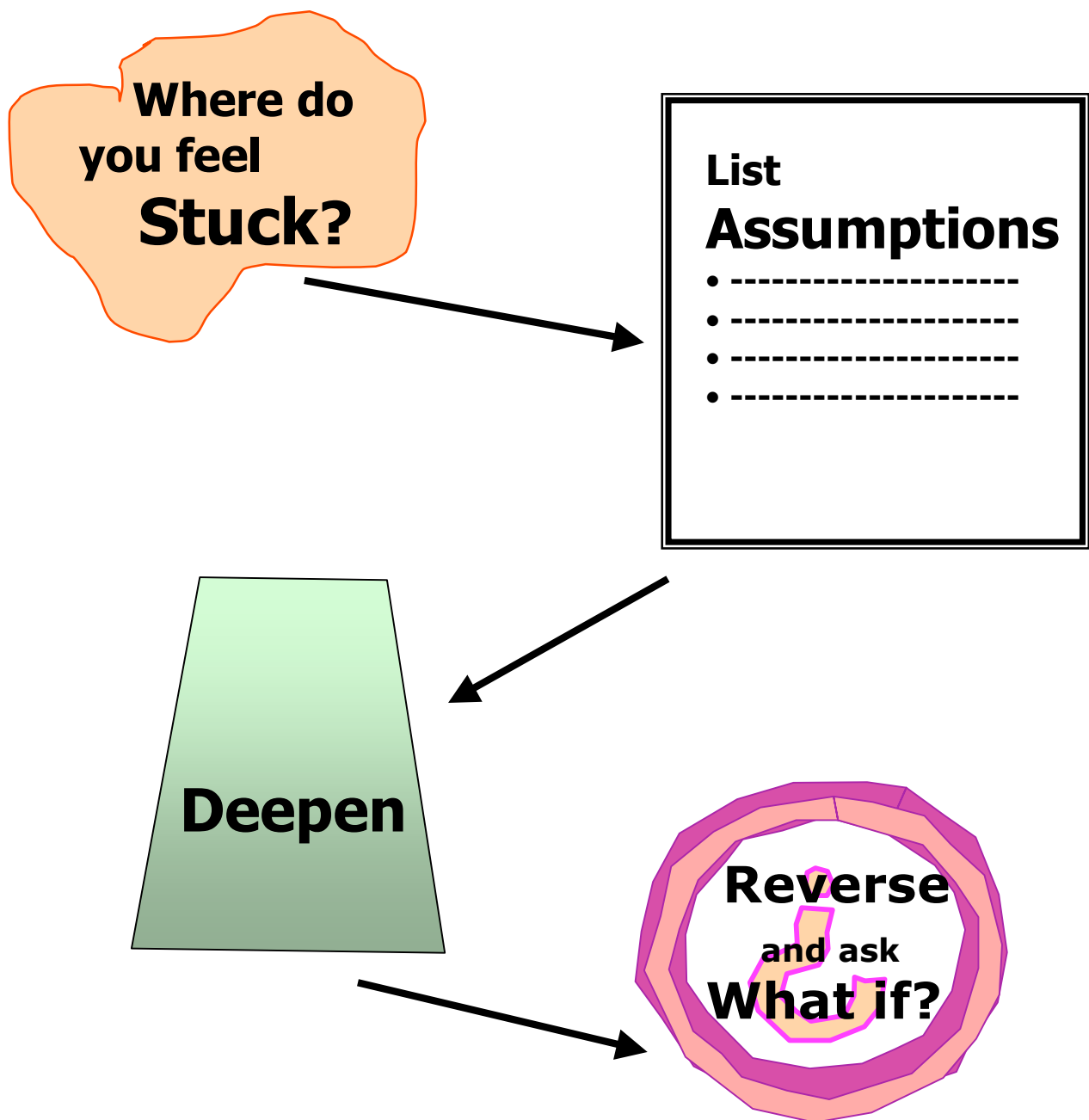


# Assumption Busting



# Assumption Busting:

## Breaking Patterns to Find New Ideas

### 1) Where do you feel stuck?

Name the situation, the starting point. It might be a habitual problem, something you keep encountering so you're aware that you need to break a pattern. It could be something that you're meeting for the first time.

It could be a wish or a desire, for instance: "Wouldn't it be nice if I could get Molly into bed easily?" Or it could be a problem: "How can I get Molly in bed without a struggle?" Whether you choose to see it as an opportunity or a challenge, start with a statement that summarizes the situation at hand.

### 2) Gather Data

If you're a young testosterone-laden bachelor, you might make certain assumptions about this point of departure, "How can I get Molly in bed?" The assumptions are very different, however, if you happen to be the parent of a young child. That's why gathering data is essential, in order to recognize the patterns that might be limiting us.

Make a list of data; record all facts you *know* about a situation. At this point you're making a divergent list, so defer judgment and just write down any piece of information that seems to have a bearing on the challenge before you. For instance:

- *Molly is three years old.*
- *She has an 11-month old sister.*
- *She's just started attending school, which is exciting, but scary.*
- *She has high verbal skills, in English.*
- *She has a bedtime ritual that used to work fine, until a few months ago.*
- *Bedtime is at 8:00 pm.*
- *At bedtime she resists, cries, stalls and gets out of her bed.*
- *She shares a room with her sister.*

For the purposes of Assumption Busting, each piece of data is considered an assumption. We believe these statements are true, but when using the process of Assumption Busting we recognize that there is a high probability that they are not *all* true, or that they do not *need* to be true.

For instance: that Molly is three years old could seem uncontested. But if her parents treat her as though she's five, she may in fact be more mature and have different emotional needs than other children her age.

This is key: In Assumption Busting, *every* fact becomes an assumption. In this step, you're actually making a list of your preliminary assumptions.

### 3) Deepen

Now review this list of data. Pick an assumption that seems to be too general, or seems limiting in some way. Or maybe it just seems important to examine, based on your gut instinct.

The most fruitful assumptions to overturn are things you believe are true that may not be true, things you believe are required that may not be required, or things you believe you don't control but in fact you can influence.

In this step, the goal is to deepen your understanding of the assumption you've chosen to bust. You're not busting the assumption just yet; you're trying to understand it fully. To do this, make an additional list of assumptions about the assumption.

For instance, from the list in the example about Molly, let's choose "She just started attending school, which is exciting, but scary," as a general assumption, and deepen our understanding of this assumption as follows:

- *It's a long day for a three-year old, she's at school from 8:30 to 4:30.*
- *She speaks French all day at school and English is her mother tongue.*
- *She eats lunch at school; she's eating new and different foods.*
- *She takes an afternoon nap at school, something she'd stopped taking at home.*
- *She's making new friends, doing new things, in a new environment.*
- *She's away from her mother and father all day long.*

#### **The most fruitful assumptions to overturn are:**

- **Things you believe are true that may not be true.**
- **Things you believe are required that may not be required.**
- **Things you believe you don't control but in fact you can influence.**

#### 4) Busting: Reverse.

The easiest way to bust the assumptions is to reverse them.<sup>1</sup> Suspend judgment, momentarily, and pretend that the opposite is true. When you challenge what you believe you know, it invites new perspectives. Many of the statements you come up with may be nonsense, however, from this chaos a few will connect, and some new wisdom may arrive.

#### 5) Ask What if?

Use the stem “What if...?” to make a list of questions that help make the reversed statement *more* true. See what other “What if...?” questions that come to mind when you’re playing with this reversed statement. Sometimes this line of questioning leads to a “What if...?” that breaks through the assumption and busts it.

To finish our example:

*She’s at school from 8:30 – 4:30.*

***She’s not at school from 8:30 – 4:30.***

*What if she came home at midday for lunch and returned?*

*What if she only went to school ½-days, in the mornings?*

*What if she didn’t go to school at all?*

*What if she was home-schooled?*

*She speaks French at school and English is her mother tongue.*

***She doesn’t speak French at school. English is not her mother tongue.***

*What if she spoke no French at school?*

*What if she spoke English at School?*

*What if she had two hours of English every day?*

*What if she went to a bilingual school?*

*What if we spoke French at home instead of English?*

*What if she had a translator?*

*She eats lunch at school; new and different foods.*

***She doesn’t eat lunch at school; the foods are the same and familiar.***

*What if she came home for lunch?*

*What if we packed a lunch for her?*

*What if she had special meals at school?*

*What if we gave her new and different foods at home?*

*She takes an afternoon nap at school, which she’d stopped taking at home.*

***She doesn’t nap at school. She starts napping again at home.***

*What if Molly didn’t nap with the rest of the children?*

*What if we got special permission for her to stay at home until the nap is over?*

*What if we taught her how to pretend to nap?*

*What if we had her nap at home on the weekends?*

*What if we took this nap into consideration when we scheduled her bedtime?*

*Etc.*

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<sup>1</sup> You can also use a divergent technique like SCAMPER (substitute, combine, adapt, modify, put to other uses, eliminate, re-arrange) to reframe the assumption.

In this example, the objective we started with was to get Molly to go to bed without a struggle. Playing with the assumption that the new experience at school impacts her willingness to go to bed revealed something that hadn't been considered: that the afternoon nap imposed by the teacher might make it harder for her to keep to her usual bedtime. It forced a review of another assumption on the original list: bedtime is at 8:00.

What follows is up to you. Sometimes the simple act of reframing an assumption creates a paradigm shift that makes the next course of action very clear. To go further, restate the "What if...?" that busts your assumption as a starting point for generating ideas by using the stem "How to...?" For instance, "How to take the school nap into consideration?" or "How to re-schedule Molly's bedtime?" or "How to give Molly *late-night* permission on days she's had a nap at school?"

Of course, the best way to understand Assumption Busting is to do it. The brain isn't likely to burn a new pattern just by reading about it. You have to use it often enough that your brain makes new connections; adds a *new* pattern. The process of Assumption Busting is a deliberate way to break the patterns your brain has developed: to pose new questions that make new connections that lead you to new solutions - and to innovation.

## Assumption Busting

- 1. Where do you feel stuck? Identify a problem or situation on which you want to work.**
- 2. Gather data: Use who, what, when, where, why, and how to make a list of everything you know, think and feel about the situation. These are your assumptions.**
- 3. Deepen: Pick an assumption and make a list of assumptions about the assumption.**
- 4. Bust Assumptions: Choose one of the *deepened* assumptions and reverse it. Restate it in its opposite form.**
- 5. Now take this reversed statement and use the stem "What if?" and make a list of questions that make this reversed statement more true or that expand your understanding of the assumption.**