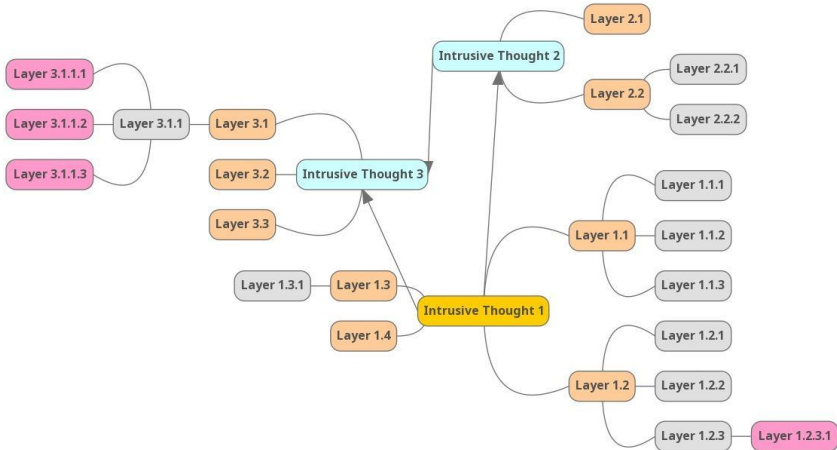


## S3C9. The layered attack of ROCD

Most times, an ROCD attack is not a simple attack. ROCD attacks in various layers, at various levels. When you first learn to use the principles of ERP to deal with your ROCD, you expect that if you stand up to Kay and decide not to do what Kay asks you to do, Kay will meekly shut up. But that is a mistake. Kay does not shut up. Kay gets more aggressive in the beginning. If Kay wants you to separate from your partner, Kay will do whatever it takes to make sure that you keep fighting with your partner and eventually separate from her.

So, when you first refuse to listen to Kay, Kay gets angrier and ramps up the assault. The assault may not just be with regard to the first thought. While you are managing the assault of the first intrusive thought, another thought might pop up out of nowhere and add more complexity. It is like being at war and being attacked from all sides. The enemy is not only capable of sending in more troops but also does not stop at basic weapons. The more you disarm, the more it seems to send. Look at the figure 3.9.1 that illustrates how thoughts may impact you from various directions.

Figure 3.9.1: Layers of ROCD



As you can see, not only can one thought lead to many layers, which can lead to further layers, but also, one thought can lead to a totally different thought, which can again lead to multiple layers. In the futile endeavour to attain certainty, you try to solve all these questions, in vain. But your ROCD is capable of asking more questions than you can answer. The race to find answers to all the questions your ROCD can pose keeps you stuck in the loop.

Think of Kay like a toxic boss. You are new to the job and your boss is toxic.

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He asks you to do his personal chores like getting him coffee, doing his paperwork, and so on. You know you should be standing up for yourself and setting boundaries but you don't dare to. Until one day when you pluck up the courage to stand up to him. He asks you to get coffee for him and even though you are afraid, you refuse to do so. If your toxic boss is used to mute compliance from you, will he take a refusal well? Will he just say *'Okay, don't bother, I will get it myself?'* No. He is likely to get angry and scream at you.

So, he says *'How dare you say no to me? I am your boss and you have to follow my orders'*. It scares you more and you comply. He wins. But suppose you decide to stand up to that threat as well and still refuse to get him coffee. He may ramp up the threats and may say something like, *'I will make sure you lose your job'*. That is even scarier than what he said earlier and you give in to the fear. He wins. But if you refuse again, he says, *'I will also make sure you never get hired in the industry again'*. Again, it scares you, and if you comply, he wins. But, if at this point you still refuse, you notice that he begins to cool down. So, you were trembling with fear but you still haven't needed to get him coffee and you have survived the episode and won the battle.

But your troubles aren't over yet. The next day again the same thing happens. He asks you to get him coffee. You are scared again. If you give in at any stage on that day, he wins and the equation remains as before. But if you survive the onslaught of his threats and insults, another day passes by, another battle is won. Then another and then another. Until one day, your boss realizes that you are not going to get him coffee and he stops asking. It is then that you win the war.

Your ROCD is like that. Say, you get the thought that your partner's eyes are asymmetrical and that you don't like that. The compulsion is to keep checking your partner's pictures to see if her eyes look very bad or manageable. But you choose not to do it because you know Kay is asking you to do it. So, you get anxious but tell Kay, *'I don't care if my partner's eyes are asymmetrical, I still am not leaving her'*. Kay gets upset and more aggressive and says, *'Oh, but you deserve better'*, and you begin to wonder if it is true. If you decide to check and do the compulsion, Kay wins. If you don't, and despite the rising anxiety you say, *'Yeah, maybe I deserve someone better, but I don't care. I am not leaving my partner'*.

Kay begins to fear losing control and gets more aggressive. The next thought is, *'Oh people will laugh at you, they will laugh at the two of you, and they will laugh at your parents'*. You are far more anxious than ever before but again, you respond by saying, *'I don't care if people laugh at us, I am not leaving my partner'*. Then Kay does not have anything to say and begins to withdraw, and your anxiety begins to come down. Battle won. Similarly, the next few times it happens, if you choose to stand up for yourself and your partner despite how anxious Kay's assault makes you feel, eventually Kay will stop bothering you about your partner's asymmetrical eyes, and

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you would have won the war.

Another analogy is the ‘anger management’ analogy. Assume that you are in an anger management class, I am the coach and it is my responsibility to assess you whether you pass or fail. To test you, all I have to do is to hurl insults at you and you have to tolerate them without getting angry. So, I start off with the most innocent insult I can think of, and you clear that without getting angry. So, I raise the level. I call you another name that is a little more insulting than the first one. You were not expecting it but you still take it on the chin. Good.

But I’m not done yet. I hurl another large, juicy insult at you. This gets you agitated but you remember it is a test and that if you tolerate my insults you will pass. So, you grin and bear it even though you do not appreciate it. But then I wallop you with a really vicious insult. By now you’ve had it. You get angry and you snap back. I shake my head and declare you as having failed the test. You continue to be in the class. Instead, if you had held on just a little more and tolerated the fourth and the fifth insult, you could have passed the class.

Think of your ROCD in a similar manner. Your ROCD is the examiner. It attacks you with the first layer by saying ‘*You don’t like your partner’s eyes*’, which you learn to tolerate. So, it attacks you with a more painful thought, which may be ‘*That means you are okay being with an ugly partner*’. Now you feel anxious but you learn to tolerate this too. So, your ROCD sends another attack your way and tells you that ‘*Your friends will laugh at you*’. Somehow you manage to fend that off too. But then ROCD sends like a really huge, disturbing thought that ‘*You will be isolated from social contact by your friends because of your ugly partner*’.

If you are able to handle this and not do your compulsive act, you win the battle at least. The next time, it will get easier. But if this last attack causes you to panic and do the compulsion, you will continue to be assessed on this obsession the next time. So, if you want to recover, the only way out is to fend off every attack from ROCD with acceptance even if it feels difficult.

These are the layers of ROCD’s attack. For every layer you learn to manage, your ROCD throws up another and attempts to make you give in. If you can survive these layers by standing up to your ROCD and not doing any compulsions, no matter how anxiety inducing and difficult it is, eventually you will learn to manage your trigger.

In the next chapter, we shall look at the drug dealer analogy.