"How might someone else (or add a specific name) see the situation?"

When someone is explaining a situation, note down what they say. This will help you, and them, understand language which is focused on helplessness or extreme thinking.

Help others to reframe pessimistic and fixed statements and thinking, e.g. If someone says that they are being *forced* to give up a role, ask what opportunities there are to do something different.



FLIP – IMAGINATION  
AND PATTERN  
BREAKING

In this cheat sheet, we look at how we can use 'Imagination' and 'Pattern Breaking' to challenge wonky thoughts and ensure great outcomes.

## IMAGINATION

It can be helpful to ask people to anticipate future challenges, and how situations might play out. If they are encouraged to imagine a more positive outcome, they will be better able to face situations when they next arise. Similarly, if people think about how they would deal with any challenges differently, it helps the brain rehearse for *if* and *when* they happen again.

We can do this by asking questions and exploring the person's desired intention. For example, if someone has had a tricky conversation with a customer or colleague, we could ask them what it would have looked like if it had been a positive, successful interaction. What would they have said? How would they be behaving? How might the other person have reacted? How would it feel at the end?

You could also ask your team to imagine that they have become the most successful department. What has happened for them to do this? What will they be doing differently?

## PATTERN BREAKING

Children have amazing imaginations but, for some reason, as we get older we tend to think that we are not so imaginative any more. In actual fact, we can be just as imaginative as we were when we were young (if not more so), if we are encouraged.

Your role, as a leader, is to give that encouragement to people, by asking the right questions and giving them the time and space to come up with solutions. This, in turn, will enable people to think about helpful patterns of behaviour that they have, and any unhelpful patterns of behaviour that may have crept into their everyday practice.

As humans, we all have patterns of behaviour. Many of these work in our favour, such as avoiding situations which we know are dangerous. However, some can work against us, such as avoiding new or challenging situations because we think that we might fail.

By thinking about our habits, behaviours and language patterns, we can recognise which ones are sustaining or blocking a situation from moving forward. We can then decide what we are going to change or evolve, by thinking imaginatively and creatively.

We can also start to identify new, positive patterns that we would like to try to work on.

## Give it a go...

To get people thinking more imaginatively, introduce 'big questions' into team meetings. These should not have one specific answer, e.g. If an elephant and a bear were crossing the desert, which would win?

To help you think about your own helpful and unhelpful patterns of behaviour, why not create an imaginary coach – perhaps a famous person who you admire? What questions would they ask you? How would they encourage you to adopt a more imaginative approach to problem solving?

In team meetings, have 3 big sheets of paper with STOP, START and CONTINUE at the top. Ask people to write, on Post-its, the behaviours and language that they want to stop, start and continue. Particularly encourage blue sky, positive thinking when considering new ways of working.