

THE THINKER'S EDGE

MAXWELL MOMENTS

11 PRACTICES FOR GETTING AHEAD IN BUSINESS AND LIFE

JOHN C. MAXWELL

New York Times Bestselling Author



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Nashville • New York

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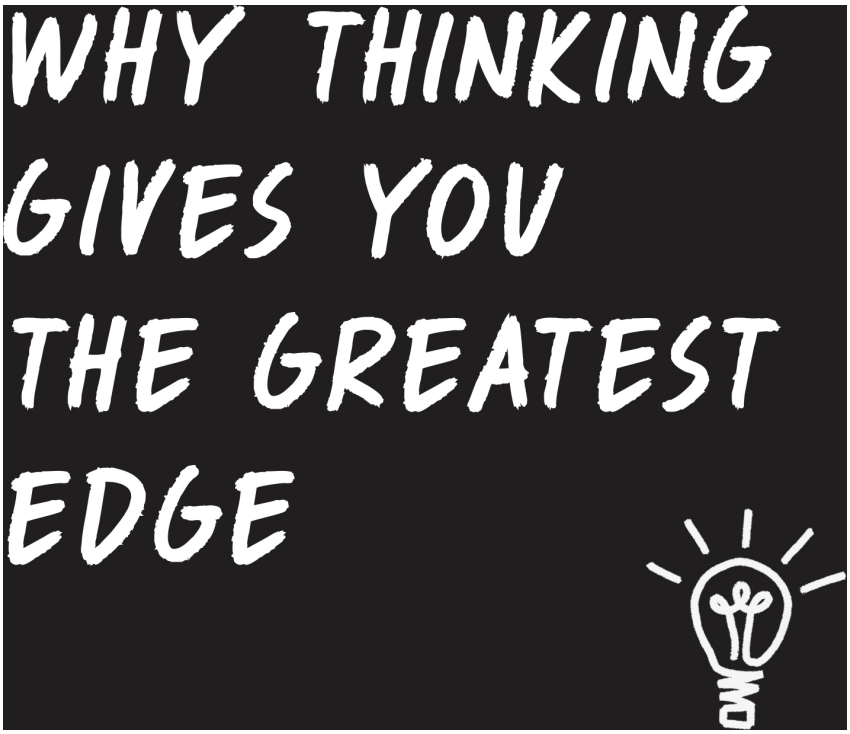


“YOU ARE TODAY WHERE YOUR THOUGHTS HAVE BROUGHT YOU; YOU WILL BE TOMORROW WHERE YOUR THOUGHTS TAKE YOU.”

—James Allen

What will bring you success?

What will give you the greatest edge in your professional and personal life? Opportunities? Intelligence? Education? Money? Friends in high places? Hard work? Luck?

Nope. It’s none of these. It is your ability to think!

1. Every product, service, invention, song, movie, book, painting, design, company, object, or innovation begins with a thought.
2. People who think differently have an edge over others.

3. What you think determines who you are. Who you are determines what you do.
4. Your thinking impacts your capacity. Your capacity changes your destiny. Your destiny determines your legacy.
5. You can *change* the way you think.

THE PERFORMANCE EDGE

If you grew up in a home with great thinkers who translated their thinking into successful lives, you have an advantage. You probably already possess thinking skills that others lack.

Or if you have been personally mentored by highly successful people, you have begun to think differently than most of your peers.

If neither of those is true for you, then you do have some work ahead of you. But here's the good news: My father developed the thinking edge and trained me when I was a child. And for the past fifty years, I've been mentored by great thinkers…

If you'll adopt the thinking contained in this book and put it into practice by taking action, you can develop the thinking edge that will set you apart and make you successful.

CHANGING YOUR THINKING IS NEITHER EASY NOR AUTOMATIC

The only people who believe thinking is easy are those who aren't in the habit of engaging in it.

If you want to become a better thinker, you need to work at it. But it is worth the effort and investment. Author Napoleon Hill observed, “More gold has been mined from the brains of men than has ever been taken from the earth.”

Gold mines tap out. Stock markets crash. Real estate investments tank. But a human mind with the ability to think well is like a gold mine that never runs out. It’s priceless.

> *“THINKING IS THE HARDEST WORK THERE IS, WHICH IS THE PROBABLE REASON WHY SO FEW ENGAGE IN IT.”*
>
> —Henry Ford

GOOD THINKING CREATES A FOUNDATION FOR GOOD RESULTS

The quality of your thinking will lead to the quality of your results.

One of the reasons people don’t achieve their dreams is that they want to change their results without changing their thinking. Is that true of you? If so, you need to know that is never going to work. If you don’t like the crop you are reaping, you need to change the seed you are sowing! You need to change your thinking.

“Good thoughts and actions can never produce bad results; bad thoughts and actions can never produce good results. This is but saying that nothing can

come from corn but corn, nothing from nettles but nettles. Men [and women] understand this law in the natural world, and work with it; but few understand it in the mental and moral world (though its operation there is just as simple and undeviating), and they, therefore, do not cooperate with it."

—James Allen

"THE SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE IN INDUSTRY HAVE SUCCEEDED THROUGH THEIR THINKING. THEIR HANDS WERE HELPERS TO THEIR BRAINS."

—Claude M. Bristol in *The Magic of Believing*

GOOD THINKING INCREASES YOUR POTENTIAL

For many people, the greatest detriment to their success tomorrow is their thinking today.
If your thinking is limited, so is your potential. But if you grow in your thinking, you will eventually outgrow whatever task you're doing or challenge you're facing.

"You will become as small as your controlling desire, as great as your dominant aspiration."

—James Allen

No matter how complicated life gets or how difficult problems may seem, good thinking can make a difference—if you make it a consistent part of your life. The more you engage in good thinking, the more good thoughts you will continue to think.

You are using only a fraction of your capacity. Good thinking is what opens the door to greater capacity and greater potential.

"NURTURE GREAT THOUGHTS, FOR YOU WILL NEVER GO HIGHER THAN YOUR THOUGHTS."

—Benjamin Disraeli

GOOD THINKING PRODUCES MORE GOOD THINKING WHEN YOU MAKE IT A HABIT

Success comes to those who are in the habit of doing things that unsuccessful people are unwilling to do. Achievement comes from the habit of good thinking. It's like creating a never-ending army of ideas capable of achieving almost anything.

"AN INVASION OF ARMIES CAN BE RESISTED, BUT NOT AN INVASION OF IDEAS."

—Victor Hugo

LEARN FROM THE BEST THINKERS

YOU CAN FIND

It doesn't matter where you are. It doesn't matter how many or how few resources you have. It doesn't matter who you know. You can begin learning from better thinkers right now.
When I was a teenager, I started reading books that changed my thinking and changed my life.

My desire is that this book will be only a starting point, a foundation. Add to it by reading books and listening to podcasts by great thinkers. Seek out and spend time with people who challenge you. If you want to be a sharp thinker, get around sharp people.

And never stop. You will never "arrive" as a thinker. There are always new problems to solve, mountains to climb, and vistas to take in.

"Where success is concerned, people are not measured in inches or pounds or college degrees, or family background; they are measured by the size of their thinking."

—David J. Schwartz


1
SEE WIDER,
DEEPER,
AND FARTHER
THAN OTHERS

“MANY AN OBJECT IS NOT SEEN, THOUGH IT FALLS WITHIN THE RANGE OF OUR VISUAL RAY, BECAUSE IT DOES NOT COME WITHIN THE RANGE OF OUR INTELLECTUAL RAY.”

—Henry David Thoreau

Human beings are in the habit of seeing within the limits of their own world first. We tend to have tunnel vision. We see through the filter of our own experiences, biases, responsibilities, concerns, and agenda. But that limits us.

To improve your thinking and gain the thinker’s edge, you need to learn how to see the big picture. You need to see longer, wider, and farther than others do. You must make the effort to get outside of yourself and your own limited point of view.

You can’t see the picture when you’re inside the frame.

To get outside of the frame, think beyond your own experience. Try to see how others see. Find out how others think. Become a good listener. Think beyond your personal agenda. Expand your world.

People who see wider, deeper, and farther accomplish more than narrow-minded people. They experience fewer unwanted surprises. They take into account people, problems, relationships, history, timing, chemistry, values, finances, creativity, and momentum. They see more, and before others do.

“A SMALL MAN IS MADE UP OF SMALL THOUGHTS.”

—Victor Hugo

SEEING MORE AND BEFORE OTHERS…

1. ALLOWS YOU TO LEAD

You cannot take people somewhere you can’t see or overcome obstacles invisible to you.

2. KEEPS YOU ON TARGET

You must think about the big picture while doing small things if you want to keep those small things moving in the right direction.

3. HELPS YOU SEE WHAT OTHERS SEE

When you’re already listening and trying to see issues from the other person’s point of view, you relate to and understand them better.

4. PROMOTES TEAMWORK

When you see most of the issues and you understand people, you can help them find their fit and work together.

5. PREVENTS YOU FROM BEING CAUGHT UP IN THE MUNDANE

The person who forgets the ultimate is a slave to the immediate.

6. ENABLES YOU TO GO INTO UNCHARTED TERRITORY

The world was built by people who “crossed bridges” in their minds long before anyone else did.

DON’T WAIT FOR CERTAINTY

To see wider, deeper, and farther than others, you must look at the bigger picture. Become more comfortable with ambiguity. Don’t try to force every observation or piece of information into preformulated mental cubbyholes.

Instead of waiting for certainty, strive for clarity. Cultivate the ability to see more by embracing and dealing with complex and diverse ideas. Learn to juggle many seemingly incompatible thoughts at the same time. Bring together diverse concepts, accepting seemingly opposite points of view at the same time. Embrace what authors Jim Collins and Jerry I. Porras call the “Genius of the AND.” **Be able to hold two contradictory truths in your mind without dismissing one of them.**

LEARN FROM EVERY EXPERIENCE

Don’t rest on your successes. Don’t focus on them. Instead, learn from them. And more importantly, learn from your failures. Teachability is key to seeing wider, deeper, and farther.

The greater the variety of experiences you have in life, the more you have the potential to learn. Try a lot of things. Take a lot of chances. Explore.

After every experience, take time to reflect. Experience isn’t the best

teacher—*evaluated* experience is.

> *“FORGET WHAT HURT YOU IN THE PAST, BUT NEVER FORGET WHAT IT TAUGHT YOU.”*
>
> —Shannon L. Alder

GATHER INSIGHT FROM A VARIETY OF PEOPLE

Talk to people outside of your normal circle. Yes, it’s good to gain insight from people who know and care about you. Always ask for wise counsel. But seek out others who have experience deeper and broader than your own. **Ask for the opinions of people you know disagree with you.**

GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION TO EXPAND YOUR WORLD

Most people are married to the *status quo*. They want what is, not what could be. They seek safety. They want simple answers.

To gain the thinker’s edge, you need to give yourself permission to go a different way, to break new ground, to find new worlds to conquer.

Society wants to keep people in boxes. Expand your world. Get out of that box. **Never forget that there is more out in the world than you’ve experienced. Go out and find it.**

“NOTHING LIMITS ACHIEVEMENT LIKE SMALL THINKING; NOTHING EXPENDS POSSIBILITIES LIKE UNLEASHED IMAGINATION.”

—William Arthur Ward


2
DEFINE
WINNING FOR
YOURSELF
AND OTHERS

How do you define a win for your organization, business, department, team, or group? In most businesses, leaders define wins by the bottom line. Profit means success.

But dollars should not always be the primary measure of success. That's obvious when it comes to something like family. But it's true even in business.

If you're accustomed to measuring winning only in terms of finances, you are missing wins that are very important to you and your organization.

Don't you want more in life than financial success?

Every activity has its own unique definition of winning, based on values and relationships as well as results.

You have the power to define winning for yourself. If you lead a team, you have the *responsibility* to do it.

When you define winning before you start, you can measure outcomes very quickly and easily. You have a target. You can use it to ensure that all the little activities you're doing line up with and contribute to your greater goal.

Defining winning enables you to:

- Measure your progress
- Make decisions
- Know when you need to change course
- Align your resources
- Eliminate the unnecessary
- Reward your team
- Declare success

When you know what constitutes winning, you greatly increase your odds of doing it.

DEFINE WINNING WHERE IT MATTERS MOST

In the important areas of your life, what are you going after?

What is winning for your team? Your department? Your organization?
What is winning for your family?
What is winning with your friends?
What is winning in your neighborhood, community, city, or nation?
What is winning for you as a human being?

It's important for you to be as specific as possible.
If your target is something as vague as "success," you will have a painfully difficult time trying to achieve it. What is the true essence of each winning goal?

"We try never to forget that medicine is for the people. It is not for the profits. The profits follow, and if we have remembered that, they have never failed to appear."

—George W. Merck

"To laugh often and much: To win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children, to earn the appreciation of honest critics…, to appreciate beauty, to find the best in others,… to know even one life has breathed easier because you lived. This is to have succeeded."

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

FOCUS ON WINNING

Don’t allow mental clutter to cloud your focus. Don’t be distracted by immediate tasks that don’t contribute to the bigger picture. If a small thing no longer contributes to the main thing, stop doing it.

Don’t let a convoluted or idealistically worded company mission statement obscure your vision of the greater goal.

What’s the real bottom line when it comes to winning? When you strip away all the things that don’t really matter, how would you define success? What are you really trying to achieve?

ASK THESE QUESTIONS

- Is the win possible?
- Does it include everyone or just a few?
- Have we identified and articulated the areas that will make winning difficult?
- Are we willing to pay the price to win?

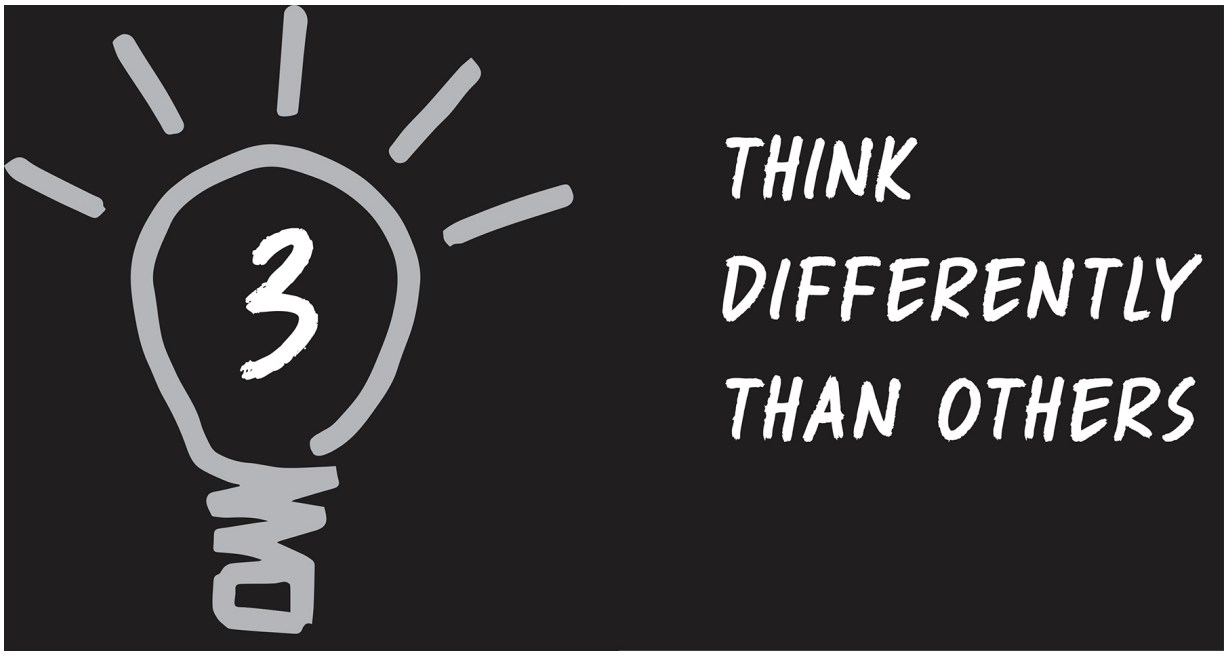
HELP YOUR TEAM WIN

Everyone needs to know not only the big goal, but also their individual role in achieving it. **Define each person’s win in the context of the bigger win.**

Lead your team to victory!

“I have never had a losing season, at anything. In every basketball season I have participated in, I ended up with a winning record.”

—Pat Summitt


3
THINK
DIFFERENTLY
THAN OTHERS

“THE DIFFICULTY LIES NOT SO MUCH IN DEVELOPING NEW IDEAS AS IN ESCAPING FROM THE OLD ONES.”

—John Maynard Keynes

Thinking differently than others can be very difficult, whether you’re a businessperson bucking company tradition, a new mother going against old wives’ tales, or a teenager ignoring the popular trends of the day. To go against popular thinking is to draw unwanted negative attention to yourself, especially in the age of social media.

It’s always easier to do what other people do and hope that *they* thought things out beforehand. But if you think that way, you can get stuck in a rut forever.

Many people look for safety and security in popular thinking. They figure that if a lot of people are doing something, then it must be right. It must be a good idea. If it’s accepted by most people, then it probably represents fairness, equality, compassion, and sensitivity, right? Not necessarily.

According to popular thinking…

The earth was the center of the universe.
The sun and planets orbited the earth.
The earth was flat.

Popular thinking loves the status quo. It puts its confidence in the idea of the moment and holds on to it with all its might. **People may say that there’s safety in numbers, but that’s not always true.**

“We must discard the idea that past routine, past ways of doing things, are probably the best ways. On the contrary, we must assume that there is probably a better way to do almost everything. We must stop assuming that a thing which has never been done before probably cannot be done at all.”

—Donald M. Nelson

When you follow the crowd, accept popular thinking without questioning, and don’t try to think differently than others, you will always have to settle for mediocre results.

Popular = Normal = Average = Mediocre

You limit your success when you adhere to popular thinking. It means putting in the least energy just to get by.

If you want uncommon results, you must question common thinking. **You must go against the flow.**

EMBRACE BEING UNPOPULAR

If you want to succeed, you need to think about what’s best, not what’s popular.

Unpopular thinking, even when resulting in success, is largely underrated, unrecognized, and misunderstood.

Unpopular thinking contains the seeds of vision and opportunity.

Unpopular thinking is required for all progress.

The next time you are about to conform to popular thinking on an issue, choose not to blindly follow.

- Stop.
- Think.
- Question.

Is there a better way? Go that direction, no matter what others are doing. Let them call you wrong. Let them call you stupid. Let them say what they will. Be unpopular. But get where you need to go to do what's right and be successful.

VALUE INNOVATIVE THINKERS

One of the best ways to learn how to think differently is to watch, appreciate, and learn from people who think differently. Get to know people from different races, cultures, generations, professions, backgrounds, traditions, and interests. **Move outside of your regular circles.**

You will think like the people you spend the most time with. If you spend time with those who think differently, you will start to think differently. You will break new ground.

"Most of our people in sales and middle management come from businesses with products and services different from ours. That constantly exposes us to new ways of thinking. We also discourage our people from active participation in formal business and trade associations and fraternities because their thinking is quite common. They don't need to spend lots of time thinking the way everyone else in the industry

does."

—Larry Maxwell

QUESTION YOUR OWN THINKING

Whenever you find a way that works, aren't you likely to do it that way again? If your thinking resulted in success once, you're liable to go back to it over and over again. You might even keep doing that after it no longer works!

The greatest enemy to tomorrow's success is today's success.

When was the last time you did something for the first time?

When was the last time you broke your routine, challenged your habits, questioned your tried-and-true methods?

Break your patterns. Drive to work a different way. Order a different dish instead of your favorite at your regular restaurant. Go to a *different* restaurant entirely. Listen to the opinions of the *other* political party—not to argue, but to learn. Read a different kind of book. Take up a difficult hobby. Enlist the help of a different colleague. **Intentionally do something the "wrong" way. Take yourself off autopilot.**

"EVERY TRADITION THAT WAS PUT INTO PLACE WAS ORIGINALLY A GOOD IDEA—AND PERHAPS EVEN REVOLUTIONARY. EVERY TRADITION THAT WAS PUT INTO PLACE MAY NOT BE A GOOD IDEA FOR THE FUTURE."

—Andy Stanley

GET USED TO BEING UNCOMFORTABLE

Following the crowd is comfortable. Being around people who agree with you is comfortable. It's like sitting in an old recliner that has adjusted to all your idiosyncrasies.

Thinking differently than others is uncomfortable. Get used to it.

Be contrary. Go against the flow.
Challenge the status quo. Swim upstream.
Go against the grain. Go uphill in a downhill world.
Be different.
That's the only way to get somewhere new.


4
BELIEVE IN
POSSIBILITIES
MORE THAN
OTHERS

“THE WINNERS IN LIFE THINK CONSTANTLY IN TERMS OF I CAN, I WILL, AND I AM. LOSERS, ON THE OTHER HAND, CONCENTRATE THEIR WAKING THOUGHTS ON WHAT THEY SHOULD HAVE OR WOULD HAVE DONE, OR WHAT THEY CAN’T DO.”

—Denis Waitley

Do you find the idea of believing in possibilities—or “possibility thinking”—unrealistic? Or overly optimistic? Or out of date? If so, consider it in a different way: The will to succeed. Belief in yourself. Confidence in your ability. Faith. But whatever term you call it, the truth is that people who believe they can’t accomplish something, don’t. People who believe they can, can! It’s not guaranteed that they *will*. But at least they have a chance. That’s the power of believing in possibilities.

If you believe you can do something, you have already won much of the battle. If you believe you can’t, then it doesn’t matter how hard you battle, because you’ve already lost.

When you believe you can do something difficult—and you succeed—it opens many doors for you. If you open yourself up to believing in possibilities, you open yourself up to other greater possibilities. **One open door leads to another.**

DREAM BIG DREAMS

No matter what your profession is, believing in possibilities can help you broaden your horizons and dream bigger dreams.

If you embrace possibility thinking, your dreams will go from molehill to

mountain size, and because you believe in possibilities, you put yourself in position to achieve them.

> *“BIG THINKERS ARE SPECIALISTS IN CREATING POSITIVE, FORWARD-LOOKING, OPTIMISTIC PICTURES IN THEIR OWN MINDS AND IN THE MINDS OF OTHERS.”*
>
> —David J. Schwartz

> *“NOTHING IS SO EMBARRASSING AS WATCHING SOMEONE DO SOMETHING THAT YOU SAID COULDN’T BE DONE.”*
>
> —Sam Ewing

If you want to achieve big things, you need good people on your team who believe you can accomplish what you set out to do.

How likely are you to attract them if you don’t believe in yourself and your future?

People who think big and believe in possibilities attract big people to themselves.

Believing in possibilities is contagious. Every time you remove the label of *impossible* from a goal, you raise your potential and the potential of your team. You can’t help but become more confident and think bigger when you’re around other possibility thinkers.

“The real difference between men is energy. A strong will, a settled purpose, an invincible determination can accomplish almost anything; and in this lies the distinction between great men and little men.”

—Thomas Fuller

There is a direct correlation between how much you believe in possibilities and your level of energy for pursuing them. Who gets energized by losing? If you are certain something can’t succeed, how much time and energy are you willing to give it? Nobody happily pursues a lost cause.

You invest yourself in what you believe can succeed. When you embrace possibility thinking, you believe in what you’re doing, and that gives you energy.

If you are naturally negative or cynical, or if you believe that possibility thinking is naive or foolish, then consider this: How many highly successful people do you know who are continually negative? How many people who don’t believe in possibilities do you know who achieve big things? I bet your answer is none.

STOP FOCUSING ON THE IMPOSSIBILITIES

To believe in greater possibilities, change your focus. Stop dwelling on what’s wrong and what’s not possible.

If possibility thinking is new to you, you will need to coach yourself away from negative self-talk. Whenever you start mentally listing all the reasons something can’t be done, stop yourself. There will be time later to face hard

truths. But if you *start* there, your efforts will *end* there.

Instead of telling yourself what's wrong with an idea, ask yourself: What's right about it?

If you can't come up with anything positive, enlist the aid of a friend or family member to help you.

"THE WORD IMPOSSIBLE IS NOT IN MY DICTIONARY."

—Napoleon Bonaparte

"I tell people: If you don't want to get into positive thinking, that's OK. Just eliminate all the negative thoughts from your mind, and whatever's left will be fine."

—Bob Rotella

"I HAVE LEARNED TO USE THE WORD IMPOSSIBLE WITH THE GREATEST OF CAUTION."

—Wernher von Braun

LOOK FOR POSITIVE POSSIBILITIES IN EVERY NEGATIVE SITUATION

Believing in possibilities is more than just refusing to let

yourself be negative. You must become intentional in looking for positive possibilities despite the circumstances. Every situation can be seen as potentially better than it is in the present moment.

It doesn't take a genius IQ or twenty years of experience to find the possibility in every situation. **All it takes is the right attitude, and anybody can cultivate that.**

If you're having trouble seeing positive possibilities, get inspiration from others who don't.

Don't settle for the status quo. Believe for better.

> **"Some men see things as they are and say, 'Why?' I dream things that never were and say, 'Why not?'"**
>
> —George Bernard Shaw, quoted by Robert F. Kennedy

Let's face it: Most people dream too small.
They don't think big enough. Don't become one of those people.

If you believe in possibilities, push yourself to dream bigger, imagine your organization larger, and set your goals beyond your comfort zone, you will be forced to grow.

And that will set you up for even greater possibilities.

> **"Beware of those who stand aloof And greet each venture with reproof; The world would stop if things were run By those who say, 'It can't be done.'"**
>
> —Unknown

“Make your plans as fantastic as you like, because twenty-five years from now, they will seem mediocre. Make your plans ten times as great as you first planned, and twenty-five years from now you will wonder why you did not make them fifty times as great.”

—Henry Curtis


5
STAY FOCUSED
LONGER THAN
OTHERS

“TO BE ABLE TO CONCENTRATE FOR A CONSIDERABLE TIME IS ESSENTIAL TO DIFFICULT ACHIEVEMENT.”

—Bertrand Russell

The ability to focus for long periods of time can bring energy and power to almost anything you do, whether physical or mental. If you’re learning how to pitch a baseball and you want to develop a good curveball, you must focus on your technique, not just throw the ball randomly. If you need to refine the manufacturing process of your product, focused thinking will help you dig down to develop the best method. If you want to solve a difficult mathematics problem, you’ll need focused thinking to break through to the solution.

The greater the challenge, the more focused thinking time you will need to overcome it.

Focused thinking removes distractions and mental clutter so you can concentrate on an issue and think with clarity. If you don’t know what your target is, how will you ever hit it?

Focusing your thinking helps you to know the goal—and to achieve it.

“Knowledge is power only if a man [or woman] knows what facts not to bother with.”

—Robert Staughton Lynd

“THE IMMATURE MIND HOPS FROM ONE THING TO

ANOTHER; THE MATURE MIND SEEKS TO FOLLOW THROUGH."

—Harry Allen Overstreet

LEVERAGE THE TIME WHEN YOU THINK MOST CLEARLY

When are you at your best mentally? At five o'clock in the morning while most of the world is sleeping? An hour or two after you wake up? The end of the day before quitting time? Late at night when others have gone to bed?

Identify that time period and protect it! Don't do inconsequential tasks. Don't schedule meetings. Don't exercise. Don't surf the internet, watch television, or play games. Guard that as your thinking time.

REMOVE DISTRACTIONS

Removing distractions is no small matter in our current culture, but it's critical to sustained focused thinking.

When you want to focus, insulate yourself from distractions. Get away from your phone and email. Make yourself unavailable to others so that you can think without interruptions. Set aside blocks of time to think.

If you lead others, will this create tension? Yes. The best way to deal with it is to give 100 percent of yourself to leading when you're leading and 100 percent to thinking when you're thinking. Wherever you are and whatever you're doing, be present!

“KEEP YOUR MIND OFF THE THINGS YOU DON’T WANT BY KEEPING IT ON THE THINGS YOU DO WANT.”

—W. Clement Stone

“The real path to greatness, it turns out, requires simplicity and diligence. It requires clarity, not instant illumination. It demands each of us to focus on what is vital—and to eliminate all of the extraneous distractions.”

—Jim Collins

IDENTIFY YOUR GOAL

Your mind will not focus until it has a clear objective.
The purpose of identifying a goal is to focus your attention and give you direction, not to narrowly define a solution. Strive for open-ended creative focus.

It may help you to write out your goal. But be focused.

“If you can’t write your idea on the back of my calling card, you don’t have a clear idea.”

—David Belasco

DON'T MULTITASK

Because of the fast pace of our culture, you might be tempted to multitask. Don't do it. Switching from task to task can cause you to lose up to 40 percent efficiency. It breaks your focus.

"Concentration is the secret of strength in politics, in war, in trade, in short in all management of human affairs."

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

If you're trying to accomplish many things at the same time, you'll get more done by focusing on one task at a time, *not* by switching constantly from one task to another.

—Research conducted by Joshua S. Rubinstein, David E. Meyer, and Jeffrey E. Evans

It's one thing to focus on a task.

It's another to focus *your life*.

When you bring sustained focus to that, you gain one of the greatest edges in life. It will take you to another level entirely.

IDENTIFY YOUR PRIORITIES

Where should you be focusing your time and energy? What are your

strengths? How can you use them for yourself, your family, your career, and your fellow human beings?

Use the 80/20 rule. Give 80 percent of your effort to the top 20 percent (most important) of priorities in your life.

DISCOVER YOUR GIFTS

If you're highly self-aware, this is an easy thing to do. If not, do some digging. Take a personality profile such as DiSC, RightPath, Enneagram, or Myers-Briggs. Take an inventory such as StrengthsFinder. Talk to people who know you best.
Where do you shine?

DEVELOP YOUR DREAM

What gives you great joy? If you could change anything in your world to make it better, what would it be? What productive activity would you do even if you never got paid for it? Answers to these questions point to your dream. Pursue it!

As you get older, become more experienced, and go further, your dream should evolve and become more focused.

"He did each single thing, as if he did nothing else."

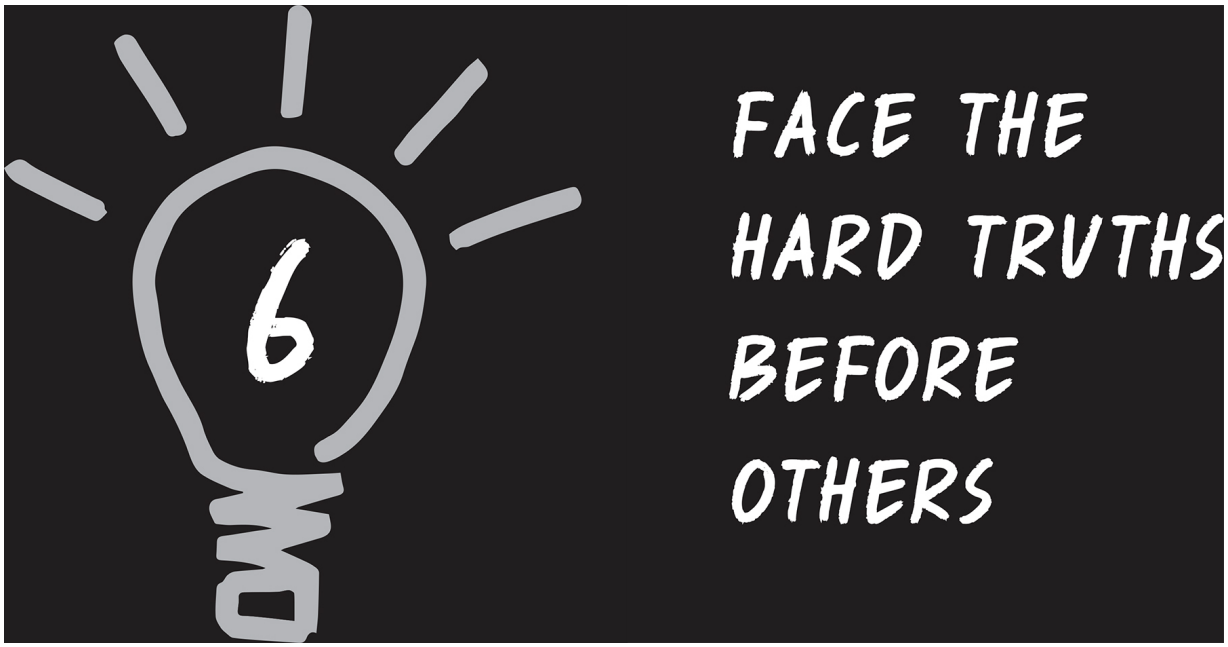
—Charles Dickens in *Dombey and Son*

For everything you gain in life, you also lose something. As you focus your thinking and your life, you will learn:

You can't do everything

You can’t go everywhere
You can’t know everyone

That’s not only OK, it’s actually good. **The more focused your life, the greater your edge.**


6
FACE THE
HARD TRUTHS
BEFORE
OTHERS

“THE FIRST RESPONSIBILITY OF A LEADER IS TO DEFINE REALITY.”

—Max De Pree

Do you avoid facing hard truths? If you want to be successful, you need to be willing to do it. If you lead other people, at work or at home, you have a *responsibility* to do it.

Facing hard truths gives you credibility as a leader. Realistic thinking helps your team buy into you and your vision. Leaders who are continually surprised by the unexpected quickly lose credibility with their team. Leaders who examine hard truths earn respect.

Facing hard truths isn’t pretty. But you can learn to appreciate realistic thinking because of what it can do for you.

Hard truths don’t go away just because you won’t look at them.

“Our society finds truth too strong a medicine to digest undiluted. In its purest form, truth is not a polite tap on the shoulder. It is a howling reproach.”

—Ted Koppel

“MEN OCCASIONALLY STUMBLE OVER THE TRUTH, BUT MOST PICK THEMSELVES UP AND HURRY OFF AS IF NOTHING HAD HAPPENED.”

—Winston Churchill

Looking at your life and career realistically helps you identify your target and develop a game plan.
Actions always have consequences; realistic thinking helps you determine what those consequences could be.

If you're not willing to face hard truths, here's the good news: You are probably very positive and have a high degree of hope. Here's the bad news: Hope is not a strategy for success.

When you know your goal and you see that it's threatened, you become better at seeing what's important. It clarifies your thinking and sharpens your decision-making.

> *"UNTIL THOUGHT IS LINKED WITH PURPOSE THERE IS NO INTELLIGENT ACCOMPLISHMENT."*
>
> —James Allen

WHAT'S THE WORST-CASE SCENARIO?

That's one of the questions you need to ask yourself if you want to face the hard truths before others do. The essence of facing hard truths is discovering, picturing, and examining worst-case scenarios.

You need to think about worst-case possibilities whether you are running a business, leading a department, managing a nonprofit, coaching a team, or planning your personal finances. Your goal isn't to be negative or to *expect* the worst, just to be ready for it in case it happens. That way, you give yourself the best chance for positive results—no matter what.

If you picture the worst case and examine it honestly, then you really have experienced a reality check.
You're ready for almost anything.

WHAT IF?

Ask yourself…

- What if sales fall short of projections?
- What if revenue hits rock bottom? (Not an optimist's rock bottom. *Real* rock bottom!)
- What if we don't win the account?
- What if the client doesn't pay us?
- What if we lose our biggest client?
- What if we lose our best player?
- What if our best player gets sick?
- What if we have to do the job short-handed?
- What if all the colleges reject my application?
- What if I don't get the job?
- What if the market goes belly-up?
- What if the volunteers quit?
- What if nobody shows up?

• What if my worst nightmare comes true?

If any of those things happen, what will result? And what will you do?

ALWAYS DO YOUR HOMEWORK

When it comes to realistic thinking, the whole process begins with doing your homework. **When dealing with an issue, you must first get the facts.**

Realism increases as you get closer.

It doesn't matter how sound your thinking is if you're basing it on faulty data or assumptions. **You can't think well in the absence of facts or with poor information.**

> *"IDEALISM INCREASES IN DIRECT PROPORTION TO ONE'S DISTANCE FROM THE PROBLEM."*
>
> —John Galsworthy

"When you approach a problem, strip yourself of preconceived opinions and prejudice, assemble and learn the facts of the situation, make the decision which seems to you to be the most honest, and then stick to it."

—Chester Bowles

ANOTHER KIND OF HOMEWORK

You can learn a lot by finding out what others have done in similar circumstances. To solve problems, your thinking doesn't necessarily have to be original. It just has to be solid. And work!

Why not learn all that you can from good thinkers, innovators, and problem solvers who have faced similar situations in the past? Some of your best thinking will have already been done by others!

WEIGH THE PROS AND CONS

Facing hard truths rarely comes down to a matter of simply choosing the course of action with the greatest number of pros, because all pros and cons do not carry equal weight. But that's not the value of the exercise anyway. The value is that it helps you dig into the facts, examine an issue from all angles, and really count the cost of a possible course of action.

"Deliberate with caution, but act with decision; and yield with graciousness, or oppose with firmness."

—Charles Hole

When you have thought through the worst that can happen in a situation, and you have developed contingency plans to meet the challenge, you become more confident and secure. It's reassuring to know that you are unlikely to be surprised by anything because you have thought things through.

- You can minimize the downside risk.
- You can find gaps between what you desire and what really is.
- You can align your resources with your objectives.

Disappointment is the difference between expectations and reality. Facing hard truths minimizes the difference between the two because it sets your expectations and gives you a better chance of achieving the reality you desire.

“The value of an idea lies in the using of it.”

—Thomas Edison


7
REFLECT
AND LEARN
MORE OFTEN
THAN OTHERS

“WE OUGHT NOT TO LOOK BACK, UNLESS IT IS TO DERIVE USEFUL LESSONS FROM PAST ERRORS—AND FOR THE PURPOSE OF PROFITING BY DEAR BOUGHT EXPERIENCE.”

—George Washington

The pace of life in our culture does not encourage anyone to stop and reflect.

But without reflection, we take things for granted. We lose perspective. And we lose opportunities to learn. As a result, we don’t grow as much as we could, achieve as much as we could, take our potential as far as we could, or succeed the way we could.

Reflective thinking enables you to distance yourself from the intense emotions of particularly good or bad experiences and see them more objectively.

- Thrills of the past can be seen in the light of emotional maturity.
- Tragedies can be examined in the light of truth and logic.
- Failures can be analyzed to find solutions.

Reflecting and learning can help you process emotions and help you stop carrying around a bunch of negative emotional baggage.

HOW DO YOU EVALUATE PAST DECISIONS?

Have you ever been prompted to make snap judgments or rushed decisions

and later wondered if you did the right thing?

Reflecting and learning afterward can give you clarity and help you diffuse doubt. It can give you confidence for future decisions because you've got road markers from having mentally been there before.

Reflecting and learning empower you to put ideas and experiences into an accurate context. **Without reflection, it can be very difficult to see the big picture.**

> *"TO DOUBT EVERYTHING OR TO BELIEVE EVERYTHING ARE TWO EQUALLY CONVENIENT SOLUTIONS; BOTH DISPENSE WITH THE NECESSITY OF REFLECTION."*
>
> —Jules Henri Poincaré

> **"We should be careful to get out of an experience only the wisdom that is in it and stop there lest we be like the cat that sits down on a hot stove lid. She will never sit down on a hot stove lid again and that is well but also she will never sit down on a cold one anymore."**
>
> —Mark Twain

Experience has value. Job experience. Life experience. Yet, experience alone will not add value to your life. What has value is the insight you gain from reflecting on that experience and learning from it. Reflective thinking turns experience into insight.

Any experience becomes valuable when it informs or equips us to meet new experiences.

> **“Experience is a jewel, and it had need be so, for it is often purchased at an infinite rate.”**
>
> —William Shakespeare

FIND A GOOD PLACE TO THINK

One of the best things you can do for yourself is to find a place where thinking and reflecting come easily.

Wherever you pick must be easy to get to, otherwise you won’t use it. It must also provide quiet and solitude. Distraction and reflection simply don’t mix. It’s not the kind of thing you can do well near a television, in an open office, while your phone is pinging you, or with children in the same room.

As you find a place to think your thoughts, your thoughts will find a place in you.

SET ASIDE TIME FOR REFLECTION

For most people, reflection and self-examination don’t come naturally. Is that true for you? Do you find reflection dull? Do you have a hard time staying focused? Is it emotionally difficult?

Set aside time and break through the challenges. If you don’t, reflecting and learning won’t become part of your life. And you will leave huge amounts of your potential untapped.

“The unexamined life is not worth living.”

—Socrates

CREATE A REGULAR RHYTHM OF REFLECTION

Ideally, you should plan at least a few minutes every day for reflecting. If you find that difficult to achieve, reflect at least weekly. Ask yourself…

- What did I learn? How and when should I apply it?
- Did I add value to someone? How?
- Did I lead well and set a good example? How?
- Did I express love to the important people in my life? How?
- What did I encounter that I need to give more thinking time to? When will I do it?

Asking yourself these questions will help you stay disciplined and accountable for how you spend your time.

You may want to set aside a day every *month* or *quarter* to reflect, and several days at the end of the *year* to think back about the previous twelve months.

Gather your calendar and to-do lists from the previous time frame and spend time reviewing them. Write your impressions about the year just past. Write down:

- Family highlights
- Personal milestones

- Business or career highlights
- Low points
- Significant people moments

As you reflect on how you spent a year of your life, learn from your successes and mistakes, discover what to repeat, determine what to avoid, and set goals for the coming year.

By visiting past situations in your mind, you can think with greater understanding. Reflective thinking is like the slow cooker of the mind. It encourages your thoughts to simmer until they're done.

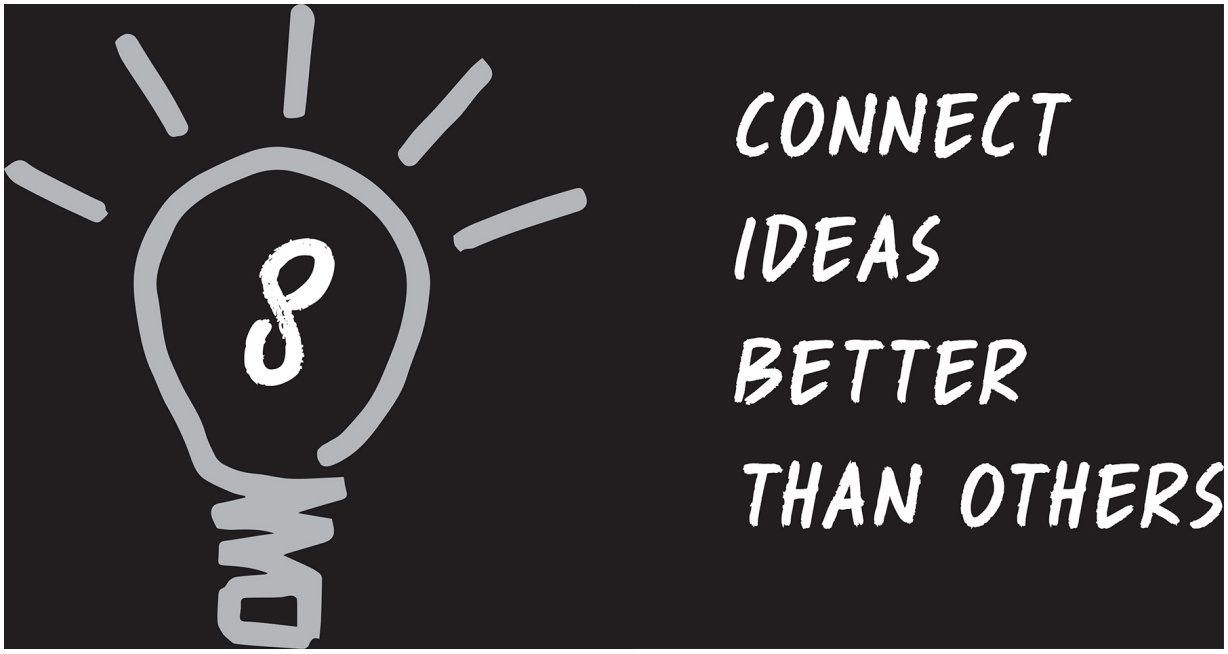
LET YOUR REFLECTION AND LEARNING LEAD TO ACTION

Writing down the good thoughts that come out of your reflective thinking has value. But nothing helps you to grow like putting your thoughts into action. To do that, you must be intentional.

Every time you stop to reflect and learn, ask yourself two questions:

What can I learn?
What must I do?

Make the action as specific as possible, schedule it, and follow through. Do that, and you will have an edge over nearly everyone you know.


CONNECT
IDEAS
BETTER
THAN OTHERS

> *“YOU CAN’T USE UP CREATIVITY. THE MORE YOU USE, THE MORE YOU HAVE. TOO OFTEN CREATIVITY IS SMOTHERED RATHER THAN NURTURED. THERE HAS TO BE A CLIMATE IN WHICH NEW WAYS OF THINKING, PERCEIVING, QUESTIONING ARE ENCOURAGED.”*
>
> —Maya Angelou

Why do people continue to be fascinated by Leonardo da Vinci, even though he has been dead for more than five hundred years? Because few people in history were better than he was at creating connections between ideas. His creativity was and still is magnetic.

Creative thinking is intelligence having fun. If anyone could be said to have had fun with his intelligence, it was Leonardo. The diversity of his ideas and expertise was incredible. He was a painter, architect, sculptor, anatomist, musician, inventor, and engineer. People must have had him in mind when the term *Renaissance man* was coined.

Just as people were drawn to Leonardo during his lifetime and for centuries afterward, they are drawn to creative people today. **If you cultivate creativity, other people will be drawn to you.**

Creativity is being able to see what everybody else has seen

but

think what nobody else has thought

so

you can do what nobody else has done.

> *“CREATIVITY IS ESPECIALLY EXPRESSED IN THE ABILITY TO MAKE CONNECTIONS, TO MAKE ASSOCIATIONS, TO TURN THINGS AROUND AND EXPRESS THEM IN A NEW WAY.”*
>
> —Tim Hansen

WHAT KIND OF CREATIVITY DO YOU POSSESS?

Every human being is born creative. The act of learning as a child comes from creating connections between ideas and objects.

Think about the kinds of connections and creative ideas you’ve harnessed before:

- Sometimes creative thinking is invention, where you break new ground.
- Other times it’s about innovation, which helps you do old things in a new way.
- Often it requires you to connect the unconnected in a way others haven’t before.
- Sometimes it makes you able to take something to a new level of excellence.

No matter how you choose to create, it means you see the world through sufficiently new eyes so that you see new solutions.

Don’t believe you’re not creative. Open your mind to innovation. You can recapture that spark from when you were a child. And when you do, you will have an edge over all those other people who are convinced they lack creativity.

VALUE IDEAS

Creativity is about having ideas—lots of them.

You will have ideas only if you value ideas.

> **“Highly creative people are dedicated to ideas. They don’t rely on their talent alone; they rely on their discipline. Their imagination is like a second skin. They know how to manipulate it to its fullest.”**
>
> —Annette Moser-Wellman

EXPLORE OPTIONS

If you want to create connections between ideas, explore options. **Exploring possibilities will help stimulate your imagination.**

> **“Imagination is more important than knowledge.”**
>
> —Albert Einstein

EMBRACE AMBIGUITY

Creative people resist the temptation to stamp out uncertainty. We all see inconsistencies and gaps in life.
Don’t try to close them. Explore them!

> **“It is the dull man who is always sure, and the sure man who is always dull.”**
>
> —H. L. Mencken

WELCOME FAILURE

Being creative is risky. By virtue of doing something new, you are likely to fail. So what?

Embrace it!

The difference between average people and achieving people is their perception of and response to failure. The more creative you want to be, the more important it is for you to be unafraid of failure.

> **“An essential aspect of creativity is not being afraid to fail.”**
>
> —Edwin Pond Parker

Being creative requires a willingness to look stupid. It means going out on a limb—knowing that the limb often breaks! You must know these things and still keep searching for new ideas. And you can’t let the ideas that *don’t* work prevent you from coming up with more ideas that *do* work.

Harness that anxiety to make you more creative. And when you fail, shake it off and move on.

“Anxiety is the essential condition of intellectual and artistic creation.”

—Charles Frankel

GET OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE

Become an out-of-the-box person. Leave your comfort zone. Break out from your own history and personal limitations to experience creative breakthroughs.

“If you obey all the rules, you miss all the fun.”

—Katharine Hepburn

Expose yourself to new paradigms. Travel to new places. Explore other cultures, countries, and traditions. Find out how people very different from you live and think.

Read outside of your favorite subjects and genres. Meet people outside of your profession, neighborhood, and political party. And ask questions—lots of questions, of yourself and of others.

Making connections between ideas is largely a matter of asking the right questions.

“If you don’t ask, ‘Why this?’ often enough, somebody will ask, ‘Why you?’”

—Tom Hirschfield

Ask yourself…

Why must it be done *this* way?
What is the root problem?
What are the underlying issues?
What does this remind me of?
What is the opposite?
What metaphor or symbol helps to explain this?
Why is this important?
What's the *hardest* or *most expensive* way to do it?
Who has a different perspective on this?
What happens if we *don't* do it at all?

Being creative is challenging the process.

CREATE A SAFE HAVEN FOR IDEAS AND INNOVATION

Creativity is contagious. Have you ever noticed what happens during a good brainstorming session? One person throws out an idea. Another person uses it as a springboard to discover another idea. Someone else takes it in yet another, even better direction. Then somebody grabs hold of it and takes it to a whole new level. The interplay of ideas can be electric.

"There is a correlation between the creative and the screwball. So we must suffer the screwball gladly."

—Kingman Brewster Jr

Negative environments are responsible for the death of thousands of great ideas every minute.

Wherever you have influence, create an environment that welcomes creative thinking. Such areas are greenhouses where ideas can seed, sprout, and flourish.

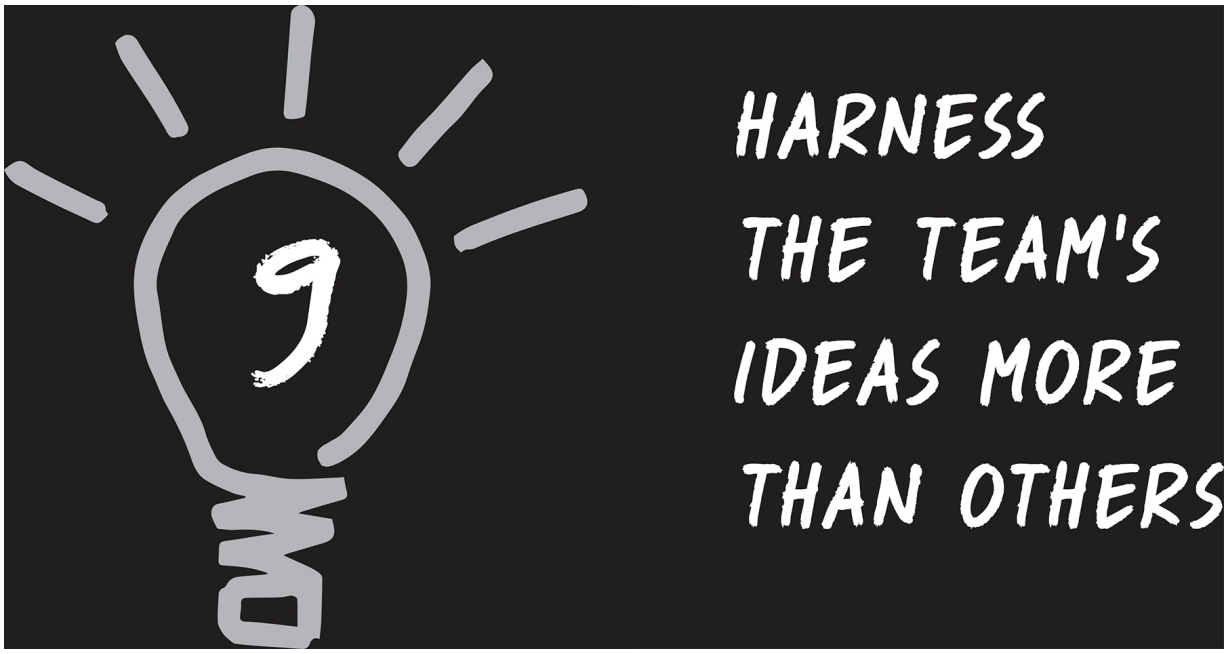
The more open you can make your environment, the greater the potential for creative thinking.

“A new idea is delicate. It can be killed by a sneer or a yawn; it can be stabbed to death by a quip and worried to death by a frown on the right man’s brow.”

—Ovid

“STUDIES OF CREATIVITY SUGGEST THAT THE BIGGEST SINGLE VARIABLE OF WHETHER OR NOT EMPLOYEES WILL BE CREATIVE IS WHETHER THEY PERCEIVE THEY HAVE PERMISSION.”

—David Hills


9
HARNESS
THE TEAM'S
IDEAS MORE
THAN OTHERS

“TO ACCEPT GOOD ADVICE IS BUT TO INCREASE ONE’S OWN ABILITY.”

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

As much as you might be tempted to think you know enough to do whatever is necessary to succeed, you have blind spots and areas of weakness and inexperience. **Everyone does.** That’s why you need to harness your team’s ideas, not just rely on your own.

There’s a synergy that comes from working together with other members of your team, a synergy that gives you an advantage over others who fail to work and think collaboratively.

Your team members have had experiences you haven’t. They have learned things you haven’t. They have strengths you lack, insights you will never have, perspectives that are unique.
When you harness the team’s ideas, you bring all of that to the table.

We tend to think of great thinkers and innovators as soloists. They’re not. **Innovative thinking doesn’t occur in a vacuum.**

If you combine the thoughts you have and the thoughts others have, you will come up with thoughts none of you have ever had!

“None of us is as smart as all of us.”

—Ken Blanchard

“Many times a day I realize how much my own outer

and inner life is built upon the labors of my fellow men, both living and dead, and how earnestly I must exert myself in order to give in return as much as I have received."

—Albert Einstein

A team that works together to share ideas thinks stronger, learns faster, and works more creatively. It yields a higher return. There is a compounding effect when teams practice shared thinking.

A great thought is rarely birthed from a good thought. It usually comes from several good thoughts. When three, four, or five good thoughts come together from the synergy of a team, you always have the potential for a great thought.

In education, the emphasis is often on being able to come up with the right answer on your own. The environment is competitive. Working together to create good answers is considered cheating.

If you have been trained to avoid thinking with others and harnessing a team's idea, retrain yourself. Think collaboratively. **All answers improve when you make the best use of everyone's best thinking.**

Start by believing others have ideas to offer. Everything others say has some kind of value.

"HE THAT IS TAUGHT ONLY BY HIMSELF HAS A FOOL FOR A MASTER."

—Ben Jonson

OVERCOME BARRIERS TO SHARING IDEAS

Are you an emotionally secure person? Are you open-minded, receptive, and enthusiastic when people share better ideas than yours? Or do you feel threatened? If you have insecurities, you need to work on them. **It takes a secure person to be open to others' ideas.**

Do you value other people highly? Do you believe they have good ideas and a perspective worth listening to? If you don't, you need to **change your perspective**. You won't value the ideas of people if you don't value and respect them.

Do you value collaboration? If not, you need to **change your mindset**. You must open yourself up to the *concept* of sharing ideas before you will engage in the *process* of sharing and listening to ideas.

"I sincerely believe that the word relationships is the key to the prospect of a decent world. It seems abundantly clear that every problem you will have—in your family, in your work, in our nation, or in this world—is essentially a matter of relationships, of interdependence."

—Clarence Francis

GET THE RIGHT PEOPLE AROUND THE TABLE

The greatest secret to harnessing the team's ideas is inviting

the right people to the table. Everyone you invite should bring something to the table:

- The desire to positively interact with others
- The ability to add value to another person's thoughts
- The maturity to be silent when necessary
- The resilience to handle quick changes in the conversation
- An appreciation of others' strengths where they are weak
- An understanding of the best potential contribution
- The ability to bring out the best thinking in others
- The desire to put the team before themselves
- A willingness to take responsibility for the decisions that are made

Don't choose your brainstorming partners based on friendship, circumstances, or convenience. Be strategic. Who you invite to the table makes all the difference.

Successful teams and organizations work together to harness the team's ideas. They practice shared thinking. If you lead an organization, department, or team, then you can't afford to be without people who are good at shared thinking.

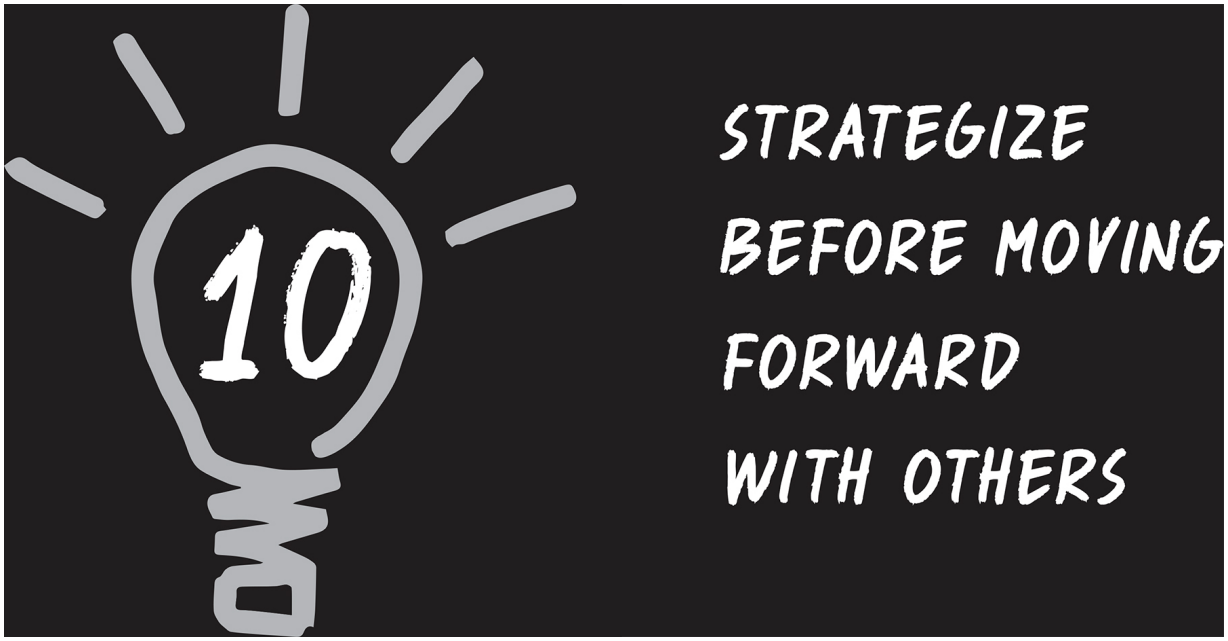
"Always be on the lookout for ideas. Be completely indiscriminate as to the source. Get ideas from customers, children, competitors, other industries, or cab drivers. It doesn't matter who thought of an idea."

—Jeffrey J. Fox

VALUE COOPERATION MORE THAN COMPETITION

If you're a leader, you're probably competitive. You like to win. There's nothing wrong with that—as long as your desire is to lead your team to victory, not just yourself.

Shift your thinking from *competing* to *completing*. When you share ideas, focus on helping the team, not getting ahead personally. Bring people together to share their thoughts, and make sure the best idea always wins. **That encourages everyone to share their ideas, and it helps the team win.**


10
STRATEGIZE
BEFORE MOVING
FORWARD
WITH OTHERS

“THE [PERSON] WHO IS PREPARED HAS HIS BATTLE HALF FOUGHT.”

—Miguel de Cervantes

Strategy is the bridge that links where you are to where you want to be. It gives you direction and credibility today and increases your potential for success tomorrow. It is like saddling your dreams before you ride them.

Strategic thinking takes complex issues and long-term objectives, which can be very difficult to address, and breaks them down into manageable sizes.

Anything becomes simpler when it has a plan!

IDENTIFY THE REAL ISSUE OR PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES

The first step in developing a strategy is always to identify the problem.

Too many people jump to solutions, and as a result, they end up solving the wrong problem. To expose the real issues, ask probing questions that help you:

- Identify your current situation
- Collect information—and keep collecting even after you think you’ve identified the issue
- Challenge your assumptions—you have many which may be biasing

your viewpoint
- Set aside any personal agenda that may be clouding your judgment
- Put off final conclusions

Discovering your real situation and objectives is a major part of the battle. **Once the real issues are identified, the solutions are often simpler.**

"Before it can be solved, a problem must be clearly defined."

—William Feather

"Strategy is first trying to understand where you sit in today's world. Not where you wish you were or where you hoped you would be, but where you are. Then it's trying to understand where you want to be five years out. Finally, it's assessing the realistic chances of getting from here to there."

—Jack Welch

BREAK THE ISSUE OR CHALLENGE DOWN INTO SMALLER PARTS

The first step in strategic thinking is to break down an issue into smaller, more manageable parts so that you can focus on them more effectively. How you do it is not as important as just doing it.

"Yard by yard, life is hard; but inch by inch, it's a cinch."

—Robert Schuller

How you break down an issue is up to you, whether it's by function, timetable, responsibility, purpose, or some other method. The point is that you need to break it down. **Only one person in a million can juggle the whole thing in his mind and think strategically to create solid, viable plans.**

"NOTHING IS PARTICULARLY HARD IF YOU DIVIDE IT INTO SMALL JOBS."

—Henry Ford

LOOK FOR THE WHY BEFORE DEVELOPING THE HOW

Before developing your strategy, add another layer to your discovery process by asking *why* a situation has occurred or a problem has happened.

Asking why helps you dig deeper into root causes.
It also helps you open your mind to possibilities and opportunities.

"Thousands of engineers can design bridges, calculate strains and stresses, and draw up specifications for machines, but the great engineer is the man who can tell whether the bridge or the machine should be built at all, where it should be built, and when."

—Eugene G. Grace

DEVELOP YOUR STRATEGIC PLAN

Good strategy is precise. Sloppy or generic thinking is your enemy. Try to match your strategy specifically to the problem or issue. Strategy is never a one-size-fits-all proposition.

How you approach the planning process depends on your profession and the type of challenge you're tackling. But use everything at your command: information, research, data, and history.

Bring together the best thinkers on your team, your most creative people, and those closest to the problem.

Start with the obvious. That promotes unity and develops consensus. Use that to build momentum, initiate creativity, and tackle the more complex.

Be sure to consider whatever resources you have. How much time do you have? How much money? What kinds of materials, supplies, or inventory? What are your other assets? What liabilities or obligations will come into play? Which people on the team can make an impact? **Bring whatever you can into play.**

"Successful generals make plans to fit circumstances, but do not try to create circumstances to fit plans."

—George S. Patton

PUT THE RIGHT PEOPLE IN THE

RIGHT PLACES

Even the best strategy won't help you if you don't take into account the people who must implement it.

Look at what happens if you miscalculate:

Wrong person—problems instead of potential
Wrong place—frustration instead of fulfillment
Wrong plan—grief instead of growth

Everything comes together when you put together all three elements: the right person, the right place, and the right plan.

> *"THE WILL TO WIN IS WORTHLESS IF YOU DO NOT HAVE THE WILL TO PREPARE."*
>
> —Thane Yost

> *"STRATEGIC THINKING IS LIKE SHOWERING, YOU HAVE TO KEEP DOING IT."*
>
> —Olan Hendrix

And then be prepared to do it all over again.

The one with the plan is the one with the power. Employees want to follow the boss who has a good business plan. Volunteers want to join the leader who has a good strategic plan. Children are secure with the parent who has a plan for the family. If you strategize before moving forward, others will listen to you, and they will want to follow you.


11
CONSIDER THE
WELL-BEING
OF OTHERS

“THERE IS NO MORE NOBLE OCCUPATION IN THE WORLD THAN TO ASSIST ANOTHER HUMAN BEING—TO HELP SOMEONE SUCCEED.”

—Alan Loy McGinnis

Few things in life are as personally rewarding as helping other people. When you are concerned about the well-being of others and you spend your day unselfishly serving people, you can lay your head down at night with no regrets and sleep soundly.

When you get outside of yourself and make a contribution to others, you really begin to live.

“Getters generally don’t get happiness; givers get it.”

—Charles H. Burr

If you can cultivate a spirit of generosity, you will develop an appreciation for life and an understanding of the higher values of life.

There is no life as empty as the self-centered life.
There is no life as centered as the self-empty life.

If you want to improve your world, then focus your attention on helping others.

“We cannot hold a torch to light another’s path without brightening our own.”

—Ben Sweetland

Unselfishly considering the well-being of others will help you cultivate all of life's other virtues. Why? Because giving unselfishly is so difficult. It goes against the grain of human nature. But by learning to think unselfishly and becoming a giver, you will develop love, gratitude, respect, patience, and discipline.

The act of adding value to others will be the thing that adds value to you!

"You can have everything in life you want, if you will just help enough other people get what they want."

—Zig Ziglar

"He has achieved success who has lived well, laughed often and loved much; who has gained the respect of intelligent men and the love of little children; who has filled his niche and accomplished his task; who has left the world better than he found it whether by an improved poppy, a perfect poem, or a rescued soul; who has never lacked appreciation of earth's beauty or failed to express it; who has always looked for the best in others and given them the best he had; whose life was an inspiration; whose memory a benediction."

—Bessie Anderson Stanley

Take responsibility for adding value to others in their personal development. Start with the people closest to you.
In every relationship, think about how you can invest in the other person.

Live so that you create win-win situations every day. Why?

When others win but you lose—they win once.
When you win but others lose—you win once.
When both you and others lose—no one wins.
When both you and others win—everyone wins many times.

The best relationships are win-win. And if you're thinking about the well-being of others, make sure they win first. **That's unselfish thinking, and that makes all the difference.**

The hardest thing for most people is fighting their natural tendency to put themselves first.

If you want to become less selfish in your thinking, then you need to stop thinking about your wants and begin focusing on others' needs.

"What seems to be generosity is often no more than disguised ambition, which overlooks a small interest in order to secure a great one."

—François de La Rochefoucauld

Every day, Benjamin Franklin asked himself two questions. When he got up in the morning, he would ask, "What good am I going to do today?" And before he went to bed, he would ask, "What good have I done today?"

Ask and answer those questions with selflessness and integrity, and you will remain focused on the well-being of others.

“People with humility don’t think less of themselves; they just think of themselves less.”

—Ken Blanchard and Norman Vincent Peale

Life is not about you!

Focus on helping people who cannot receive anything in return. If you can, help without receiving recognition for it. There are spiritual, mental, and emotional benefits that come from uplifting the well-being of others anonymously.

Put yourself in a position where you can see people’s needs and do something about them.

“Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity.”

—Horace Mann

“Give to everyone who asks. I firmly believe that our purpose in life is to try to make a difference in the lives of those around us… I give something—no matter how small—to everyone who asks me… It’s fun, especially if you don’t do it out of obligation. Believe me, it will change the way you think about yourself and about your money.”

—Tod Barnhart

“Learn, earn, return—these are the three phases of life. The first third should be devoted to education, the second third to building a career and making a living, and the last third to giving back to others—returning something in gratitude. Each state seems to be a preparation for the next one.”

—Jack Balousek

If you achieve success, you can leave an inheritance for others. But when you consider the welfare of others, you can create a legacy in others.

“It is not the style of clothes one wears, neither the kind of automobile one drives, nor the amount of money one has in the bank, that counts. These mean nothing. It is simply service that measures success.”

—George Washington Carver



Becoming a good thinker isn't overly complicated.

It's a discipline. And like most disciplines, it can be cultivated and refined.

To help you make it a strong and regular part of your life…

FIND A PLACE TO THINK YOUR THOUGHTS

Designate a special place to think. If you go to your thinking place, and you expect to generate good thoughts there, then eventually you will come up with some. Do that often enough, and you will make it a habit.

FIND A PLACE TO SHAPE YOUR THOUGHTS

Rarely do ideas come fully formed and completely worked out.

Most of the time, they need to be shaped until they have substance.

Hold your ideas up to strong scrutiny. Ask questions about your ideas. Fine-tune them. Write them out.

As you shape your thoughts and write them down, you really find out whether an idea has potential or not.

> *"LEARNING TO WRITE IS LEARNING TO THINK. YOU DON'T KNOW ANYTHING CLEARLY UNLESS YOU CAN STATE IT IN WRITING."*
>
> —S. I. Hayakawa

FIND A PLACE TO STRETCH YOUR THOUGHTS

Every thought has the potential to become something great. The goal of finding a place to stretch your thoughts is to find that potential. That needs to be done with other people.

The Right **Thought** + the Right **People** in the Right **Environment** at the Right **Time** for the Right **Reason** = the **Right Result**

Finding a place to stretch your thoughts gives you a chance to take that idea as far as it can go.

FIND A PLACE TO FLY YOUR THOUGHTS

Any idea that remains only an idea doesn’t make a great impact. The truth is that the real power of thinking comes when it goes from abstraction to action.

If you are able to develop the discipline of good thinking and turn it into a lifetime habit, then you will be productive all of your life.

“Think like a man of action, act like a man of thought.”

—Henri-Louis Bergson

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