



MAKE ART of YOUR LIFE
- from Formal Logic to Dialectical Thinking
through Visualization

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THEME:
**MIND
TRAINING**

**GROW'S
INTERNATIONAL
SECTION
- in English**

» DIALECTICAL THINKING – THE MIND SPACE FOR CREATION «

DANIEL ÁLVAREZ LAMAS, founder of Instituto Ben Pensante, a coaching, mentoring and ICC Coach Training Institute in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, changed his career as a bank executive for the professional practice of coaching – executive coaching and coach training. He also became the Spanish translator of the work of the researcher in human development OTTO LASKE. Among many other things.

In this article he asks the question why coaching makes such a big difference in our thinking and why it works. His answer?

Read, and you will find out – and learn how to think dialectically as a habit!

MAYBE WORDS LIKE *Formal Logic* and *Dialectical Thinking* may sound new to you. But you will see that they are easy and will help you a lot to understand what happens in coaching and in other human development interventions. In fact, we will be speaking about coaching all the time. We will discover why it works so well and the type of thoughts that result from the coaching process, especially through the visualization of a goal. So – let’s start with the first key question:

WHY DOES COACHING make such a big difference in our thinking?

by Daniel Álvarez Lamas

WE NORMALLY USE a type of thinking called *Formal Logic*, which gives us easy and practical solutions but is a heavy burden that stops us from getting creative ideas. That is why we need experts who lead the conversation, and therefore our thinking – the coaches. They will help us to get access to our best thinking and brand new solutions. In fact, we will get a new type of thinking, more developed and creative called *Dialectical Thinking*. This is what we will see here in detail.

But let us first get to know all **our life story**. We will need it for a complete understanding and for getting deep results in our coaching sessions. I hope it sounds familiar to you.

After the “*rebel without cause*” stage in our youth, we accept the social rules and pay attention to “*how to do things the way people do*”. It is like surrendering in order to make things easier and **learn from social knowledge**. We learn how to think in order to solve situations, especially in relationships. We learn what to do in order to get what we want and to solve conflicts. If you look at it from a wide perspective, it means learning about social expectations – to know what people expect from you in every situation, and what can you expect from others.

YOU SOLVE SITUATIONS doing “what you should”, so that the other person(s) will do “what they should” in turn. This can be seen as the “*should*” stage, the stage in which you know and follow the social rules.

These social rules for living together have implications in two dimensions:

- **Emotional** (how we feel)
- **Cognitive** (how we think).

During this “*social agreement*” stage, a common way of thinking and feeling is so deeply installed in our minds that it seems that there is no other. In cognitive terms, this leads to *formal logic*, or *rational thinking*, a “**one view**” besides **common thinking**.

For example, here is a typical social rule that anyone may agree with: “*If I have a calm coffee with my colleague and explain something patiently, she will feel comfortable and think that my idea is not a mess*”.

It implies understanding feelings and thoughts of both parties. It also feels sensible and wise - but why does it fail so often?

In practical terms, the “*should*” stage, in which we learn to be **a good community member**, gives a big book of common learned solutions based on how we should feel and think. Great!, isn’t it? It sounds like “and they were happy forever”.

We wish it was that simple, but many times we find ourselves thinking: “*Why don't things go the way it should?*” or “*I should do this, but ...*” (as something prevents me from doing it). When this happens, we think that things “go wrong” which means “not as expected”.

In this case, society has its own **emotional control devices** in terms of blame (remember the last time someone told you “*You should have done this!*”) or frustration (when you say “*He should have done that!*”).

These emotions have the intention of defending the ordered and happy society by keeping the “common rules” against the “egoistic instincts”. I know it sounds strange that social rules can control the feelings of all human beings, but it also sounds familiar, doesn't it?

These are the kind of feelings we deal with in coaching sessions when someone needs a change for self-realizing.

LIVING IN A COMMUNITY would be impossible without these social agreements, but **we are much more than this**, in two senses:

- Humans are not like computers and it is impossible that we really share the same interpretation of any situation (the same map, as NLP says). There is nothing like a “unique and only interpretation”.
- Besides, reality is so complex that no book of learned solutions or best practices is capable of handling it.

We need more, we need our capacity of **Creation**. Creation is a human power with two remarkable results: it makes us feel self-realized and it helps us to find solutions when any (common) solution seems impossible. Human creativity is really amazing – so why don't we use it more often? Think about it.

When you are in trouble ... Do you normally think about “the best practices” for this case or do you use your creativity?

Usually, at best, people have the capacity of creation as a hidden resource to be used “when things go wrong”.

» **COACHING**
– a perfect example of
dialectical thinking. «

THE AVERAGE PROCESS when a problem is being created goes like this:

You try a learned solution, it doesn't work, you feel pain and then you try it again or use a different learned solution, which fails in turn. This cycle goes on and on until the pain is so hard that, in some cases, you will go outside your usual patterns ... and eventually go to a coach! Sometimes, the coach or the circumstances, will help a person to see beyond learned solutions. You will get a different type of thinking - instead of searching a file in your memory, you create a new one out of the blue.

This is *Dialectical Thinking*, the mind space for creation.

A REMINDER – a bit of history: The concept of *Dialectics* comes from philosophers like PLATO, MARX and HEGEL in the western tradition, although it is much more widespread in East Asia where cultures have a long tradition of ideas like “*transcending and uniting the opposites*”. *Dialectics* is the essence of the idea of a more complex way of thinking called *Dialectical Thinking*, acquired at the maturity of human life.

It was developed by M. BASSECHES, P. KING & K. KITCHENER and ROY BHASKAR. It is compiled and refined in a deep work about adult development by the less known and very expert, author OTTO LASKE, with whom I have worked. In a group of colleagues, we worked in applying the coaching process for creating dialectical thinking. We showed the direct connection in our research called “*coaching 4 evolutions*”, published in *the Integral Leadership Review* *.

* Coaching 4 Evolutions research published in *the Integral Leadership Review*:
<http://integralleadershipreview.com/13417-819-talent-strategies-development-in-hr-by-stages-developmental-theory-research-through-coaching/>

SO, AFTER THIS AWARENESS, the big question arises: How can we make use more often of our capacity of creation?.

Which we now can convert into:

How can we use our capacity of dialectical thinking instead of formal logic?

From our experience and research, the coaching process is a simple and powerful way. Coaching is the art of *visualizing the goal*, which is a precise key for getting out of the labyrinth of social best practices towards an open space for feeling and thinking:

1. Feeling: The learned patterns provokes real pain to the person who tries to get rid of them. They are deeply rooted and try to convince you that there is no other way out of the problem. Giving them up is like an addiction detoxification process. Coaching, listening and patience, creates a wide space for this, opening a new range of deeper states.

2. Thinking: As soon as you feel free to think, the coach leads you through a dialectical process.

WHAT IS THE DIALECTICAL PROCESS LIKE?

Perhaps you learnt in philosophy classes about it: *thesis*, *antithesis* and *synthesis*. Let us see how they follow the same steps in the coaching process:

1. Thesis: being aware of the present situation.

2. Antithesis: creating a clear visualization of the goal.

3. Synthesis: letting a new solution arise.

Coaching is a perfect example of *dialectical thinking* – the way out of formal logic to reach all your creative resources. Every human development discipline has its way for doing this three-step process.

» **REALITY AND PEOPLE are a miracle to admire and a challenge to deal with, not something to judge.**«

WHAT IS THE RESULT OR SYNTHESIS when you display your dialectical thinking?

For example, in the previous example, after a coaching session (with these three steps), you may understand that the other person has no time for coffees and a lot of demands, as she never gets any emotional reward from them. Maybe she is frustrated in her job. Also, you may understand that she wants a different type of professional (or even personal) relationship as a whole, and that her demands have always been short term oriented.

You may decide to explain to this person why this task is so important and acknowledge the work she has done ... and listen to her to connect emotionally. And in doing so, you are opening a bilateral relationship away from a “social agreement” or “should” solutions.

It means that, with dialectical thinking, you will discover your own inner world and understand that any other human being is a world in itself. This is more complicated than applying learned solutions and far more creative. Also, you do not see reality as something that needs to fit with expectations, but a complexity of facts that may be seen from different views.

Reality and people are a miracle to admire and a challenge to deal with, not something to judge.

As a result of what we have seen, I propose a final finding:

HOW CAN YOU THINK DIALECTICALLY AS A HABIT?

In other words: HOW CAN YOU GET THE HABIT OF CREATION?

When you need to solve a problem,
you can try this tool for getting to

DIALECTICAL THINKING IN 3 STEPS

1

THESIS:

**HOW DO I FEEL?
WHAT IMAGES COME TO ME?
WHAT USUAL IDEAS?**

First of all, **calm down your body and mind** and **listen to yourself**. Perceive what comes to your mind. Feel the difficult feeling that arises "*when things go wrong*", hold them and **perceive the thoughts that come to you with all your senses**.

You will **discover the "formal logic" that didn't work**, including uncomfortable images besides tough thoughts as "*it is impossible*" or stressing ideas such as "*I should find the solution*".

Look at all this as a spectator, without getting involved in them. We just want awareness. **Enjoy the calm atmosphere you have created.**

2

ANTITHESIS:

**CREATE THE IMAGE OF THE GOAL
AND VISUALIZE IT.**

Antithesis means the opposite of thesis. It is the absolute importance of the goal, the situation we want that seems so difficult in the present moment. You can follow this questions for visualizing it:

- **WHAT DO I WANT?**
- **HOW WILL I KNOW THAT I WILL GET IT?**

Imagine what you want instead of the present situation. This is your goal. Be as specific as you can. For example: imagine the kind of relationship you want (instead of remembering the difficult present situation).

- **HOW WOULD IT BE?**
- **WHAT DO I SEE?**
- **WHAT DO I HEAR?**
- **WHAT ELSE?**

Enjoy the image and get more details.

- **HOW DO I FEEL?**

Now you have created your desired state with its feelings and physical sensation, which leads to the source of it all - **the VALUE behind the goal.**

- **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ME?**
- **WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ABOUT IT?**

After this process of visualizing the goal, you connect with the value that is behind it.

The value is the source of motivation and inspiration for the change.

3

SYNTHESIS:

WHAT CAN I DO DIFFERENTLY?

After **visualizing the goal**, getting the open **feelings that come from it** and having in mind the **important value that moves you ...**

YOUR CAPACITY OF THINKING CHANGES, and **different ideas come when you ask yourself what can you do now.**