

TOOL

The Ladder of Inference



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Separate fact from story.

The Ladder of Inference is one of the most powerful tools in Transformational Coaching, but it can also feel like one of the most challenging to use. We highly recommend developing a practice of using it yourself. Coaches also have beliefs worth unpacking. Getting comfortable examining your own thinking will better equip you to lead clients through the process.

Central to this process is the separation of fact from story.

Facts are the raw data as a video camera would record them. *Story* is the intricate web of meaning we weave around those facts. Almost all conscious thought is story.

A fact could be, “X said ___.” We might tell ourselves the story that “X rudely contradicted me.” (Hint: Adverbs and adjectives are nearly always story.)

On the following page, you will see an example of how you could use this tool in your own practice as a coach. Next, you will find a question you might ask at each “step” of the ladder to support recognizing and, when appropriate, shifting stories.



The Ladder of Inference: Example

DECISION-MAKING PROCESS STEP

EXAMPLE

I Take Action

I don't follow-up with the client.

I Adopt Beliefs

My time is best spent working with clients who prioritize our conversations.

I Draw Conclusions

Coaching conversations aren't a priority for the client.

I Make Assumptions

Client was able to attend the meeting but chose not to.

I Add Meaning

Missing meetings is a sign of not finding the meetings valuable.

I Select Data

Client is always present for other scheduled meetings for their role.

I Experience and Observe

Client didn't attend their scheduled coaching conversation.



START ▶



The Ladder of Inference: Questions

DECISION-MAKING PROCESS STEP

STARTER QUESTION

I Take Action

What might be the consequences —intended or unintended—of acting out of this belief?

I Adopt Beliefs

If this is the belief you hold, how will that affect the actions you take?

I Draw Conclusions

I hear that you've drawn a conclusion about _____. Can you identify the assumptions on which that's built?

I Make Assumptions

What did you assume about ____ based on the meaning you made?

I Add Meaning

Are there any other meanings you could make from this data?

I Select Data

What else might a camera have captured that we haven't named yet?

I Experience and Observe

I hear that you saw/heard/experienced _____.
(Paraphrase)



START ►



WHAT'S NEXT

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