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THINKING

Why is it important to think from a variety of perspectives?

What are the various ways people use their intelligence?

What kinds of superpowers can you harness by thinking differently?

Accomplishing something big often requires new approaches to thinking. An observation usually attributed to Albert Einstein posits, “We can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.” And this of course makes perfect sense. So often, we adopt a particular perspective at work, in our home lives, and in our studies, and that outlook effectively walls out any approach that doesn’t fit into that viewpoint. But there are two key problems with that. One is that all perspectives should be challenged on a regular basis to confirm that they are still viable. For example, so often when a company goes out of business, it’s later shown that it was so completely mired in one approach to the marketplace that it wasn’t capable of seeing that the audience they were targeting was no longer as responsive as they once were. The second problem a fixed perspective faces is that challenges are often the product

of a particular type of thinking, and the answer can be found only by bringing a fresh approach to the table.

Why do most of us have a restricted range of thinking? I think the answer is the same as it was when we were discussing focus: because we somehow missed out on “thinking class” when we were in school. Fortunately, it’s never too late to attend that class, and I’m going to enroll you in it right now.

THE THINKING HATS

Dr. Edward de Bono devised the concept of the “six thinking hats” as a tool for getting out of whatever rut of thinking one might be mired in.¹ Regularly used to help groups problem-solve in a more productive way, it is easily adaptable by any individuals hoping to keep their thinking fresh. The core notion is to separate thinking

into six distinctly defined functions by progressively donning a series of metaphorical hats:

- You put on a **white hat** when you’re in information-gathering mode. At this point, your focus is on collecting details and getting all the facts you’ll need to address whatever issue you’re trying to address. To help you remember this, think of a white lab coat.
- You switch to a **yellow hat** to bring optimism to your thinking. Here, you’re trying to identify the positives in any problem or challenge you’re facing, highlighting the value inherently in place. As your memory tip here, think of the yellow sun.
- Next, you’ll wear a **black hat** to pivot from looking at the good side of the challenge to facing its difficulties and pitfalls. This is where you’ll come face to face with the

consequences of failing to successfully address a problem. Memory tip: Think about a judge's robe.

- Once you've done that, don your **red hat** to allow emotion to come into play. This is the point where you can let your feelings about the problem come to the surface, and maybe even express fears. This is also where you can allow speculation and intuition to enter into the conversation. To remember this, think about a red heart.
- Now it's time for the **green hat**. When you're wearing this hat, you're in creativity mode. You've looked at the problem analytically and you've looked at it emotionally. Now ask yourself, what new ideas can you bring to what you already know about the problem? How can you come at it in a way you haven't

considered before? Memory tip: Think about green grass.

- Finally, wear the **blue hat** to be in management mode, and make sure you've addressed your agenda productively and gone through the process in a way that benefits from all the other hats you've worn. Often, organizations will start with the blue hat to set goals for a meeting and then put it on again at the end. Even if you're using the six hats by yourself, this is something you might want to consider. To remember this, think about blue skies.

The De Bono approach to problem-solving is an ingenious and elegantly organized method for getting the most from your thinking. At its core, it is a neatly defined way of looking at an issue from all sides. First, you make sure you're clear on what you need to address. Then, you determine that you have all the facts in front



of you. Next, you make sure you're dealing with the issue with a positive perspective. Then, you get real about the challenges you're facing, and allow yourself to feel what you're feeling about it. After this, you allow yourself to attack the problem from perspectives you might not have considered before, letting your imagination run free. And then you circle back to make sure you've addressed what you set out to address during this session.

Look at how many different ways you've used your brain for this one task. You've been analytical, you've been emotional, and you've been creative. You've explored the sunny side and the dark side. And you've almost certainly attacked the issue with tools you don't automatically use every single day (though you might from now on). Einstein would be proud of you.

KWIK START

Think of a problem you need to be solved right now. It can be anything from "How can I get that job," to "How can I communicate better with my family?" Use the Six Thinking Hats model to run through the different perspectives of looking at the problem you're trying to solve.

HOW ARE YOU SMART?

Why is it important for us to have tools to help us think in different ways? Because people usually have a dominant way of using their intelligence. Dr. Howard Gardner, professor of cognition and education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, has studied intelligence extensively and has identified eight distinct forms of intelligence:²

1. **Spatial** : This is someone who usually thinks from the perspective of the space around them. Airline pilots tend to be spatial thinkers, but so do people who excel at playing chess, as both require an innate understanding of how things fit into space. The artist Claude Monet comes to mind as another example because of his remarkable use of space in his paintings.
2. **Bodily-Kinesthetic**: Someone with a dominance of this form of intelligence uses their body as a form of expression or problem-solving. Gymnasts have refined bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, as do drummers. The first name that jumps into my head when I think of this form of intelligence is Venus Williams, who expressed her genius with her body on a tennis court in ways that very few ever have.
3. **Musical** : This is a person with a strong “sensitivity to rhythm, pitch, meter, tone, melody and timbre.”³ Musicians obviously have a dominance in musical intelligence, but you’ll also find it in poets, who often use meter and rhythm as effectively as they use words. My poster child for musical intelligence is Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.
4. **Linguistic**: Someone with a dominance in linguistic intelligence is particularly attuned to all the implications of words, not just their strict dictionary definition. Writers of course have this trait, but so do great orators and lawyers. The first person I think of with linguistic intelligence is William Shakespeare.
5. **Logical-Mathematical**: This is a strength in seeing the “logical relations among actions or symbols.”⁴ Mathematicians find them-

selves very comfortable seeing or seeking the connections between different numbers. Scientists likewise draw connections between physical objects or the forces acting on objects. Our friend Albert Einstein immediately leaps to mind as a prime example.

6. **Interpersonal** : Someone with a dominance in interpersonal intelligence has a deep innate ability to connect with other people and a rich understanding of how others might be feeling at any given moment. Therapists tend to have strong interpersonal intelligence, as do schoolteachers. When I think of interpersonal intelligence, I think of Oprah Winfrey, because of her amazing ability to relate to whomever she is speaking with.

7. **Intrapersonal** : If you have dominance in intrapersonal intelligence, you have a par-

ticularly refined sense of what is going on inside of you. People with strong intrapersonal intelligence do a great job of “taking their own temperature.” They’re in touch with their feelings, they know what triggers them, and they have a good sense of how to manage this. If you know someone who is cool under even difficult circumstances, it’s likely that this person has strong intrapersonal intelligence.

8. **Naturalistic**: This kind of intelligence expresses itself in an ability to see the world of nature in all its complexities. Where you might see a field of flowers, someone with this dominance will see four different kinds of tulips, a couple of varieties of lavender, and a rare grass that you just thought was a weed. Zoologists tend to have a dominance in naturalistic intelligence, as do landscape architects. The first person with this trait

who comes to my mind is the remarkable primatologist Jane Goodall.

Do you see yourself in one of these descriptions? There's a good chance you'll relate to more than one, because people rarely have only one form of intelligence. It's likely you have a dominance in one or two, and there may be a couple of others that you employ with some regularity. At the same time, you'll almost certainly find some on the list that you use rarely, if at all.

But all of these forms of intelligence identify successful ways of operating in the world, and any one of them might come into play when you're facing a particular task or problem. Awareness of all eight, and considering each while wearing your six thinking hats, is a remarkably effective way to unlimit your thinking.

WHAT IS YOUR LEARNING STYLE?

Just as types of intelligence vary from person to person, the way one learns varies. The VAK learning styles model has been in use since the 1920s and is useful in showing you how you prefer to learn new things:

- **V is for Visual**, meaning that you tend to learn through illustrations, charts, video, and other visual media.
- **A is for Auditory**, meaning that you find yourself most comfortable learning by listening, either to a lecture, a discussion, a podcast, an audiobook, etc.
- **K is for Kinesthetic**, meaning that you prefer to learn via physical interaction. Kinesthetic learners tend to gain more from taking a hands-on approach to learning.⁵

“The life which
is unexamined
is not worth
living.”



—PLATO