CONNECTIVITY COACHING to COMBAT LONELINESS

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My Role at Caltech

- About me: For more than 15 years, I have been assisting international scholars and their families, as well as US citizens, when moving to SoCal:
    - Cultural and Relocation Advisor at Caltech
    - Facilitator for the Caltech International Spouses Club
    - Spouse 'Networker'

- The key word that unifies my different functions is connectivity

- I am adding another hat, offering CONNECTIVITY COACHING

- My approach is focused on MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS, both professional and personal

What is Loneliness?

- **Personal loneliness** involves the subjective feeling of isolation. It's the discrepancy between how you perceive your relationships *vs.* what you want from them.

- **Professional loneliness** involves the subjective perception of a lack of qualitative relationships between leader and peers in a team; it can also be a gap between oneself and the values and/or mission of the company.

- **Loneliness within a couple** is hidden; it cannot be seen but lives are parallel without connections. There is no intimacy.

- **Loneliness within a busy social life** (family circle or group of friends) happens when there is no emotional connection.

INTERACTIVE

What word comes first in your mind when you think of a lonely person?

What is not Loneliness?

- **Solitude is NOT Loneliness:** I want to bring your attention to this word, because in French, it's a synonym of loneliness (unwanted solitude/isolation), *vs.* in English, solitude is a desire (wanted solitude).

- **Alone is NOT Lonely:** Being alone is a choice. You can be socially isolated and not feel lonely *vs.* You can be socially not isolated and feel lonely

- **From a Societal Standpoint: the end of the Loneliness Stigma:** used to be perceived as a failure in life's most fundamental domains (couple / family, community, work). Today, everyone openly talks about loneliness without any taboo.

Loneliness Numbers: 2022 in USA

Loneliness epidemic was identified by Vivek Murthy, John Cacioppo and Louise Hawkley, long before the Covid pandemic.

58% of men and woman feel lonely in general.

72% of workers feel lonely at least monthly; among them are managers: 50% feel isolated and 61% say it reduces performance

73% Gen Z feels lonely: the loneliest generation

65% of lonely employees believe that their mental health affects their work performance

57% remote workers sometimes or always feel alone; they lack companionship, have nobody to turn to during challenging times.

70% of employees who switched to remote work felt more isolated compared to when they were in the office

57% of Senior Executives feel there's no one to rely on and don't feel close to anybody. Also, 70% think no one knows them well

48% entry-level feel lonely

56% of employees believe that technology decreases the amount of in-person interaction in the workplace

82% of workers say that connections are essential; one friend at work is enough to alleviate/stop the feeling of loneliness

55% Gen Z feels emotionally distant from their co workers compared to 27% for the baby boomers. 54% hide their true selves.

75% of Hispanic and 68% African American are more likely to be lonely

High School employees are more prone to loneliness than those with a college degree.

Extroverts are likely to feel lonelier, especially if they do not have anyone around, mainly because they are more accustomed to be in the company of people.

The Impacts of Loneliness
Research shows all the fields below are directly impacted by loneliness

- Medical: Reduction in life span equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day

  Greater reduction in lifespan that obesity

  Diabetes type 2

  Dementia

  Heart disease

  Depression

- Economic: Decrease performance, lower productivity because the employee is unengaged

- Political: Impacts on who people vote for and feeds extremism + populism

- Societal: Mindset's switch from a collective mindset to an individualistic one

The Costs of Loneliness

- Medical in USA, 2018: $7B

- Business/Economic in USA, July 2019: Loneliness costs employers more than $154B a year in lost productivity due to absenteeism related to loneliness.

- Accounts for approximately 5.7 days missed by lonely employees compared to those who are not lonely.

- Equivalent to $1,590/employee (productivity cost per day: 8-h work/day x $278 (in private industry)

- Hidden Costs (productivity, performance): no data yet

Drastic Measures to Lessen Loneliness

Taken by Governments

- **In UK:** creation of the Minister of Loneliness in 2018
- **In Japan:** creation of the Minister of Loneliness in 2021

Taken by Individuals

- **The Five Blue Zones**: one in California at Loma Linda
- **Renting a Friend** for 1 hour and more (originated in Japan)
- **Mukbang** (originated in South Korea)
- **Discos** for elderly people only
- **A pill** is under experiment to counter act the hypervigilance

Where Loneliness Comes From

A Loneliness Gene

- Does loneliness is a dormant gene that is activated depending on a situation *OR* does loneliness, when triggered, activates other genes (anxiety, depression)?
- Today, UC Chicago and ACSD are working on understanding where loneliness comes from, but scientific literature is not clear yet, including also its heredity.
- One thing is sure: the environment plays a key role (50% and more)

Social Media

- 2007 is the coming of the smart phone
- 2010 is the 1st rise observed of loneliness among users.
- Stanford experiment in 2018: screen *vs.* interactions
- Today, everything is on demand (movies, food, clothes, vacation, dating): convenience *vs* relationships

Childhood:

- Attachment Theory

A Bit of the Context: A Societal Change

- **Neo Liberalism** in the world leans towards a new mindset
- **Social-Medias**

  -> screen *vs.* interactions

  -> the pace of keeping updated is getting faster
- **Artificial Intelligence** is getting more pervasive
- **Gen Z** is not manageable the same way as the Baby Boomers, even the Millennials
- **The "king child"** raised in the positive reinforcement era
- **Gender Rules** in companies (Loi Rixain in France in 2021)
- **Diversity Inclusion Equity**

The New Normal at Work

- Remote/hybrid work

- The new challenges for leaders

- The new criteria of the employees that make a company feel good

How Loneliness Works

Example: Tom says very quickly to Daniel "Hello Dan!"

- Triggers hormones

- Activates social pain

- Highjacks social cues

- Unsettles others

- Reinforces self-centered behavior

- Avoids social interactions

- Distresses others and turn them away

Isolation sets in

Connectivity Helps to Combat Loneliness

For the individual

- the benefits of volunteering

For the manager

- communicating with the team AND on 1-on-1 with the peers

The Disconnect Between Managers and Employees
Gen Z born between 1997-2012 - Millennials born between 1981-1996

USA: Between April & Dec 2021, 24 million workers out of 166 million left their jobs: THE GREAT RESIGNATION

- All sectors of activity were concerned.
- Mainly Millennials and Gen Z
- 40% left without having another job offer
- Prediction: 64% think the Great Resignation will continue

Gen Z

- Gen Z is the only generation 100% digital.
- By 2050, all employees in companies will be Gen Z.
- Gen Z is the loneliest generation: 73% feel lonely (+ 4% since 2019)
- 55% feels emotionally distant from their co workers compared to 27% for the baby boomers
- As a result, 54% hide their true selves.
- Despite their high-tech profile (never have been offline), Gen Z craves for in-person relationships at work.
- 82% of the managers believe that Gen Z prefers to communicate via texts or chats
- As a result, Gen Z feels misunderstood by their managers

Managers Don't Understand the Exodus

- Instead of diving in and understanding the reasons of the massive exodus, many companies act the opposite way of what their employees expect, by making WRONG assumptions:

- While managers behave transactionally, employees want to feel useful, understood, and recognized.

- At the same time, employees leave even if 40% of them do not have another offer

- In other words, what matters the most are meaningful human relationships.

The manager's disconnection creates great loneliness

Loneliness is Bad for Business

- Loneliness decreases productivity (absenteeism, sick days)

- Loneliness decreases team spirit loyalty (no engagement, commitment)

- Loneliness decreases creativity (self-esteem/confidence/worth are very low)

Loneliness costs a lot of money to a company

Leadership Evolves from Tough Shell to Soft Shell

- The old version of the manager is a top-down approach, showing grit, and retaining emotions.

- But the pandemic hit, and many employees have redesigned their priorities.

- Meaningful relationships come first.

- Maya Angelou said: " People will forget what you said or did, but they will not forget how you made them feel".

- The new version of the leader is invited to demonstrate empathy, compassion, and may be sometimes a bit vulnerable.

When it comes to loneliness at work, the question is not about wondering *if* there are lonely people around, but *how* to spot a lonely employee. The manager is not responsible for the mental health of the employee but is responsible for recognizing shifts in employee behaviors that might indicate loneliness. (Jenkins & Van Cohen).

Profile of the New Manager:
Creating Meaningful Relationships Within the Team

- A manager is an observer

- A manager is a confidence booster

- A manager is an empathic listener

- A manager is a "vulnerabler"

- A manager is a "goal breaker"

- A manager is a "comforter"

- A manager is a seed planter

- A manager is talent reinforcer

- A manager is a "feedbacker"

- A manager is a work-life balancer

The manager puts intention
to create
a collective purpose
&
a psychological safety

=> belonging

=> more likely to be loyal to the Cie

INTERACTIVE

What are identifiers of a lonely person?

How to Spot a Lonely Employee

- A lonely employee is likely to be sick more often and take sick days
- A lonely employee is not social
- A lonely employee acts in an unfriendly manner
- A lonely employee doesn't collaborate, neither engage
- A lonely employee doesn't initiate
- A lonely employee is not reliable
- A lonely employee is not interested in growing
- A lonely employee appears as not taking so much attention to oneself
- A lonely employee may keep camera off

As described in Connectable written by Jenkins and Van Cohen

Strategies to Create Belonging

- Mixing people of different ages in a team
- Reverse Mentoring

The Big Challenges for Managers

- Loneliness is not visible like a broken leg with a cast.

- Loneliness is hidden.

- Remote team: some turn the screen on while it's off for others

- Relocation slows down: employees quit one job for another one
  but stay in the same city, and live in the same home because of remote work (incentive become useless)

- Keep in mind that managers can also be lonely (70% of them): helping others and decentralize oneself is a good way to lessen loneliness.

INTERACTIVE

Which tips would you give to create connections

What Coaching Can Bring

Connectivity Coaching to Combat Loneliness

Can Help Switching Subjective Feelings of Isolation

into Intentions to Develop Meaningful Relationships

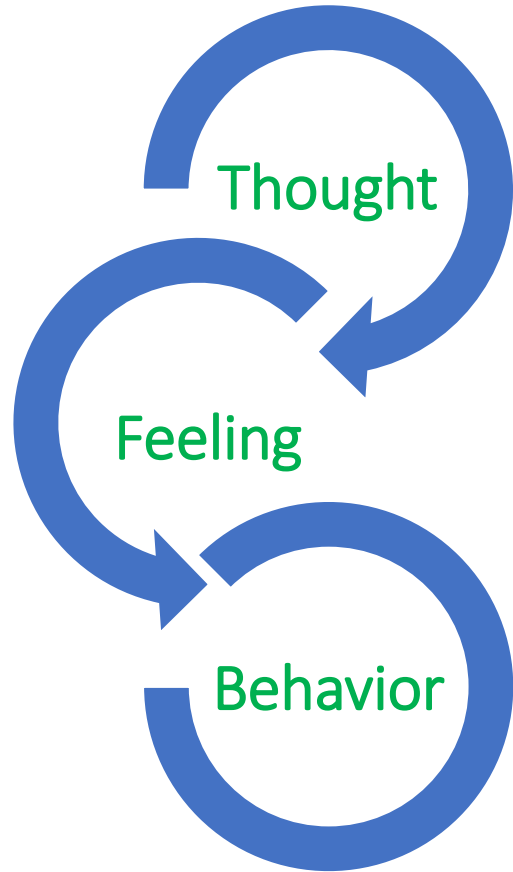# Examples of Thought → Feeling → Behaviors
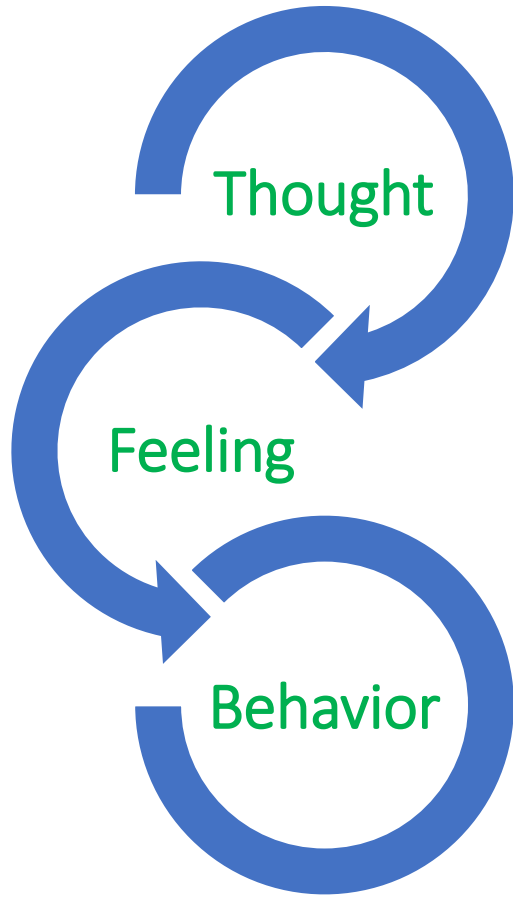
- **Thought:** I know he doesn't like me (mind reading) or I know you are going to break up with me (fortune telling)

- **Feeling/Emotion:** self critic, rejection and impacts on self worth/esteem/confidence/love

- **Behavior:** aware of your lack of confidence and assertiveness → loneliness

Thought

Feeling

Behavior

INTERACTIVE

What is a belief?

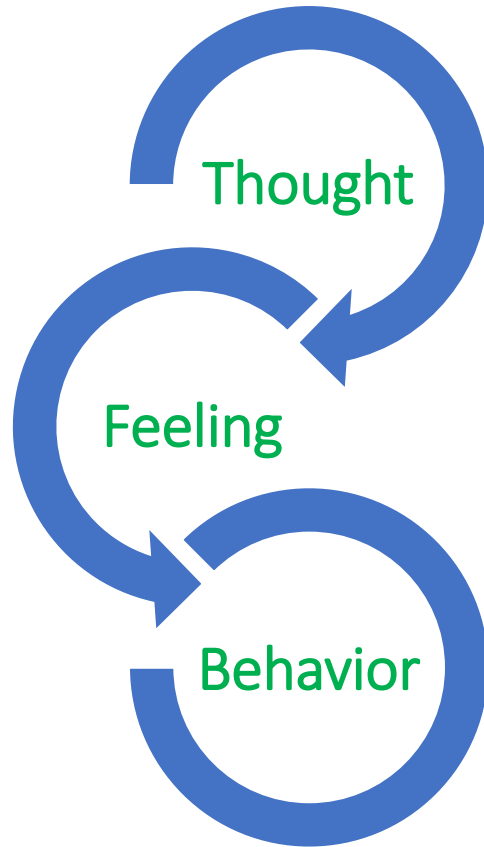# Examples of Thought → Feeling → Behaviors

- **Thought:** I feel so distressed that I'm sure this meeting will be a disaster (emotional reasoning)

- **Feeling/Emotion:** anxiety

- **Behavior:** overwhelmed→ fatigue → loneliness

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What is a bias?

Examples of Thought → Feeling → Behaviors

- **Thought:** I should/ must/ have to/ought to like... For example: I feel guilty because I should have been able to finish this project by the deadline.

- **Feeling/Emotion:** self-pressure and/or pressure on others, perfectionism, never enough, judgmental with oneself and others

- **Behavior:** nervosity and activity (# energy) → no time for others → loneliness

Thought

Feeling

Behavior

Transforming Thoughts to Achieve Goals

- Heighten awareness of the self-defeating, self-criticism and criticism of others

- Decode the social cues

- Explore the inside-outside

- Be aware of the compensations: hyper-achiever, controller, hyper vigilant, perfectionist, victim, avoider, restless, rationalizer, pleaser.

- Give oneself actions (the 1% progress)

- Practice! It's a process!

- Being able to coach oneself

My Coaching Approach

- **No Stigma**: Admitting you are lonely is as if you have failed in life's most fundamental domains: Belonging (community), Love (intimacy), Attachment (family and friends) → Everyone has felt lonely

- **Creating Space for Trust and Safety:** I am your ally → I am committed to help you find your very own solutions.

If You Want a Coaching Experience

- Send me an email at: bavouac@caltech.edu to set up a meeting.

- Session details: I offer a package of 6 zoom sessions/person, to be completed within 2 months. Each session is on one-on-one and lasts 45 minutes.

- The coaching sessions are entirely free for the Caltech community: students, postdocs, staff, visitors, and faculty.

TAKE HOME ! *UCLA Loneliness Scale © Dr. Daniel Russell*

For each statement, indicate how often you feel the way described using the numbers below.

1=Never 2=Rarely 3=Sometimes 4=Always

1. How often do you feel unhappy doing so many things alone?
2. How often do you feel you have no one to talk to?
3. How often do you feel you cannot tolerate being so alone?
4. How often do you feel as if no one understands you?
5. How often do you find yourself waiting for people to call or write?
6. How often do you feel completely alone?
7. How often do you feel unable to reach out and communicate with those around you?
8. How often do you feel starved for company?
9. How often do you feel it is difficult for you to make friends?
10. How often do you feel shut out and excluded by others?

Scoring

The average loneliness score on the measure is 20. A score of 25 or higher reflects a high level of loneliness.

A score of 30 or higher reflects a very high level of loneliness.

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