

## Silent Assumptions/Irrational Beliefs

David Burns uses this “vertical arrow technique” to identify silent assumptions. Often, as the process continues one will either arrive at a clearly absurd irrational thought, or uncover a real issue that needs to be dealt with. Either way, the information is useful.

Your patient is an executive with a large computer firm. He complains of severe anxiety and feelings of panic whenever he is asked to give a presentation. He agrees to write down several automatic thoughts during the week. At the next clinic you ask him to choose one automatic thought with which to work. He chooses: “They might ask me a question I can’t answer”.

Thoughts:

*“They might ask me a question I can’t answer.”*

If that were true, why would it be upsetting to me? What would it mean to me?



*“I’ll make a fool of myself in front of my colleagues”*

If that were true, why would it be upsetting to me? What would it mean to me?



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To identify your silent assumptions, ask yourself these questions after each thought.

Example: *"I'll never be able to get this all done."*

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