

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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