THINKING FOR HUMANS

The Art of Being Mindful

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PREFACE

I have written *Thinking For Humans* because of what I believe about thinking and about its incredibly extensive effects within the human experience. Here's what I believe:

- The quality of your life is the quality of your thinking.
- To be "fully alive/fully human" requires the ability to truly and authentically *think* and think for yourself.
- *Thinking* lies at the core of everything that we do that's *human.*
- As you *think,* so you are and so you are becoming. Your thinking defines you and shapes your inner self and "personality."
- The quality of your beliefs, decisions, emotions, memories, knowledge, imaginations, etc. depends on the quality of your thinking.
- To manage your thinking requires that you think about your thinking, to use your meta-cognition to *meta*-think.
- Meta-thinking enables a special kind of learning— *meta*-learning by which you can then manage the quality of your thinking.

An Untaught Essential

While *thinking* is the most fundamental thing you do, *the great majority of people have never been taught how to truly think.* That's because at school we are taught *what to think;* we are not taught *how to think.* Thinking was, and continues to be, assumed and taken for granted. It should not. Consequently, the great majority of people are poor thinkers. Their thinking is superficial and is easily dominated and distorted by emotions. As the quality of their thinking is low, this causes most of their problems in life. Shockingly, we mostly think our way into difficulties as we fail to discern quality information, make bad decisions, engage in stupid actions, create disastrous relationships, etc. All of that sabotages one's best efforts. The

good news is that you can think your way out of those problems by learning the genuine article—critical and precise thinking.

> "... the problem is that we think very poorly. How could it be otherwise when few of us are given any instruction..." Steven Alan, *Thinking Creatically* (1991, p. ix)

If *thinking* governs the way you learn, the way you comprehend the world, the way you make decisions, the way you relate to others, the way you manage yourself, the way you treat yourself and others, no wonder thinking plays the most critical role in your successes and failures. Yet most people dismiss thinking as unimportant. They *assume* that "thinking is thinking" and "what else could it be?" They don't know that a person's brain could be active without the person actually *thinking*. They don't know there are multiple kinds of non-thinking. In each, a person may seem to be thinking, and he may think that he's thinking, but he is not actually "thinking" (chapter 21).

Thinking Assumptions

Because of the very nature of true *thinking,* there are numerous assumptions and myths that we commonly hold about thinking. There are also things about thinking which no one has ever told you. There are things that are important—critically important. And someone needs to tell you! When I discovered them, I began communicating them as widely and as often as I could. These things make the difference between clarity and confusion, success and failure, joy and depression, optimism and pessimism. If you don't know these things about the most fundamental *human response,* you will hardly know what is *the essence* of being human. Thinking is that important!

The founder of IBM, Thomas Watson Sr. used the mantra *"Think"* in his 1914 brand. A century later, Steve Jobs used *"Think different"* as his brand for Apple. Why this emphasis by these leading CEOs in business? Because there is a deficiency of real thinking! Joey Reiman put it this way:

> "Thinking is not a core competency in business. Daydreaming is frowned upon, and fast solutions are rewarded. As a result, the workplace is often the *last* place you'll find real live thinkers." (*Purpose,* 2013, p. 151)

The Book's Design

Thinking For Humans focuses centrally on the most fundamental thing you do—*think.* I'll therefore begin in Part I with the most fundamental aspects

of what thinking is and provide a series of chapters on those most *essential thinking skills.* Does that mean thinking is a skill? Yes, and you would do well to think about *thinking as a skill*—a mental activity that gives you a lease on life. Parts II and III covers the constructive or *eureka thinking skills* and the *executive thinking skills.*

Part IV focuses on the seven kinds of deceptive non-thinking aspects— aspects which we all default to, and which lie at the heart of most of our problems. When you know these, and can shift to real thinking, you will be able to solve most of the problems that you will ever face. By learning the 14 *thinking skills*, your intelligence will increase and you will become an excellent problem solver. That's because "intelligence" is not a trait, it is a function of thinking—*how* a person thinks, your range of flexibility.

Throughout this book, there is a central theme: *The quality of your thinking determines the quality of your mental and emotional well-being.* A central component of mental and emotional illness is poor thinking—distorted thinking, and thinking that is not under your control. When you correct your thinking—you set in motion a healthy way of moving through the world that makes you more effective and productive, that makes the way you relate to family and friends more rewarding and loving, and the life you live more joyful.

> "The neurotic is not emotionally sick— *he is cognitively wrong!* If health and neurosis are, respectively, correct and incorrect perceptions of reality, propositions of fact and propositions of value merge in this area..." (Maslow, 1970, p. 153)

On the surface, *thinking* seems so natural that it may seem silly to spend time *learning how to think!* On second thought, however, if you listen to how some people talk, you know they are not actually thinking, or if they are, they are thinking so poorly that it is creating even more problems for them. You might wonder, "Have they not been taught how to think accurately and sanely?" The truth is that *thinking is your secret weapon for succeeding* in every aspect of life. It is the secret for sanity and well-being, for healthy relationships and productive careers.

In the field of Personal Constructs, Don Bannister (1971) argued that instead of thinking about people in terms of static and immutable characteristics instead of as a "person in motion." Therefore we "should be investigating *the process of thinking itself.* That's what I have designed this

book to do—to study and understand *thinking* as a process, a function, and as a skill.

> "Intelligence has been regarded as a trait; we have studied such static and allegedly immutable characteristics when we should have been investigating *the process of 'thinking',* of solving problems, of construing." (D. Bannister, 1971, p. 63)

Preparation *for — Thinking for Humans*

I wish I had written *Thinking For Humans* first. But I could not have done that. I first needed to immerse myself in the fields of Critical Thinking, Learning, Creative Thinking, Decision Making, Wisdom, etc. I also need to begin teaching and training people in *the art of thinking* which I did in the Neuro-Semantic "Brain Camps." Further, I had to learn how to facilitate real thinking without overwhelming people (which I did when I began). In preparation for writing this book I first wrote the thinking series:

- *Executive Thinking* (2018)
- *Executive Deciding* (2022)
- *Executive Wisdom* (2022)
- *Executive Learning* (2019)
- *Hypnotic Thinking* (2020)
- *Humorous Thinking* (2021)
- *Metaphorical Thinking* (2022)
- *Predictive Thinking* (2022)
- *Thinking as a Modeler* (2018)

Thinking for Humans: **The Art of Mindful Awareness**

This subtitle goes to my wife, Geraldine. One day when we were at Starbucks for our reading time, as she was reading the manuscript, she commented, "You know, what you are writing is *actually the science of mindfulness*. While mindfulness is about being aware, it is more literally, *mind-full* about how to think."

Thinking For Humans is an invitation to discover the true magic of thinking—*real thinking,* thinking that is authentic, accurate, self-correcting, and precise. As you do, you will become increasingly more able to deal with life, people, and reality as they truly are, rather than how you wish it to be. Then, as a critical thinker, you will see through illusions, deceptions, and the cover-ups all around you. As a real thinker, you will be able to use your knowledge more effectively, solve problems more productively, and live more adventuresomely. In anticipation that you will become a force to be reckoned with, *welcome to the thinking adventure.*

PART I

INTRODUCTION TO

THINKING

Chapter 1

WHY
THINK ABOUT THINKING?

"Thinking is the ultimate human response."
Edward De Bono, *Six Thinking Hats*

While you may already think, believe, or know that thinking is important, many do not. Probably, most people do not. So that's the argument I want to make as I start this book—*thinking is important!* It is important for a multitude of reasons, many of which you may be completely unaware of. And it is far more important than you imagine! So here we go.

Thinking Mentally Maps the World

First, when you think, you create a mental map for navigating life. Why is it important? How important is it? Consider what it is that you are actually doing in thinking—*you are creating something new in the world—your unique mental map.* Every form of thinking, whether it is true or false thinking, results in *you mapping out a territory of the world which you then navigate as you live and act.* By thinking you are tracking reality and creating an instrument (a model) for "finding your way about more easily in the world" (H. Vaihinger). Pretty important, wouldn't you say?

In fact, every mental map that you have in your head is there because *you thought it.* You learned it, you heard it, you experienced it, you read about it, you saw a movie, etc. In some way, the *ideas* that you have in your head about making money, having a career, developing friends, finding a mate,

exercising, going on a holiday—every mental map is a product of *your thinking.* Given that, how well are you doing*? Do you have great and brilliant mental maps* for navigating whatever aspect of life that you want to navigate?

Now a warning. The critical piece about all mental maps is that—*"the map is not the territory."* That's what Alfred Korzybski wrote in his classic book, *Science and Sanity* (1933/1994).[1] But if the map sufficiently corresponds to the territory regarding what's out there, then it is useful. Now you can use it to go places, do things, and experience the richness of life. Accordingly, as you think, you create *representational maps* in your mind*, linguistic maps* using words and language to understand things*, evaluative maps* by which you make decisions about what's good and bad, and *associative maps* that reflect how you have connected various things together. And as goes your mapping, so goes your life.

Thinking Generates Ideas about Life

This leads to another important thing about thinking. *Thinking generates ideas.* To authentically think is to learn to create ideas. And ideas—well, *your ideas define reality for you.* It creates the world that you live in. But not all ideas are created equal. There are good ideas, there are bad ideas. There are really intelligent ideas and really stupid ideas. There are disastrous ideas that can ruin a life and there are brilliant and awesome ideas that can make life precious and wonderful. It's in this way that the quality of your thinking—your ideas—is the quality of your life. How's your world? Is it the kind of world that you want to live in?

Via thinking you can also create life-changing ideas. What's needed in the creative process is the creation of true and accurate ideas, not flawed and inaccurate ideas. To generate great ideas requires thinking deeply and broadly. You'll need to think critically to construct logical, healthy, and ecological ideas.

> *"Nothing limits achievement like small thinking; Nothing expands possibilities like unleashed thinking."* William Arthur Ward

Thinking Models Experiences

Now with mental maps and ideas, as you engage in real thinking, you are not only creating a set of ideas as your mental model for navigating life, *you are now able to model what you want in life and from life.* What do you want? You see this or that expertise being demonstrated, and with your

ideas and mental mapping you can reproduce that expertise in your mind, and then replicate it in your body. That's *modeling.*[2] Because you deal with the world through your maps, as you use your thinking to model success, health, well-being, kindness, loving relationships, and on and on— your *thinking* is your key that opens the door to those experiences.

Actually you have been modeling since your birth. What you saw in your parents and siblings, you imitated. Your mirror neurons make this possible. But *what* have you modeled? That's the question. Did you model yelling and name-calling as a means by which to assert yourself or to make your point? Modeling behaviors in a dysfunctional family, while highly likely, is not the way to develop excellence. Excellence, more often than not, requires that you go outside of your original family, or social group, to find expertise in others who you can model.

Thinking Creates Meaning
Let's put all of this together and see what we have. What are you actually doing when you think ideas and map the structure of desired experiences (modeling)? *You are creating meaning.* You are exercising your innate powers as a meaning-maker. Amazing! And when you do that in a rich and full way, you make your life *full of meaning.* Here then is something that makes thinking so great— *by your thinking, you make your life more and more meaningful.* That's because at the heart of "meaning" is thinking. Meaning is not a 'thing' in the world, it is essentially the constructs of your *thinking.* By thinking you construct and attribute meaning to things and that defines the world you live in. You invent meaning using the fundamental meaning questions.[3]

Thinking Generates Your Sense of Self
Now given all of that, it should be no surprise that *thinking* does something else that is central and core to your life—*your thinking defines and determines you—who you are.* As a living sentient being, you are a human being who comes to know yourself as you think. "As you think, so you are." You not only invent ideas and meanings, *you invent yourself.* You are a product of the *thinking* that you've been doing about yourself from the very beginning. How "good" is that thinking?

In fact, "self" is the first and most intimate of all of your constructions. Born without an ego, as an infant you didn't know *who* you were or *what* you were at the beginning. Only over months and months did you start to

get a sense of yourself, first as a sentient being, then as one in the sensorimotor development stages sensing the world around you with your eyes, ears, tongue, nose, skin, fingers, and body. Then as you heard what your caregivers said to you and about you, you began to form "a sense of self." Later, with language, you began to define yourself whether you are loved or a nuisance, whether you will amount to anything or will be worthless.

Eventually your thinking created many aspects of your self. You created a felt, kinesthetic sense of self, a social sense of self, your self-confidence regarding what you can (and cannot) do, your sense of value as a person (conditional or unconditional), your sports self, your music self, your intellectual self, and on and on. And, in the end, *thinking makes it so.* So ultimately how you think about yourself governs your self-image, self-value, self-confidence, social self, etc. What you conclude about yourself, human nature, or human worth establishes your experiences about yourself. You think your *self* into being.

Thinking Determines the Quality of Life

As you can now tell, thinking determines every aspect of your life's quality. Thinking governs the quality of your communications, learning, productivity, enjoyment, relationships, success and everything else human. You cannot have a higher quality of life than the quality of your thinking. By your thinking you can unleash inhibitions, cognitive distortions, fallacies, and biases. Real thinking frees you from errors, myths, superstitions, falsehoods, etc. This establishes the over-arching theme of this book: *The quality of your thinking is the quality of your life.*

Sadly, however, most people think poorly and inadequately. Actually, many are *not* thinking at all, *they are on automatic.* They lack the kind and quality of thinking that creates solutions, productivity, and makes life more effective and efficient. But they can change that. They can learn high quality thinking as a capacity and as a skill.

Thinking Creates Templates for Thinking

If all of the above underscores the seriousness of thinking, the next awareness amplifies that seriousness a hundred-fold. When you think, you not only create the content information of your thoughts, you also create the thinking templates by which you will thereafter think. This means that *what* you think today may become *how* you will think tomorrow. It may become

the thinking structures and patterns you use tomorrow. That is, *the way you think* today results from how you first learned to think.

The challenge of thinking is that your pre-frontal cortex generates a special kind of mind—your self-reflexive consciousness. *As you think, you create mental structures through which you think.* These mental structures comprise your "theory of mind" or "model of world." The bottom line is that *you think your thinking templates into being.* This makes your thinking psycho-logical in nature—your thinking makes sense to you from the inside-out—even though it may not make sense to those on the outside.

This would be an unsolvable problem except for one thing. You can develop meta-cognitive skills so that you can *think about your thinking,* evaluate your thinking, and change your thinking. This "executive thinking" can then solve any problems that your first thinking caused. Your first thoughts can be particularly dangerous because they often *set the frame* for all of the thoughts that follow. Your first thoughts establish a reference which later you use as your frame-of-reference. And while most of this occurs unconsciously, you can become aware and make new choices to update your thinking templates (the subject in the later chapters).

Thinking Functions as an Inside–Out Phenomenon
Thinking begins outside–in. As children we first learn to think by repeating what we hear. You *learn to think* from parents, teachers, TV, etc. For many, this is a serious handicap because they never move beyond this. For them, all of their thinking is determined by sources on the outside. No wonder they become externally referenced and struggle to think for themselves. But it doesn't have to stay that way. Everyone can learn to do their own thinking. Healthy thinking development eventually moves from outside–in to inside-out. Then it becomes a refining loop *inside —> outside —> inside.*[4]

Thinking Governs What and How You Learn
Thinking is inevitable because as human beings we do not know things instinctively. We have to *learn* everything, and that requires thinking. Thinking defines how you reason, interpret, draw conclusions, use referent experiences, construct meanings, value, goals, etc. Via learning you develop your intelligence to solve problems and thereby reach desired outcomes. In learning you discover what things are, how they work, what they are for, the factors that make them effective or ineffective, the value

and/or dis-value of those things, etc. Since learning is a function of thinking—*you can't learn any better than you think.*[5]

Thinking Governs Change and Transformation

At the turn of the 20th century, William James wrote, "The greatest revolution of our generation is the discovery that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives." In the field of business, John Maxwell asked, "Why are some people successful and others not?" His answer: *successful people think differently than unsuccessful people.* (*Thinking for a Change,* 2003). This highlights another facet about thinking: To think is to change. In fact, your brain literally changes with every new thought that you entertain. Some neurons are activated, other neural networks and assemblies are deactivated, as messages travel along neuro-pathways. And when your insides change, so will your speech and behavior. If you want to change something about yourself—start with changing your thinking—*what* you think and *how* you are thinking.

Thinking Enables Effective Decision-Making

Your ability to make higher quality decisions, evaluate pros and cons, use your highest criteria, to think things through, do clear thinking, get beyond being muddled and confused, and make sound judgments for smart decisions depends on thinking. This includes the ability to pause, reason, look for evidence, etc. and to generate sound judgment—*wisdom.* Why do we humans so frequently make bad decisions? We do superficial thinking. We fail to think things through. We jump to conclusions based solely on emotions of desire and/or fear. The solution? More intelligent thinking.[6]

Thinking Enables One to Become Fully Human

Thinking that leads to clear, accurate, precise, creative, and practical living thereby enables you to become "fully human, fully alive." This description of self-actualization by Maslow highlights both aliveness and humanity. High quality thinking enables you to actualize your best talents, potentials, meanings, values, visions and integrate them into your best performances (skills and competencies). *Aliveness.* This brings out your humanity, that is, being fully human. Again, this depends on the quality of your thinking. Conversely, low quality thinking reduces your humanity. And toxic thinking can completely undermine your humanity, making you less and less human.

Thinking About Thinking
Thinking is far more critical to your mental, emotional, and physical life than you may have ever imagined. For many, if not for most people, they cannot even imagine that something as simple as thinking could be that important. But you now know! You know what most do not, namely, that *the quality of your thinking determines the quality of your life.*

I'm now wondering: How convinced are you that you, and actually everybody, need training in *how to think most effectively?* What have you learned about thinking in this chapter that was new to you? What most surprises you about thinking? What do you now know about thinking that you will use to make a significant change in your life? One of my discoveries was that the best thinking does not just happen, it comes from learning and training. Welcome to that adventure.

End of the Chapter Notes
1. Alfred Korzybski used the *map* metaphor to describe thinking. He said that when a map corresponds structurally to the outside world, then it becomes useful as a guide for how to live and what to do.
2. There are many books on modeling in NLP. *NLP: Volume I* (1980) is a good place to begin. Also see *NLP Going Meta* (2004) and also *Thinking as a Modeler* (2018).
3. There are many *meaning* questions. Among the most foundational are: What is it? How does it work? What is the significance of this? What should I do? What are the rules that govern this? See *Neuro-Semantics: Meaning and Performance* (2012).
4. See *Inside–Out: Empowered From Within* (2022).
5. Unlike animals, we do not have *informational* instincts. We only have a few *impulse* instincts which generate our needs and drives; Maslow called them "instinctoids." See *Motivation and Personality* (1954/1970), *Unleashed* (2007) and *Executive Learning* (2021).
6. See *Executive Decisions* (2020).

Chapter 2

AN OVERVIEW OF THINKING

"Living consciously is a state of being mentally active rather than passive. It is the ability to look at the world through fresh eyes. It is intelligence taking joy in its own function."
Nathaniel Branden

Instead of beginning with the most obvious question, "Where does *thinking* begin?" I will begin with another question which we can more clearly answer, *"Where and how do you experience thinking in your mind?"* The answer seems simple, yet it is not. The answer is that you most essentially sense your thinking in terms of the sights, sounds, sensations, smells, and tastes that you represent in "the theater of your mind." Yet that is not where thinking actually begins. It is where you and I *become aware* of our thinking. So while thinking begins long before this, it is here that we become aware of our thinking. *It is here we do our conscious thinking.*

Before detailing the fourteen kinds of thinking in the *thinking model,* this chapter overviews the basic levels of thinking. In over-viewing, the design is to deepen our understanding of thinking as an incredibly mysterious phenomena.

Representational Thinking
When you use your senses to think, technically we call this "representational thinking." It *seems like* you are seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, and tasting the objects, persons, and experiences that you saw, heard, felt, smelt, and tasted on the outside. You speak about *seeing* mom or dad. You speak about hearing your teacher's voice. You talk as if you

are again re-experiencing the merry-go-round or the taste of strawberries. You talk that way, but that's not really the way things are. It's only how your inner world appears to you.

Representational thinking begins about nine-months of age when an infant begins to create and experience "representational constancy." Prior to that, what was "out of sight was out of mind." But beginning around nine-months, babies begin to "hold in mind," as it were, what they have seen, heard, and felt. Prior to that you can play peek-a-boo. You hide behind a book, and each time you poke your head out, the baby experiences a cognitive jar. It is as if the infant is thinking, "Where did you come from?" But later, the young child knows you are still there. That's representational constancy— holding constant your representations—keeping them in mind even when you can't see them, and taking them with you wherever you go.

Yet the crazy thing is that representational constancy is not real. You actually do *not* see, hear, feel, smell, or taste in what seems like a "theater in your mind." For that matter, there's no theater in the mind. There's no movie at all! There are not even snapshots. But yes, it *seems* like there is. Subjectively you experience *thinking* "as if" you are seeing-hearing-feeling an inner movie of sights, sounds, sensations, etc. Yet it is all *a construct* of the brain. The brain, with its visual cortexes, associative cortex, motor cortex, and many other cortexes, generates these images as a simulation. You are presenting to yourself again what you have experienced on the outside, hence re-presentations.

This is where *thinking* begins for us *in terms of our awareness* even though thinking begins long before this. Before you use the sensory systems to represent your thoughts, your "thoughts" were brought into your nervous systems as your sense receptors *abstracted* information from the energy manifestations out in the world (the electro-magnetic field). And as your very neurology was busy *abstracting*, it was deleting lots of things, generalizing basic categories, and distorting information. These thinking processes occur in all of your later (and more advanced) thinking.[1]

In terms of your awareness, you start with representational thinking—the movie you play in your mind as you represent and then "hold in mind" the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic information (VAK) that you have reconstructed. This makes up your first *model of the world* for navigating life, your first *code* of the information you retain and store. It operates as

your reference system for understanding and making sense of things.[2]

Associative Thinking

Even prior to reconstructing sensory experiences, there's an even more primitive *way of thinking*. It arises as you associate one thing with another thing. Pavlov's dogs associated a bell with food . . . and salivated. The *thinking* here is not conscious, but an outside-of-conscious awareness—a neural association. And it sets up a false "causational thinking pattern." Once one thing is *associated* to another thing, it seems that X *causes* Y or X *is* Y. A particular song sends you back to your teenage years. The sound of drumming evokes certain emotions in you.

Via this neural associating, the neurons in your brain constructs what we call *associative thinking*. Deep inside your brain and nervous systems, you are experiencing Hebb's Rule, "cells that fire together wire together." Donald Hebb, a Canadian neuroscientist articulated this rule which is now recognized as the basis of Hebbian learning or what Pavlov called classical conditioning.

Associative thinking is the "thinking" of the more highly intelligent animals. It is how they "learn" and the mechanisms we use in training them. We set up associations so that our dog knows when it is time to go outside to pee or for a walk. Associative thinking is a simple linear kind of thinking. It is a stimulus–response pattern and one that governs a large portion of our lives —and we are mostly unaware of it. Red, yellow, and green lights signal us unconsciously to step on the brake, slow down, or hit the accelerator. Associative thinking sets up simple linkages of responses. All sorts of *triggers,* as stimuli, activate our unconscious thinking. By connecting an external object or experience to an internal state, *associative thinking* establishes various associations or *behavioral patterns.* And in the end, "all your brain knows is patterns" (Jeff Hawkins, *On Intelligence*, p. 56).[3]

Linguistic Thinking

In your thinking development, words come to you first in the form of names. *Naming* is what every parent does so naturally and inevitably, "mommy," "daddy," "doll," "truck," etc. Naming satisfies the child's inquisitive mind, "What is that?" *Naming establishes the categories you then use for thinking.* Now while we can certainly *think* apart from words, probably the great majority of our thinking, maybe 90 percent, is done

through words. Without words it is nearly impossible to think most things. With words we are able to build up semantic systems of meanings.

As you and I code our thoughts in words, we then "think" in words—in *symbols* which stand for something other than themselves. Using the word "dog" I don't see the word itself, I see the little Jack Russell jumping up and down wanting to go for a walk. Words work in our mind to the extent that *they call forth a referent* and enable you to see the referent in your inner movie. To the extent that you can *track* a word directly to the representations in your inner movie, to that extent the words facilitate understanding and how you make sense of the world. Yet here *words* fall into two general categories. There are sensory-based words and there are non-sensory evaluative-based words.

Sensory-based words enable you to immediately track the word or phrase directly to your inner movie whereas non-sensory words do not.[4] You cannot see or hear or feel them without using your own referent experiences to interpret the terms. Amazingly, this includes the great majority of the *words* you use. You cannot see rude or kind, you cannot see leadership or relationship, you cannot see or hear confidence or worry. These are all *evaluative terms* which operate at a higher level to sensory-based terms. Yet you *think* in these words—these kinds of abstract terms govern and determine your *thinking*. In this way you can think great ideas and develop life transforming concepts *and* you can think in destructive and highly distorted ways that undermine one's well-being and create a hellish life. Again, the first thinking that you do creates the thinking templates you use —the categories, classifications, concepts, etc.

Thinking therefore occurs at all levels of linguistic abstraction, from sensory-based words to higher and higher levels of abstraction, that is, evaluative words and all of these make up the meta-representation system. Above and beyond seeing, hearing, feeling, etc. are *words* which provide a code for the terms, categories, classifications, etc. A passage from Ecclesiastes gives us a sensory-based description about chance and risk:

> "I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happens to them all." (Ecclesiastes 9:11)

George Orwell took that passage and "translated" it into modern abstract

thought. It was his way of poking fun at our overly abstract language which sounds so intellectual. This is the kind of language which thrives in academia, government, and bureaucracies.

> "Objective consideration of contemporary phenomena compels the conclusion that success or failure in competitive activities exhibits no tendency to be commensurate with innate capacity, but that a considerable element of the unpredictable must invariably be taken into account." (1950, *Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays*)

While that may sound intellectual, and much more serious than the original passage, it is loaded with abstractions and nominalizations. And to get there he had to engage in deleting information, generalizing, and distorting information and use more conceptual terms to take us up the scale of abstraction.

Evaluative Thinking
To *think* is first to represent what you are referring to—your reference. To *think* secondarily is to make an evaluation of that reference. And at first your evaluations are simple, naive, and black-and-white—you think in terms of right or wrong, good or bad, reward or punishment, etc. *The world you think into existence is a polarized world of opposites.* And for a child, this makes perfect sense. Children first have to create their basic categories. Only later are they able to think about "the excluded middle" that is, the greys in-between the polar opposites and along a continuum.

As *thinking* develops, so do your evaluations. You increasingly develop more standards and criteria for making your evaluations. As you learn to think with these higher values and rules, you think via conceptual frameworks about morality, ethics, fitting in, being accepted or rejected, liked or disliked, etc. In a word, your thinking creates the rules that you think govern reality. This *thinking* constructs your "conscience" —what you consider that you should or should not do, must or must not do, what's prohibited and what's allowed. As this occurs, you develop moral and ethical thinking patterns ("should, must, need to" etc.).[5]

Integrative or Embodiment Thinking
Now all of this *thinking* occurs *in* your body and *with* your body, that is your neurology which includes your spinal cord, brain stem, and brain. It is not that you think in your head only; *you think with all of your body and neurology.* The great majority of your associative thinking occurs mostly

as your neurology *connects* two things and "learns" that X and Y belong together. The result is what we call "reflex learning." Here your *neurology* has learned the neurological patterning needed so that you can walk, run, lift your arms, etc. This describes the learning that's inherent in every sport (e.g., tennis, skating, basketball, soccer, skiing, etc.). It describes how you learn to type, drive a car, tie your shoe string, etc. This learning is typically non-consciously neurological. We describe this as muscle-memory and once it is, we say the learning is now "intuitive." This kind of learning is *implicit learning* or tacit learning that Daniel Kaheman called "System 1" in his classic book, *Fast Thinking/ Slow Thinking* (2011).

To get a learning so deeply ingrained into your neurology that it is automatic and intuitive, *over-learn* something. Learn it, and then learn it again, and keep repeating it until you know it "inside–out." Do it until it becomes a neurological reflex. This means that you can program or *mind-to-muscle* knowledge of a process so that it becomes *felt* in your body, a felt response. At that point, it is coded kinesthetically. Then the body "knows." This fits a New Guinean Proverb that says, *"Knowledge is only rumor until it is in the muscle."*[6]

In terms of integrative thinking, the circuit primarily goes from *thinking to feeling.* Feeling follows thinking as the effect of the cognition. The kinesthetic feeling registers and encodes the cognition, now as a felt understanding. *This holistic understanding recognizes that feeling is an aspect of thinking and not an opposite.* The old dichotomy between reason and emotion is just that, an old dichotomy. Accordingly, once there is feeling in the body, that feeling inevitably influences thinking. It is a circuit. As an *ideodynamic* or ideomotor phenomenon, ideas affect the motor cortex and put the body into motion. Thinking activates the motor cortex to such an extent that even *seeing* someone do something can activate our mirror neurons thereby getting us to replicate that action.

This exposes a myth about thinking and emoting. *Emotions* (what we often call 'feelings') *are not the polar opposite of thinking.* If there's a problem between thinking and emoting, it may be that you are feeling *too much,* or that the feeling is coming from some distorted thoughts (cognitive distortions), or that you have an *emotional habit* that doesn't serve you well. As thoughts generate feelings we have *embodiment,* a built-in function of the nervous system. Via embodiment, you integrate what you have learned. When you *feel* accurate thoughts, your thinking becomes *integrative*

thinking. This neurological-emotional response enables you to fully own what you think.

In Rational Emotive Therapy (RET) cognitions and emotions are not viewed as polar opposites or as static "things." Instead of separate entities, they are viewed as part of a singular process. Ellis (1994) explained this dynamic relationship between thinking and emoting.

> "We can define our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors as if they are disparate or separate kinds of processes: but rarely, if ever, is this true. In one sense or another, as I first said in 1956, '*Thinking and emoting...* in certain (though hardly all) respects *are essentially the same thing*, so that one's thinking becomes one's emotion and emotion becomes one's thought.'" (p. 95, italics added)

What could be a problem is *emotional-thinking*. This refers to using your feelings to inform your thinking. Emotional thinking is how *children* think. A child *senses* the world (see-hear-feel) and then uses that feeling to draw conclusions (over-generalize, personalize, etc.); *they feel their way to thoughts*. From embodiment, they think. Then when the emotions are too strong, they overwhelm and prevent clear thinking. All fear, threat, anxiety, stress tend to undermine the best thinking. When you are afraid, stressed, emotional—you basically cannot think!

> "Critical thinking is always difficult, but it's almost impossible when we are scared." (Hans Fosling, *Factfulness,* p. 103)

Ideally, it is much better to think in order to feel. That is, to *let your thinking inform your emoting*. Real thinking first requires the development of the higher executive functions (which slowly develop during childhood). From sensory-thinking messages are sent upward to the neocortex for processing.
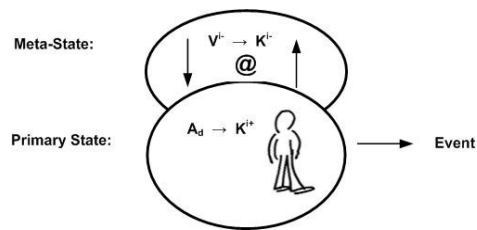
After thinking through something and coming to understand it, you can then *use your emotions to integrate what you know* into your neural circuits so that *you feel what you know*. Then, via repetition, you can link synapses so that your procedural knowledge can become an implicit procedural memory, i.e., *a neurological program*. Repetition, as it were

metaphorically, burns the program into the neural circuitry. "Cells that fire together wire together." In this way you commission your body to feel an idea. As it becomes *hardwired,* it frees your conscious awareness to attend to other things. This is a mind-to-muscle pattern which allows you to translate what you *know* into what you *do*. Doing this allows you to coach your body how to feel you knowledge and thereby close the knowing-doing gap.

Integrative thinking/learning starts outside and is brought inside. *Thinking* is launched in the newborn's mind by parents and others who introduce language and culture. Eventually what is outside comes *inside* as it is represented—we learn to think from what we hear in family and culture. After that, healthy adult thinking becomes *an inside-out process.* Once deeply inside now we have a circular loop that incorporates the feedback and feed-forward loops: *inside—outside—inside.*[7]

Thinking about Thinking
All thinking is not the same. There are many different kinds of thinking and many different levels. Nor are emotions radically different from thoughts. As you think, so you emote. Your emotions do not arise magically or mysteriously. They mostly are derived from your thinking.   And ... once your emotions are activated, your emotions then influence your thinking. After that your thinking and emoting operate as a circular system. And sometimes it is challenging to know which came first.

Your thinking begins with the pictures, sounds, and sensations that you experience in your mind. Here you present to yourself again what you have seen, heard, and felt. Now you can *take the world with you* wherever you go. Now you can begin to edit that simulated world in your mind so it serves you well or undermines your very well-being. That's up to you and the quality of your thinking.

While a great many people in NLP don't know this, *NLP is essentially about thinking.* NLP begins with representational thinking (the VAK, sensory-awareness), it then goes to associative thinking (anchoring, cause-effect linkages), linguistic thinking (language, the Meta-Model), evaluative thinking (values, beliefs, meta-programs), and finally integrative thinking (state, embodiment, mind-to-muscle). *In learning NLP, you learn to think.* Or at least you should if you learned it well. Yet because most trainers and educators in NLP don't know this, they do not emphasize this. This book

is designed, in part, to change that.

End of the Chapter Notes
1. Korzybski describes this extensively in *Science and Sanity* (1933/ 1994).
2. See *Movie Mind* (2002). This is the genius of NLP, see *Using Your Brain for a Change* (1985). Even as late as 2019, Richard Bandler still focused exclusively on representational thinking and did not seem to even be aware of the meta-levels, see his book *Thinking on Purpose* (2019).
3. Associative thinking shows up as "anchoring" in NLP, a user-friendly version of classical conditioning.
4. This leads to *representational tracking—*a key thinking skill which will be described in the coming chapters.
5. Fowler researched and developed a model on the growth of ethical thinking over the years. See *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development,* James Fowler (1976).
6. This is what we do in the Mind-to-Muscle pattern which we include in nearly every training manual. See *Achieving Peak Performance* (2009).
7 See the book, *Inside—Out: Empowered From Within* (2022). You can find it on "the Shop" on www.neurosemantics.com.

Chapter 3

HOW THINKING DEVELOPS

"When I was a child, I thought as a child,
when I became a man, I put away childish thoughts."
I Corinthians 13:11

"No one achieves greatness by becoming a generalist.
The immature mind hops from one thing to another,
the mature mind seeks to follow through."
Harry A. Overstreet.

You have a thinking history. How you think today did not just magically pop into existence one day. It developed over time. For all of your life, you have been learning how to think. And how you think today is the result of that history. As that process has developed, it has gone through many stages. Once upon a time your brain was processing information in the "magic thinking" stage. At that time, you imagined that all sorts of magical things could happen if you just thought about it or if you wished for it hard enough. "Ah, those were the days!"

But now you've grown up and you have a grown up brain. And hopefully, your thinking has also grown up. At least it has mostly grown up. To the extent that it has not, to that extent you may still be stuck in one or more of the primitive thinking stages. There's also another factor that sometimes arises. Namely, in times of stress we all tend to revert to more childish and primitive thinking patterns.

This short chapter overviews some of the key factors and stages in your thinking history. That's because knowing how your thinking developed enables you to know the quality of your thinking skills today and what you may still need to work on.

In the Beginning, there was Awareness
In the beginning, there was *sentience*, a basic and simple *awareness*. As an infant you began life seeing, hearing, feeling ... simply sensing the world. You experienced the sensory world as a sentient being ... aware, and *yet not aware that you were aware*. At that time, it was all a "buzz of images and sounds." It was all a "buzz of images and sounds" with no form or structure so as an infant you did not know what to make of it. It also operated by the "out of sight, out of mind" principle. Then you began the thinking journey toward becoming a *thinking self* with self-awareness.

You then experienced one of your first developments—the ability to hold an image or sound in mind. Developmental Psychology calls this *constancy of representation.* What you see and hear and sense, you can now "hold" such images, sounds, and sensations in your mind. Even though mother is no longer in sight, you can call up her image in your mind and thereby remember her. This was a significant change. Now "out of sight," does not mean "out of mind." Now you began to *encode* the world of experience so that you can *keep it in mind*—you can now take it with you wherever you go. You can see things in your mind which are no longer present.

Holding constant representations, in turn, enables you to begin creating "meaning" which literally refers to the process of "holding something in mind." Consequently whatever you *hold in mind* is your "meaning" even if you do not want to hold a particular image or event in mind. That's because when you hold something in mind, it operates as your reference— what you *refer* to. It is what you *point to.* What's on your mind is also what you are attending to, and so it is your *attention.* And at first, that's all that your thinking is—your attention.

Thinking in the Early Years of Childhood
Child-like thinking begins with a naive realism. As you begin your life of thinking, your thinking is literal, concrete, and naive. As a child what you see and hear and feel is what is available to you. No wonder you naively accept and work with it, it is what you have. At that time, *words are real to you, rather than symbolic.* A young child cannot distinguish between a word as a symbol from *the reality* it points to. For the child, a word *is* the territory. Only later does the child discover that words are symbols which *stand for* something other than themselves. What a child also does not know is that he is living in a socially constructed reality of words invented by others.

At birth, an infant's cortex is amazing! And it is mostly undifferentiated. It is estimated that there are over 200 billion neurons just waiting to be activated thereby creating cortical connections which we call "learning." That occurs as neurons fire, and as they fire together, they "wire" together. As the hippocampus develops, it enables a child to remember things—to hold images in mind. This begins somewhere around nine months. This generates implicit memory which, however, is not registered consciously. This implicit memory explains *childhood amnesia*—why we remember almost nothing at all of what happened in the first four years. Prior to 18 months all "memory" is implicit, then from 18 to 24 months, as the brain develops, it allows for some explicit memory and the beginning of autobiographical memory—our sense of self over time.

In the second year, children can talk about their recollections of the day. The hippocampus enables the sense of time and sequence which is then used, first of all, to build a sense of self. Attention develops first as the infant tries to understand "what any thing is." Primary emotions are first evaluations (e.g., good/bad; pain/pleasure). With secure attachment, *sympathetic nervous system* activated for high vitality: interest, joy, excitement. The sympathetic nervous system dominates in the first year.

As the *parasympathetic system* comes online during the second year, the child responds to prohibitions. Then in the second, as the child becomes mobile and into everything(!), the parasympathetic system comes on-line and dominates. This is the time of "the terrible twos" as the child learns the meaning of "no" and learns to say 'no.'[1]

As a child begins to learn, kinesthetics come first. A child learns by feeling, sensing, and moving. All children begin as kinesthetic learners. They primarily learn by moving. Because the cortex matures from the back to the front, the first systems are those of the sensory senses—the visual, auditory, or kinesthetic senses. Now thinking expands to the other sensory channels making our mind and/or intelligence multiple.[2]

Thinking in Children in the Middle Years
Because thinking starts as representations, the ability to *represent* what you experience using your representational systems—visual, auditory, kinesthetics (sensations), smells, and tastes create your first conscious thoughts. Via this representational thinking you send signals to your body about how to feel. In this way you create or induce your state of mind, state

of body, and state of emotion. And in this way you *embody* what you think in your nervous systems. With that the patterning of the firing of your neurons create regular, habitual response patterns. These become your first "programs" for getting up, dealing with parents and siblings, eating, playing, exploring, going to bed, reading, etc.

These programs result from your early associative thinking and linear thinking. They establish your "learnings" about cause (that X causes Y) and identity (X *is* Y). Upon learning that, your nervous systems do the rest, as they *incorporate* the information so that you "know" that information as a pattern of behavior or "muscle memory." As your operational programs these enable you to operate in your world, taking your learnings with you.

Thinking in the Early School Years
As a child, you began life as a ferocious and passionate learner. You were curious and open and ready to consider whatever you were told. If you were healthy and if you had loving parents, there's nothing to block you from learning. Then in the context of family, extended family and friends, you learned your first "programs" for hundreds of things: how to dress self, eat, get along, go to school, following instructions, manage emotions, read and write, take tests, know self, handle mistakes, speak up, etc. At school you learned *what* to think, but typically not *how* to think. You learned mostly how to comply, be obedient, seek approval, sit still, etc. Consequently, most children miss out on the best and the essence of healthy education. Namely, they do not learn how to think, how to question, debate, challenge, etc.—the essential thinking skills.

During childhood, you thought and attended to extrinsic rewards. Your motivation did not come from within, it was not intrinsic. Rewards and punishments were offered from an extrinsic perspective. Only later did you develop intrinsic beliefs and values—inner rewards for which you strive.

Thinking Post-Puberty
As you became a teenager and moved from childhood to the adolescent years (11-14), *as your thinking matured you were propelled into an entirely new stage.* Your brain's development enabled you to learn to do formal logical thinking. This resulted from the hormones which were released in your body during puberty—hormones which developed the brain. This is the beginning of abstract and conceptual thinking. Now you learned to move into young adult life and the programs which you needed to navigate

that new world. You learned about your gender, your identity, sex, the opposite sex, dating, career, work, self-management, marrying, starting a family, going to university, etc.

As you became an adolescent, your brain experienced severe neural pruning. Your 200 billion neurons were pruned down to 100 billion. Those not fired or activated disappeared; potential learnings were lost. In adolescence, differentiation becomes one of the young person's strongest drives. He worked at finding and developing his unique identity as he separated from family and parents. Then her social group became what's most important as her thinking focused mostly on seeking approval of peers. In these years, the social nature of thinking flourishes as never before and, for awhile the teens are imbued with a herd mentality and driven by a need to fit in.

Childhood Thinking Stages
Overall as we grow up through childhood we move through numerous *thinking stages* in our cognitive development. Piaget was one of the original developers of the cognitive thinking developmental stages.[3] These thinking stages are *the training wheels for adult thinking.* They enable the later and more advanced thinking even though they are childish thinking patterns. Ideally, you grow beyond these thinking patterns. If not, then they operate as cognitive distortions in your adult thinking.

What is normal thinking for children, when continued in adult thinking becomes *thinking distortions.* These cognitive distortions, as the first thinking patterns, are just that, the first. And as you put away other childish things, you need to put these away as well so you can "grow up" your thinking. To *think* in terms of these distortions is to create false ideas and lots of emotional misery.

As an adult, if you continue to think as a child, you inhibit your *thinking development.* As you *thought* as a child, your thinking has led you to numerous states of non-thinking—the cognitive distortions (Appendix B). With these, you have many "programs" that *stop thinking.* They actually *prevent* you from thinking.

Thinking about Thinking
Thinking grows and develops over the years. Thinking is not just one thing, it refers to numerous processes—processes which continue to develop and

mature. It begins small and fragile; it goes through various cognitive developmental stages and eventually it can become strong and vigorous. In meta-thinking you learn how to truly think in accurate and precise ways. As you then learn how to *think about your thinking,* you can test it and shape it. You can engage in clear, creative, and critical thinking.

The wonder of the thinking stages and development is that it never ends. Thinking is a never-ending journey, one of ongoing and continuous development, and one that does not have to end with cognitive decline. There are ways to build up cognitive reserve and to keep the brain active and vigorous. That's the good news.

End of the Chapter Notes
1. Learning to say "no" enables the small child to begin to establish his or her personal boundaries for what he thinks, at that time, is good, bad, acceptable, not acceptable, etc. It is the foundation for choosing, deciding, becoming a decisive person, etc. Without the ability to say "no," it is impossible to truly say "yes" to self, to life, to others, etc. with conviction.
2. The sensory systems give us the beginning of our multiple intelligences as Howard Gardner indicated in his books on *Multiple Intelligences,* the tests that he developed for multiple intelligence, and his work with schools in enabling the more holistic view of intelligence itself.
3. Piaget identified four thinking stages in children: the sensory-motor stage, the pre-operational, the concrete operational, and the formal operation stage.

Chapter 4

WHAT IS THINKING?

"Critical thinking entails critical listening: listen for facts, for formulations, for hidden assumptions, for biases, listening for the levels of abstraction implied by the speaker's language."
Philip Sabatelli, *Thinking Creatically*

A great idea is a gem; ideas are today's currency for wealth.

E verybody thinks they know what thinking is. They think they know until they are challenged to tell *what it is!* Then suddenly, they don't know. And on first glance, the question seems too obvious, too simple. "What is thinking?" Yet when we look at all of the dozens of attempts at defining *thinking,* it suddenly becomes obvious that it is not a simple question at all. Part of the problem is that we use *thinking* to refer to a large number of mental activities: representing, recalling, seeing inside what we saw outside, internal hearing, internal sensing, and on and on. All of these are aspects of thinking and yet thinking is more.

When you think, you produce ideas. This word—*idea*—is another over-used term which also sounds simple. It is not. If *thinking* is the process, *ideas* are the content.   When you think, you create ideas. The mental maps that you make in thinking are made up of your ideas about what it is, how it works, its significance, and what you are to do. The *ideas* that you map can be healthy or toxic, empowering or limiting, accurate or erroneous. Low quality ideas can creep in entirely unnoticed and dominate your way of conceptualizing and interpreting.   This is an occupational hazard for thinking. An idea as a map can be completely wrong.

Now when ideas are wrong, then your thinking itself will undermine what

you are doing—your performance. Then toxic thoughts, thought viruses, limiting beliefs, etc. will sabotage you. The most common form of irrational ideas are the three sets of thinking processes—our cognitive distortions, cognitive biases, and cognitive fallacies.[1]

> *1) Cognitive Distortions.* Primitive thinking patterns that create semantic reactions. These are stages of thinking we all go through during childhood in the process of developing adult thinking. When used today, they limit and create misery. They are inadequate for adult thinking and are expressions of irrationality.
>
> *2) Cognitive Biases.* These are thinking shortcuts that save us thinking time and because of that they can prevent thinking. While they are used to save mental energy and often work, they can lead astray, trick, and deceive. The biases are aspects of life that should not be trusted or believed in absolutely.
>
> *3) Cognitive Fallacies.* These are false ways of thinking and reasoning. They are mostly defensive thinking patterns, not designed to inquire or gather information, but to win an argument. While we use them when arguing for something we want, they distort accurate thinking. These fallacious thinking patterns are usually based on negative emotions, defensiveness, and/or ego-centric agendas.

The Mental Effort of Creating an Idea

When defining thinking, I like to begin with this: *Thinking is entertaining and working over an idea in your mind.* This description identifies two central aspects of thinking—entertaining an idea and working an idea over in your mind. These are two core processes of thinking.

John Dewey took things further and deeper when he defined thinking in his book, *How We Think,* "The origin of thinking is some perplexity, confusion, or doubt." Wow! Thinking has a most interesting starting point! Real *thinking starts when you do not understand something.* You begin the thinking process when you are ignorant, confused, perplexed, doubting, or questioning. Not-knowing is the beginning of thinking. Isn't that amazing?! You *think* when you encounter a problem, a confusion, or regarding what you don't know. Conversely, if you already know something, *you are not thinking,* you are remembering or recalling what you already know.

What is this thing we call *thinking*? Using this definition, it involves several key factors beginning with the idea of "entertaining" or considering an idea. You begin to *think* when you *try on an idea* to see what you think

about it and how it affects you. Next, you "work it over" in your mind to understand it. Implication: thinking is *effortful*—you represent it, hold it in mind, taking multiple perspectives to it, assume it is correct, question it, argue for it, argue against it, etc. All of this mental effort or mental exertion is the internal behavior of thinking. And in the process you become *conscious.* You experience cognitive strain and discover that such thinking requires energy. When it is habitualized, it becomes automatic—it becomes energy efficient. Have you felt the strain of mental exertion when you worked to understand something?

Thinking is related to consciousness. If we ask, "When does consciousness come online?" Generally speaking the answer is when something *violates* your expectations, when a problem arises you can't solve, when something that should be present is not, when you are learning something new, and/or when you are figuring out a problem or a puzzle. These occasions for thinking elicit consciousness.

An important facet of thinking involves "working an idea over." This involves de-constructing the idea. Metaphorically, it is chewing, breaking apart, and digesting an idea so that it becomes yours. If you swallow an idea whole, that doesn't happen. The idea may be inside you, but you will probably experience it as alien to yourself. True thinking pulls the idea apart exposing its components and so you can draw inferences from it.

As thinking involves an "idea," it involves a proposal, invitation, suggestion, formula, strategy, understanding, etc. Ideas can take many different forms. But here's the thing: *merely having a "thought" in your mind does not necessarily mean you are "thinking."* Your "thoughts" are actually the end product of thinking, yours or someone else's. That means that thinking itself is *an activity or process* that ultimately constructs thoughts or ideas in your mind. In thinking, you are *construing.*[2]

While thinking is a great objective well worth going after, thinking is not easy. Rather than easy, thinking itself involves active effort. Emerson said it best, *"The hardest task in the world is thinking."* That's why many seek to cheat thinking by avoiding it. And given that, then thinking-about-your-thinking (meta-thinking) is even more effortful, especially to do so in a disciplined and effective way.

Thinking is Exploratively Asking Questions

What goes on in your mind when you think as you "work over" an idea in your mind? How do you do that? The answer is that you mostly do that by questioning. So in real thinking *you explore an idea as you curiously inquire about it with fascination and wonder.* You think by asking checking questions to make sure you understand. You ask testing questions to test it against what you already understand. You ask clarifying questions to get someone to be more explicit, clear, and concise about their words and meanings. You ask exploration questions about the context, consequences, and sources, etc. This is what's entailed in *trying on* someone's thoughts so that you can think them yourself. Only then can you learn that person's point of view and perspective and then decide if you want it for yourself.[3]

While this seems obvious to most people, it is not. Nor is the opposite obvious to most people. *Namely, if you are not inquiring and questioning, you are probably not*

> To think is to question and to question is to think.

thinking. Here's a fundamental equation about thinking: To think is to question and to question is to think. If you are thinking—the inquiry in your mind is what you do *not* know. You are in search mode and, more often than not, you are facing confusion and ambiguity in your thoughts. To think you have to be curious, a seeker, and an experimenter, which is why you go into search-mode. To think orderly and systematically is to learn, to reason a thing out, analyze, draw conclusions and "compute." Steven Pinker said that drawing conclusions from facts is a kind of computation. Yet thinking is so much more, and so much different from, mere computation.

In the act of thinking which is real and deep, you generate ideas, get to the facts, test the source and quality of facts, and reason legitimately—surprisingly, this is actually a more rare than common act. Yet it is one that can be learned, and when learned, it sets you apart as an authentic thinker. It is a deliberate process that takes time, that is both reflective and analytical. Thinking mentally maps some area of life so that you and others can navigate and achieve your objectives more effectively.

To Think is to Compare

Now in questioning, there's another fundamental—you *compare.* This is what your brain most essentially does. You compare present experience with past experience to anticipate the next moment in time. What you

remember enables you to predict your next response. Thinking is a comparing process—an interplay of memory (references), perception (currently) in the face of anticipation (patterning, planning).

In thinking you can always ask, "What are you comparing X against?" If you hear that you could save $50 on a new radio which costs $100, would you drive across town and spend an extra hour to save $50? To answer that question, you have to make some comparisons. Do you compare it to your hourly salary? Do you compare it to what a meal out on the town costs? Do you compare it to something else that you could purchase for $50? Do you compare it to the stress and strain of spending an extra hour in traffic?

Now suppose that you are purchasing a new expensive car, one that costs $60,000. If you could save $50 by going across town to another dealer, would you do it? You would save the same actual amount of money. But research shows that those who care about saving $50 on a $100 item would not do so on a $60,000 item. What made the difference? The comparison. Although the same, the saving *seems* too small *in comparison.*

If to think is to compare, no wonder there are many hidden and unconscious questions within a thought. No wonder we need to ask many questions to understand our thinking, "What are you comparing? How are you comparing? Is your comparison a true comparison or a pseudo-comparison? If you make a side-by-side comparison, what attributes are you considering relevant and/or irrelevant? If the comparison is personal, then who are you comparing X against? The best in the field? The worst? What you used to do?

To Think is to Wrestle with a Problem
Given that *thinking* actually starts only when you don't understand and/or when you have a problem to solve, this enables you to make an incredible discovery: *It's hard to think without a problem.* No problem > no thought! Again, no wonder some people do not like to think.

It is in looking for a solution to a problem that you think best. In the thinking process of working an idea over in your mind by asking questions and making comparisons, you are wrestling with a problem regarding something that you don't know, feel confused about, and/or are struggling to understand. As you consider the following problems, notice how you are "entertaining and working out an idea" as you seek to solve it. Once you

have done that, then *reflect on the mental exertion* you expended in solving it and how you went about working out the solution.

Thinking Problems

Let's start with the 9-dot challenge. Connect all nine dots with four straight lines *without lifting your pencil* from the paper.
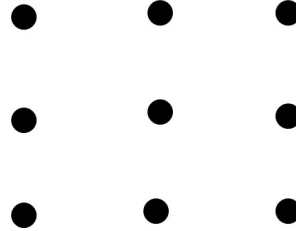
Only in your mind, figure out the answer to multiplying 17 by 33. What is the answer? Or try this one: Imagine that each of the following squares represents a card. You know from previous experience that every card has a letter on one side and a number on the other side. You also think that you know another rule, namely, "If a card has a vowel on one side, then it has an even number on the other side." Your task: Decide which of these cards you would need to turn over in order to find out whether this rule is true or false. What is your answer?

| E | J | 6 | 7 |
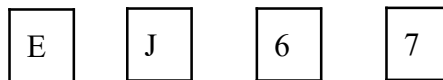
A car in Philadelphia starts toward New York City at 40 miles an hour. Fifteen minutes later a car from New York starts toward Philadelphia, 90 miles away, at 55 miles an hour. Which car is nearest Philadelphia when they meet?

A man was working on his house and realized that he needed something from the hardware store. At the store he asked the clerk, "How much will 150 cost me?" The clerk said, "They are 75 cents apiece, so 150 will cost you $2.25." What did the man buy?

Problems activate thinking! Did you discover that? If you want to engage your brain and develop it as a problem-solving instrument, give it a problem to solve. A healthy brain loves problems. Whether it is a cross-word puzzle, a math problem, a video-game—nothing make a brain/mind come alive like a problem begging to be solved.

Unconscious Thinking

Below conscious thinking is a level of thinking which is not conscious. Amazingly, "thinking" is still "thinking" even when it is *not* conscious. In fact, most thinking is non-conscious. It occurs as automatic functions within your brain and nervous systems.

I'm now referring to the neurological basis of thinking. It is within the lower brain nerve centers in the sub-cortical regions (e.g., brain stem, midbrain, basal ganglia, limbic system, cerebellum, thalamus, hippocampus, amygdala) that thinking begins.[4] Korzybski identified *abstracting* as the most fundamental neuro-mechanism. This process begins at the contact level of the body with the "energy manifestations" "out there" that impact the nervous systems. As nerve centers are activated, they *abstract* from outside and create information inside which then provides the raw materials from which all other levels of abstracting arise.[5]

Another level of unconscious thinking involves all of the brain functions which are involved in regulatory functions. These regulate the homeostatic mechanisms of the body, manage metabolism, biological drives (hunger, sleep, etc.), movement, regulate the endocrine glands (pituitary, thyroid, adrenals), reproductive organs. The autonomic nervous system is controlled by devices independent of will (Damasio, 1994, p. 151). Even the experience of attention is not necessarily conscious. Being conscious begins with wakefulness, being alert, attending to things in the environment, orientation, sensory awareness, etc.

There is the unconscious thinking involved in somatic responses and reflexes. Here excitement, animation, immediacy, etc. may occur without you being aware of it. You are also unconsciously motivated for novelty seeking which, in turn, ultimately leads to explorations and innovations.

Thinking about Thinking

I thought I knew what thinking was before I began my explorations. I quickly discovered that what I thought about thinking was very superficial. I discovered that thinking is so much more than I imagined. In a sense, thinking is deceptive— it seems so simple, yet it has profound depths. No wonder we have spent decade after decade trying to create a thinking machine (AI, artificial intelligence) without success. We have created machines that can compute numbers, pictures, and words, yet as of this date, we have not created a machine that can think.

Nor have the neuro-sciences figured out thinking. There's all kinds of theories both in the neuro-sciences and in philosophy of mind. While we know that the brain produces consciousness which means the mind and the thinking process, we do not know *the how.* And lacking understanding about *how* it works, we cannot replicate the process.[6]

End of the Chapter Notes

1. For lists of the cognitive distortions, biases, and fallacies, see the Appendices in this book; for descriptions of them, see *Executive Thinking* (2018).

2. George Kelly (1955) developed the psychology of personal constructs and used the term *construing*.

3. There are so many different kind of questions. In Meta-Coaching we have identified a set of questions to use, and those to avoid. It is in the ACMC training manual.

> Well-formed outcome questions; open-ended questions, exploration questions rather than manipulative questions, positive closed questions (testing questions, checking questions for self clarity) rather than assumptive questions or rhetorical questions; meta-awareness questions; precision questions (Meta-Model questions) rather than vague or convoluted questions; clarification questions for definition; relevant questions (to an outcome) rather than irrelevant; solution focused questions rather than problem-focused questions; *how* questions rather than *why* questions; imaginative questions (what if); collaboration questions, rather than leading questions; probing questions (for depth); confrontation questions, etc.

4. Amygdala: Receives signals from the lower states of the brain and complex information from the brain's highest centers. Sends signals to virtually every part of the brain, including the decision-making circuitry of the frontal lobes. (Elkhonon Goldberg, 2009, p. 373).

5. Korzybski in *Science and Sanity* devoted a great portion of the book to the abstracting process as a neurological mechanism as a process that brings in data from the outside world and turns it into information inside and the multiple levels inside.

6. John Searle addresses this subject in his books, *Intentionality* and *Rediscovering the Mind.*

Chapter 5

EMOTIONS FOR THINKING

*"Reduction in emotion may constitute
an equally important source of irrational behavior."
"It does not seem sensible to leave emotions and feelings
out of any overall concept of mind..."
"... feelings are just as cognitive as any other perceptual image,
and just as dependent on cerebral-cortex processing..."*
Antonio R. Damasio (1994, pp. 158-9)

A dichotomous view of thinking and emoting presents these as opposites, yet things are not that simple. Are these truly opposites or could these be two aspects of the same thing? Now it is true that any highly intense emotion, positive or negative, can overwhelm us so that we find it difficult to think clearly. It's further obvious to everyone that the strong negative emotions (e.g., stress, fear, anger, anxiety, grief, etc.) can shut down thinking. Less obvious, but equally true, strong positive emotions can also shut down thinking. Yet it's not *emotion per se* that's the problem in these cases, it's the intensity of the emotion that's problematic.

Actually, we not only need our emotions to think clearly and accurately, moderate positive emotions significantly enrich and enhance thinking. Emotions support clear thinking. Given that, what are the best emotional states for the best thinking? In the coming chapters on the fourteen thinking skills—numerous emotions are mentioned as necessary for each skill. In the chapter on consideration, a calm relaxed state is best. For questioning, a state of curiosity and wonder, for doubting, a state of passion for truth and willingness to be proven wrong, and so on. *Thinking needs emotions!* Without the right emotional components, the best thinking is significantly reduced.

Antonia Damasio in *Descartes' Error* (1994) examined the brains of those who suffered from a brain injury or from a lesion. He found that when the prefrontal cortex area is damaged, while a person can still engage in "cold thinking," the emotional richness is gone. There is little self-awareness, decision making for plans, for the future, for being responsible—all of that is gone.

> "One might say, metaphorically, that reason and emotion 'intersect' in the ventromedial prefrontal cortices, and that they also intersect in the amygdala." (1994, p. 70).

The Thinking Requirement

We have to get beyond the old dogma or myth that "thinking excludes emotions." It does not! Thinking not only involves emotions, *thinking needs emotions to be effective.* What it does not need are emotions at too high an intensity. That is the condition when emotions overwhelm and can obliterate thinking. Real thinking needs such emotions as curiosity, openness, playfulness, humility, joy, etc. to make the thinking effective. And at other times, thinking even needs fear, anger, sadness, etc.

Real thinking first requires the development of the higher executive functions (which slowly develop during childhood). From sensory-thinking you send data (messages) upward to the neocortex for processing. Thinking-feeling generates *states,* mind-body states and accessing the right *thinking states* are essential for anyone who wants to regulate his or her emotions. As emotional intelligence (EQ) (e.g., awareness, monitoring, regulating, relating) this enables you to use emotions to facilitate your best thinking and functioning. This is *the thinking–feeling circuit,* your essential mind-body system in which thinking and emoting influence each other in a systemic way.

When feeling follows thinking it registers the emotional feel of an idea. You then *feel* your meanings. After that, feeling loops back in the system to influence the next iteration of thinking. Thinking–feeling is a circuit and an *ideodynamic* (ideomotor) phenomenon. Thinking activates the motor cortex—even *seeing* someone else act activates your mirror neurons so you experience a tendency to replicate the action. This *embodiment* is a built-in function of your nervous systems. Via embodiment you integrate your learnings into your neurology and muscle memory which develop your skills and competencies. By allowing yourself to feel what you think, you experience (and practice) *integrative thinking*.   Primary emotions provide a primary appraisal system of approach/avoidance.   Positive emotions:

approach, go toward (e.g., love, excitement, joy). Negative emotions: *avoid, withdraw,* go away from (e.g., fear, threat, danger, anger).

Emotional States for Great Thinking
If you cannot truly think effectively without certain emotions, what are the emotions that you need to enhance your ability to think clearly and accurately? As your brain is always in a state—the state is your platform for thinking. You think from your emotions and with your emotions.

Calmly alert. Calm alertness is a nearly universal requirement for high quality thinking. This contrasts with stress and distress which triggers in most people a reversion to the cognitive distortions. So take deep breaths to flush your brain with oxygen. Stretch and relax your body to release built up tension in the muscles. Let worries and frustrations go to free your mind for real thinking.

Patience. While there is such a thing as fast thinking, that typically refers to a well-trained neural wiring so that one immediately "knows" what one knows, thereby making it intuitive and automatic. "Fast thinking" actually contrasts with actual and genuine *thinking.* And that takes time, time to consider, time to gather information, time to analyze information, think through consequences and implications. Patience is also needed in accepting our mental fallibility which causes you to get things wrong and your need to be prepared to be proven wrong, because you will be.[1]

Caring compassion. Whenever you find yourself not caring about something, it's actually hard to genuinely *think* about it. It's difficult to focus on it, and stay focused, in order to seek to understand it. So right out of the gate, you need to access a state of care about whatever you're thinking about. And if your thoughts are about a person, that care needs to take the form of compassion. To not care about a person, to be un-compassionate about what person thinks, says, does, or how he relates to you powerfully undermines your thinking and understanding of that person.

Curious wonderment. Given that you think in order to understand and to comprehend, without curiosity you would not come to understand very much at all. When you think you know, and are not curious about a subject or person, you close off the search and fall back to your own assumptions, or worse, prejudices. Curiosity drives all true research, exploration, and deepens conversations. With a sense of curiosity, you are driven to

understand what something is, how it works, what it leads to, etc.

Playful. The ferocious learning state that we see in children is, for the most part, an expression of playfulness. A child is simply having fun, enjoying herself, and discovering things. In adults, a sense of humor is a delight in playing with ideas and possibilities. This is what drives us to stay with an idea or a project. For us, mental play seeks discovery and understanding, "Aha! I get it!"

Openly vulnerable. As the thinking and learning state is characterized by playfulness, it is also characterized by an open receptivity and a willingness to be vulnerable, to be naive, to not-know. The emotional state that stands in opposition to this is that of feeling threatened or insecure, and the need to be defensive, rigid, and closed. To be openly vulnerable is to access a humility about being human and knowing your limitations.

Respect. Emotionally, for any thinking to be healthy, there has to be a basic honoring, esteeming, and respecting for the person who is engaged in the thinking. This includes yourself. Rogers described this as "unconditional positive regard." Only by respecting the person, can you then question the content of the thinking without the person feeling personally attacked. While a person's thinking may be really questionable, even downright stupid, the person's value is a given which we never question.

Gracious. Being gracious arises from respect and patience and leads you to being kind and gentle in interacting with others—and with self. Many people are mean and rough with themselves. If they talked to others the way they talk to themselves, and say to others what they say to themselves, they would be slapped.

Thinking Begins with State
To think effectively, *you have to be in a good state for thinking.* To do your best thinking, you simply can't be angry, fearful, anxious, upset, frustrated, stressed-out, etc. and do your best thinking. *Intensely negative states undermine the ability to think clearly and accurately.* Instead you have to be feeling open, curious, and receptive. You have to be in a state where you feel safe so that you can explore and probe. The beginning of thinking begins with the question: Are you in the best state for clear thinking? Does your state support real thinking?

For your thinking and learning experience use the following as a list to check against your state.

    __ I feel safe and secure within myself.

    __ I feel inwardly calm enough, and not stressed, so that I can think.

    __ I don't feel defensive or the need to hide or avoid.

    __ I unconditionally value myself as a person, as a human being; I don't need to be perfect or right in my thinking in order to be okay, or to be a Somebody. I am innately a somebody, my thinking is an expression of me.

    __ I distinguish myself as a person from what I do including the *doing* that's called thinking. I am more than my experiences. I don't have to always be right. My thoughts do not determine my value as a human being.

    __ I feel secure enough in myself to question, to be skeptical, and to explore, to even be wrong.

    __ I am independent enough to stand on my own two feet. I am not dependent on others for approval.

    __ I feel courageous enough to think differently from others and to speak up and say so.

    __ I feel humble and modest enough to fully embrace the human condition of being a fallible human being. I recognize the limitations of my neurology and that being "liable to error" is built-in.

    __ I don't need to "think fast," I can take my time to *think slowly and deliberately* to think in a thorough way without jumping to conclusions.

    __ I am totally curious about things and find it easy to consider ideas that I disagree with, wondering how the idea may appeal to others.

When it comes to thinking, how you begin determines how you will progress and your level of success in thinking effectively. If your beginning state is not right—the quality of your thinking will be off. To start right, be sure you are in the most optimal state for thinking. Then the adventure of thinking will be just that—a great adventure!

Thinking about Thinking
Thinking *needs* emotions because without emotions your whole demeanor becomes flat. Then when it becomes flat, your speech and your person loses its energy, vitality, and motivation. To think well requires that you infuse your thinking with a wide range of appropriate emotions which, in turn, then help you think better. Because your emotions are an intimate part of your cognitive-neural system, rather than inevitably conflicting with thinking, the right emotions empower your thinking effectiveness.

Afterwards: Accessing a Good Thinking State Exercise

1) Identify a state you need for being a better critical thinker. What is the state? Describe it as best you can? Recall a time when you experienced it. When you *access it* — step into it as fully as possible.

2) Amplify the state so that it has the right amount of intensity for you. How much are you experiencing it? What would be the best level of intensity? Notice how you are breathing, standing, your muscle tension, etc.

3) Anchor the state. What would you like to use as a *trigger* for recalling this state?

End of the Chapter Notes
1. See Daniel Kahneman's book, *Thinking: Fast and Slow* (2011).

PART II

THE ESSENTIAL

THINKING SKILLS

Thinking, as your most essential resource, functions as the foundation of your humanity. If the quality of your thinking determines the quality of your map-making, meaning-constructions, and experiences in life, then consider what a horrible disadvantage it is for a poor thinker. Poor thinking is a serious handicap in life! As a skill, *thinking* is goal-oriented and intentional, it is a function and experience that you can do in a competent way or not. Actually it's a crucial skill for managing life effectively.

This section begins with the core or the *essential thinking skills.* That's because thinking precisely, accurately, and clearly depends on the information you are working with. Once you understand that, then you can move on to constructing great ideas and meanings (eureka thinking), and after that to making great decisions (executive thinking). We begin with the

essential thinking skills so you develop the ability to question, explore, and examine your thinking to make it more true to the outside world. We begin with *the five essential thinking skills:*

      1) Considering   — Trying a Thought on
      2) Questioning   — Exploring to Understand
      3) Doubting   — Suspecting, Playing Skeptic
      4) Detailing   — Indexing, Extensionalizing
      5) Distinguishing   — De-Confusing

Although simple in nature, there's power and wonder in these skills. They enable you to *extensionalize* your ideas and understandings out into the real world where they make a difference and where you can tell if they are accurate and useful. These skills are central to critical thinking and for implementing great ideas into your life, relationships, into the products and services you create, etc.

As *essential thinking skills,* they are fundamental skills for all of the subsequent and more advanced thinking skills. They are also core to the very process of "entertaining" an idea in your mind and "working over" an idea to develop it. Without these skills, your thinking will be ungrounded and without the necessary details you need to effectively translate your ideas into real life and make them productive.

Chapter 6

CONSIDERING

"To understand any sentence, you have to begin with an attempt to believe it. You must first *know* what the idea would mean *if* it were true. Only then can you decide whether or not to believe it. The initial attempt to believe is an automatic operation of System 1 ... which is gullible and biased to believe."

Daniel Kahneman (2011, p. 82)

"The mark of an educated mind is
to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it."
Socrates

Speaking emphatically and feeling increasingly frustrated, I said, "Just consider it!" I was attempting to "reason" with a bureaucrat at a bank, trying to get a loan for an investment property. But the man in the grey suit and grey tie was completely devoted to "the policies" of the bank, he did not seem able to "think outside the box." I mentioned *creative financing,* but he seemed to view that term with contempt, or perhaps he considered it an oxymoron, completely unintelligible.

"I won't consider it, it is out of the question; we never make loans without all of the conditions being completely met."

"So that is your answer." I reflected back. And then, unable to help myself, and having seen too many episodes of "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire," I said, "Is that your final answer?" "Yes it is." At that point I did feel like asking one more question, "Would you like to call a friend?" but I restrained myself from acting on that feeling, I didn't want to burn all of my bridges. So I let it go.

Considering is the first, and probably the most important, aspect of

thinking. If you will not, or do not, even *consider* something, you will not be able to think a particular thought. You reject it wholesale right from the start. This is, more than likely, the reason children are such ferocious learners and we adults are not. Having no preconceived ideas or a history of learnings to defend, children are open to listening to and considering whatever is presented to them. We adults are not so open.

When I lived on seventh street in the city of Grand Junction proper, I often had people knock on my front door. They were going door to door selling things or promoting something. A particular religious group frequented my front door many times over the years. They asked if they could come in and study the Bible with me. Knowing a bit about the group, I always replied with the same invitation.

> "Sure, please do, *if you could be wrong* about your current opinions and you are open to studying and maybe learning something new, then I'll be open to learning something new and will also assume that I also could be wrong."

They never came in. They couldn't. A few attempted to. They would start to move forward, they would lift up their foot, then they would stop themselves in mid-air, step back, reconsider and seemingly move forward, but then step back. One time, one person actually said, "Sorry, but we can't do that." I asked why she could not do that. "Because we are not wrong and can't be wrong." "Really, you are infallible?" I didn't get an answer to that, the two of them just walked away. *They would not even consider the idea that they could be wrong.*

Considering is a very simple concept. It is the idea of *trying on an idea* to get the feel of it and to sense where it will take you, and what it will do inside you. To refer to Daniel Kahneman's quote at the head of this chapter, "To understand any sentence, you have to begin with an attempt to believe it. You must first know what the idea would mean if it were true." That's what considering is—"an attempt to believe" something.   It's not about believing the idea. Considering does *not* require that you believe it, only that you make *an attempt to understand it on its own terms.*

This is the same with seeking to understand and appreciate an imaginative story, whether a novel or movie, first you have to suspend disbelief and then accept what you hear for this moment-in-time as potentially true. You do that with any child's bedtime story that you read or tell. You do that with any sci-fi movie you watch. The beginning place for *thinking* starts here—

as you just consider what something would mean if it is true. Determining whether it is true or not comes later when you question and doubt.

Considering as Fresh Thinking
In the neurology of thinking and learning, we are wired to notice the new. The process moves from novel to familiar. You start with what you don't know. It's new! In learning, you then transform what is novel (chaotic, unknown, uncertain, and ambiguous) into that which is familiar (known, routine, stable, distinctions). As you do this, the locus of cognitive control shifts between the prefrontal cortex lobes. Elkhonon Goldbert explains:

> "Novelty and familiarity are the defining characteristics in the mental life of any creature capable of learning. In simple instinctive behaviors the triggering stimulus is instantly 'familiar' and the degree of familiarity does not change with exposure ... learning is change. At an early stage of every learning process the organism is faced with novelty and the end stage of the learning process can be thought of as routinization or familiarity." (2009, p. 66).

Ah, if thinking begins with what is novel, then because it is novel, *you will not know it* when you first encounter it. And if you refuse it for that reason, you will never know or understand it.

> "Novelty and routinization are relative. What is novel for me today will become routine tomorrow, in a month, or in a year. Therefore, the relationship between the two hemispheres must be dynamic, characterized by a gradual shift in the locus of cognitive control over a task from the right hemisphere to the left hemisphere. Transition from novelty to routinization in the course of learning a task. Right hemisphere is dominant at early learning stages, while the task is novel. Left hemisphere is dominant once task-appropriate cognitive strategies are firmly in place." (Ibid, p. 68).
>
> For the left hemisphere it is the top-down process driven by previously formed generic representations allowing a class membership assignation of unique exemplars. For the right hemisphere it is a bottom-up process driven more by ad-hoc computations aimed at establishing similarities." (Ibid, p. 84).[1]

Thinking is a "new to known" phenomenon. It begins as you *think freshly* considering what is new and different. You are thinking about something as if for the first time. This works best when you use the "innocent eye," or the "beginner's mind," or the know-nothing state. As Fritz Perls often urged, "Lose your mind and come to your senses." So often, to truly see what **is** requires "coming to your senses" so you don't use your beliefs and

assumptions to filter what you see.

The rhythm of thinking moves forward in fresh thinking and then backward to embody the new learnings to make them familiar. Here your thinking intention is to move out to what's new, novel, and different so that you can bring it back and make it an intimate part of what you know. Your brain is designed to do this—right hemisphere and lower brain levels encounter what's *new,* then left hemisphere and higher brain levels build representations of that knowledge, making it *known.* These thinking patterns start with something *new* and conclude with the *familiar.*[2]

The Inability to Even Consider
But some people seem to be completely unable to even consider a new idea —even for a single moment. What stops such a person from even considering an idea? Why will some people not even try on or entertain an idea? What harm do they imagine could occur if they consider something? The answer is usually *fear.* Fear is what mostly prevents one from this first thinking skill of considering as well as some misunderstandings which different fears trigger. This fear may take on several expressions:

> If I consider, the idea gets in my head forever and I'll never get it out.
> If I consider, it means I am accepting the idea which would be anathema to my beliefs.
> Considering an idea is the first step to believing it; it is a slippery slope into error. It is just too dangerous!
> I made up my mind about that in high school and I see no reason to reconsider it.
> I was warned about people like you always stirring things up and disturbing people!

Here we see the contrast between an openness that's willing to consider something and the closed-minded unwillingness to even think about something. Some people are closed-minded because they *fear learning something new or different.* To learn something new or different would mean that they have to change which would disturb their current comfort. So they don't want to even bother with the possibility. Others are closed-minded due to being psychologically defensive which arises as a method of self-protection. They are so insecure within themselves that they also fear learning anything new or different. After a person becomes afraid of an idea or of awareness, then *that person defaults to defensive thinking.* The person now uses the defense mechanisms (e.g., denial, repression, suppression, introjection, projection, etc.) to fend off the new.

Obviously, to be open-minded requires a certain degree of personal security and character development. This primarily refers to a solid sense of oneself and one's value. If you know yourself and value yourself as having unconditional worth, then no *thought* can take that away. You have a solid foundation from which to now search for truth and follow truth wherever it takes you. Now you can develop a willingness to consider other views, other meanings, to accept that you may not know something, and that there's lots more to learn. Albert Einstein added this: A basic openness is an openness to the mysterious:

> "The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom the emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause and stand wrapped in awe, is as good as dead; his eyes are closed."

Considering Sub-Skills

1) *Learn to just Observe.* Thinking's first act is that of just observing, observing without judging or making a commitment one way or the other. Just notice what there is before you without jumping to conclusions. By just observing, you avoid giving in to emotional reactions and reactivity. Socrates spoke to this: "The mark of an educated mind is to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it."

To just observe, embrace the state of *not-knowing* in order to fully access your powers of sensory awareness. By releasing your judgments, and by embracing your ignorance, then you can keep learning, noticing, and inquiring. Socrates, realizing that understanding is always incomplete, partial, and generalized, deemed himself "wise" precisely because he realized that he was ignorant about most things.[3]

Given that you always perceive less than there is (we all do), *stay open to what you are missing.* When you don't know what you are missing, you are unaware of what you don't know. This is why it's important to adopt a "beginner's mind"— one that is ready to learn. By developing a willingness to see what is there, you will learn to just *consider.* What are the facts that you observe? Learn to see-and-see and hear-and-hear for sensory awareness. This is what is involved in re-learning anything, you have to see cleanly, clearly, without evaluations. Take on an observing stance to what is, to what is said, to your own thinking and emoting processes. Be present in the here-and-now.

2) *Adopt an "Innocent Eye."* An "innocent eye" is what a child has. The young child simply and innocently sees and hears and feels, etc. For us adults, we have to re-learn how to once again simply see-and-see, hear-and-hear, feel-and-feel, etc. This "losing your mind and coming to your senses" is getting out of your "computer head" and coming back to reality (Perls).

To consider, simply accept whatever another person offers and imagines it is true (at least to that person). Then wonder, "How could it be true? In what ways might it be true?" Embrace not-knowing to fully access your powers of sensory awareness. Release judgment, embrace your ignorance so you keep learning, noticing, and inquiring. As you realize that your understanding is always partial, incomplete, and generalized, plant the question in your mind, "What am I missing?" Given that you always perceive less than there is, stay open to the fact *there are things that you are always missing.* When you don't know what you are missing, you are unaware of what you don't know. A "beginner's mind" is a "ready mind" ready to learn. George Miller (1980) described *considering* when he wrote the following about how to listen and seek to understand someone.

> "In order to understand what another person is saying, you must assume that it is true, and try to imagine what it could be true of." (p. 46)

3) *Give it a Chance.* Once you observe or notice what *is,* then give it a chance by *mentally trying it on.* You give it a chance by accepting what is presented to you by nature or other persons, then for a moment *imagine it is true.* You also give it a chance as you ask yourself the questions, "*How* could it be true? In what ways might it be true?" Giving an idea a chance does *not* require that you believe it, only that you seek to understand it as an idea. If you can't do that, you severely limit your thinking.

Use the premise in NLP, "People are doing the best they can given what they know and their experience." If you start from that presupposition it allows you to assume that a person's behavior and/or experience is meaningful to that person. From there you can begin a search to discover *how* could that conceivably be.

If thinking is "entertaining an idea," then it means welcoming an idea into your mind as a visitor as you would welcome a visitor into your home. You treat it respectfully in order to understand it. Invite the idea in for tea, then sit down and have a chat about it.

4) *Represent the Idea as Fully as Possible.* In considering, use all of your

senses and sensory systems to encode your understanding. Take the time to be as thorough as possible in detailing out all of the specifics of an idea. Contextualize when, where, with whom, and how. Turn it into an inner movie in your mind, that will enable you to see if it makes sense or not. De Bono suggested focusing on visual images, both images of real sights as well as images of diagrams, cartoons, and other representations that enable you to *see an idea.* Sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words and a picture can take your thinking to incredibly new places. Yet don't neglect words or forget that they are symbols, sometimes standing for something else and sometimes not.

> "The worlds we manage to get inside our heads are mostly worlds of words." Wendell C. Johnson

There's a challenge of the visual as well as the digital media which surrounds us. Because it primarily stimulates our eyes and emotions, we are tempted to react rather than think. Represent your thoughts fully to determine their value.

5) *Foreground the Idea.* Take the idea that you are seeking to understand and put it in the foreground of your mind. If you need to background whatever you already know temporarily, put that in the background. This, at least, will give the new idea a chance. Now as you just observe it and consider it, what do you think? How does foregrounding the idea change your thoughts about it? To further consider the idea, put it in front of other backgrounds and notice what happens.[4]

6) *Playfully Explore New Things.* The spirit and attitude of real thinking involves *playing around with ideas*—play around with their possibilities. "Playful" here refers to experimenting, testing, joking, pushing boundaries, turning things up-side-down, and seeing what happens. Things often become humorous—funny, weird. In this real thinking includes humor as you shift your perspective in viewing things. And humor, as "that which is out of place in time and space without danger" (Plato), means seeing the incongruent (what is out of place in time and space), the exaggerated, the absurd, the silly, and sometimes the un-thought.

Humor, and the laughter it inspires, typically results from "a sudden and pleasant psychological shift" says John Morreall in *Taking Laughter Seriously* (1983). Your thinking (and mind) tend to shift when a stable expectation is pleasantly jarred. Humor catches you "off guard" so you see

things in a very different way. In creativity it's typical to be puzzled and to say, "That's funny." Humor jolts, jars and disturbs your ordinary way of thinking. That's why jokes end with a "punch line" that jolts your thinking. This playfulness with ideas enables you to consider ideas that you would otherwise dismiss outright.[5]

Playfully explore "crazy" possibilities with a thinking partner. Take an idea and wonder out loud about it. Ask your thinking partner to play with it even if it seems ridiculous. Leave room for the word "somehow." "Could it be that X is *somehow* related to Y? If so, how?"

7) *Give Yourself a Daily Surprise.* To facilitate consideration, aim to be surprised every day. Why? Because the phenomenon of being surprised is an extraordinarily useful phenomenon—it allows you to stop and notice what you would otherwise take for granted. When you are surprised, your eyes open wider, and you become more alert.

As a thinking experience, *surprise* provides a window on presuppositions. Jerome Bruner described surprise "as a response to a violated presupposition." What you have presupposed, you have taken for granted, and expect to be the case. Either due to the assumptions built into language itself, or over-familiarity with things, *when you presuppose things and take them for granted, you stop thinking.* When all of your life is in conformity to your expectations, you have adapted to such an extent that you probably have stopped noticing things. That's because the more you expect an event, the more easily it is to see and/or hear it. You have eyes for it. Conversely, the more unexpected something is, the more your surprise will require new and more processing.

This describes a central problem with thinking, namely, once you have a model of the world it sets you up for expectations. *And when you expect, you stop thinking.* You then take the hidden premises of that model of the world for granted. You take the invisible presuppositions as given stipulations of life. By intentionally seeking to be surprised and desiring surprises, you give yourself a chance to at least *consider* other possibilities.

In brain neurology, this is how the cortex works. In your brain, you create a model of the world which, in turn, sends predictions or expectations to the thalamus.   As the thalamus receives sensory input it reports on the *difference* between what you see and expect. Next, the thalamus sends

difference information to the cortex. At that point you may adjust your model of the world or defend it. What's amazing is that "consciousness tends to come on-line when expectations are violated" (David Eagleman, *Incognito,* 2011, p. 49). How is that? It's because violated expectations wake us up to reality so we take a second look.

8) *Wonder about Possibilities.* Wonder is a function of curiosity and it is curiosity that feeds the next thinking skill—questioning. Curiosity is the mental attitude that emotionally activates you to seek to know more. You wonder about what is possible. You become fascinated with where things came from or are going. And in that state of curiosity, questions begin popping, even exploding, in your mind. As you wonder ever so curiously, you are thinking in a special way. You are forming ideas, you are exploring, wondering, searching, probing, inquiring—all essential ingredients of learning. What is new and different? What new insights and distinctions can I make? How can he think that way? What information does she have that I don't?

> "Certainty locks us out of their story; curiosity lets us in." (*Difficult Conversations,* 1999, p. 37)

9) *Patiently delay your responses.* If you can't "hold your horses," you can't even start to consider. To consider requires that you develop sufficient patience and tolerance so you avoid "jumping to conclusions." If you do that, you quickly end the exploration process. When you have a low tolerance for ambiguity, uncertainty, and/or confusion, you will impatiently seek premature closure and that will cut off considering. Embrace not-knowing so you can go on a search for understanding.

Candice Pert tells about a time in which she attended a self-development course that she mostly considered to be nothing more than California pop psychology and without any real validity. But she gave it a go. She decided she would first get the experience, then decide about its validity.

> "Although I had a lot of skepticism at first, I decided to throw myself into the training, intending to get the full experience and then make up my mind afterward." (1997, p. 165).

10) *Neutral objectivity.* While there's no absolute objectivity, aim to *consider* by searching for facts and data impartially. Even our instruments and processes for how to approach and measure things contain biases as they privilege certain assumptions (premises). Yet while you can't be absolutely objective, you can certainly increase your objectivity and reduce your biases.

To do that, separate your thinking from yourself as a person. Consider the multiple sides of an issue as fairly as possible. Correct your view when new information arises. Objectively look at your thinking and reasoning processes to check out their quality. What can you do to make them more accurate and clear?

11) *Cultivate Empathy.* When you take another person's view, perspective, interest, and intention into consideration—you are expressing one of the highest human virtues, *empathy.* It is essential for thinking critically because you are relating in a compassionate and humble way knowing that you could be wrong and the other could be right.

Thinking about Thinking
In the end, *an idea is just that—an idea.* It is just a thought—a thought that a particular person has thought at a certain time about a certain thing. At best, it is a good description of reality, a decent mental map about something out there. At worst, it is a messed-up map that you won't be able to use to go where you want to go or achieve what you want to achieve. That's why it is always a good idea to at least consider different views and perceptions. *Considering,* as the first stage of thinking, enables you to embrace reality for what it is. Imagine the opposite. If you can't consider something new or unknown to you, you limit yourself. You block yourself from discovering if the idea or some awareness has any merit at all.

A Considering Conversation
Two men were arguing on an executive team about the way to go about expanding the business. Bob presented an idea for moving forward which Bill immediately rejected. He didn't even consider it. The team leader decided to bring this up.
"Bill, it seems that you are rejecting Bob's idea without giving it a chance."
> Bill: "That's because it is not worth considering; there's no way in the world that it would work."
Leader: "And you know that how?"
> Bill: "Because we tried it years ago. It didn't work then, it will not work now."
"Indulge me, what idea did you try years ago and how was it that it did not work?"
> Bill: "Okay, sure. We tried to pay off the agent so we could negotiate directly with the board and ..."
"Is that what you think I'm suggesting?" Bob asked, interrupting the conversation.
> "Sure. [pause] That's not your proposal?"
Bob: "No, that's not what I'm proposing at all. I'm thinking in terms of changing

the formality of the negotiations; I'm thinking of setting up a more informal information wine and cheese gathering for the purpose of getting acquainted on a more personal basis with the board."

"Really? That might actually work." Bill admitted.

Afterwards: Exercising Your Consideration Powers

> In conversation with two or three others, identify a controversial subject and state your opinion about it. What are some other opinions which intelligent people hold about it which you do not? Next, what thinking and emoting arises in you when you simply think about considering it? See if you can list two or three responses. Finally, take one of the other opinions and try it on. As you do, notice your internal experience.
>
> Identify a subject. What have you never considered about that subject? What have you assumed about it? List three or four assumptions which you take for granted.

End of the Chapter Notes

1. Goldberg, Elkhonon. (2009). *The New Executive Brain: Frontal Lobes in a Complex World.* New York: Oxford: Oxford University Press.

2. These thinking patterns are called *meta-programs* in NLP and include: Sameness and difference, diverge and converge, mismatch and match, options and procedures; possibility and necessity.

3. See *Executive Wisdom* (2022). The paradox about wisdom is that it entails knowing what you don't know. When you *know* that, you are beginning to become wise.

4. This gestalt perceptual skill of foregrounding and backgrounding information is also a meta-program; it is #5 in *Figuring Out People.* In NLP, this gestalt capacity explains the structure and power of the Swish Pattern. There is also a pattern for foregrounding and backgrounding in *Sub-Modalities Going Meta* (2005).

5. See *Humorous Thinking* (2022).

Chapter 7

QUESTIONING

"The important thing is not to stop questioning. Question everything."
Albert Einstein

"Asking a question is the simplest way of focusing thinking...
asking the right question may be the most important part of thinking."
Edward de Bono

"It's not the answer that enlightens – it is the question!"
Eugene Lonesco, Playwrite

"The question is more important than the answer.
The answer will always change, but the question shows that you are thinking.
And thinking is what's important."
Edwards Deming

*"A question **not** asked is a door not opened."*
Marilee Goldberg

I started with 'considering,' because it is only when you truly *consider* the ins-and-outs of something that are you ready to question it. From that position, you can now move to deeply exploring what you're considering so that you can understand an idea or a task on its own merits. This deep exploring reveals the essence of thinking, namely, thinking takes you to where and what you don't know so that you can come to know it. *Thinking is questioning.* Why is that? It's because questions are driven by curiosity and wonderment. We want to know. We also may want to play around with some possibilities. Or we have been surprised and we are now fascinated by what we may have missed. So now we have questions.

What happens when you ask a question—a real question out of curiosity, wonderment, and interest? When you ask a question, *you put yourself in search mode.* When you do it well, you open all of your senses and your mind to

> Questioning unleashes your thinking capacity.

seek to understand what's before you, what you are experiencing, doing, or what someone is saying. In questioning you are seeking to satisfy an inner hunger—a mental and emotional hunger for understanding. No wonder questioning unleashes your thinking capacity.

When you ask a question you also activate your dynamic *intentional—attentional* resources which govern how you scan for information. Research has demonstrated that the question you seek to answer determines the scanning patterns you use (*Incognito*, Engleman, pp. 28-29). In other words, questioning predisposes you to a certain way of both perceiving and thinking. And that shouts about the importance of quality controlling your questions because the wrong kind of questions can unknowingly orient you to disastrous forms of thinking.

Questioning not only activates thinking, but can activate all kinds of thinking, the bad and unuseful along with the good and useful.   If questioning is as powerful as all of this indicates, then questioning can be powerfully enabling and equally it can be powerfully disabling.

Questionless in Seattle

The quotations at the beginning of this chapter speak about the wisdom of the ages about questions. In spite of this, *some people are questionless.* Whether they live in Seattle or elsewhere, they are uncurious about most things. Or

> *"Don't just teach your children to read. Teach them to question what they read. Teach them to question everything."*
> George Carlin

they have so few questions, or such insipid questions, that they are essentially questionless. And when a person doesn't have a question in mind, that person is probably not thinking. He is just drifting along, passively experiencing whatever is on TV, whatever others are saying, perceiving the world without being truly engaged in it.

What explains this? How can a human being become so questionless after experiencing the ferocious curiosity as a child who had a million questions about everything? What happened to a person to so thoroughly knock

questioning out of a person's consciousness so that one becomes uninquisitive? This is critical given the function of questions as Thomas Berger noted:

"The art and science of asking questions is the source of all knowledge."

Again, it is probably *fear.* It could be the fear of being wrong ("What are you an idiot, you're wrong"), fear of looking foolish ("That's a stupid question!"), fear of getting too personal ("Who are you to ask me that!?"), fear of offending someone, fear of violating protocol or some cultural norm, fear of not phrasing the question just right, and on and on. There could be all sorts of fears about asking questions—fears that drive questions out of a person's mind so she will not even consider them.

I'll Only Ask If I Already Know
Once in Hong Kong during some Neuro-Semantic Training on the subject of leadership, I was made aware that some of the Hong Kong participants were dissatisfied with the way things were going in the training. They gave feedback to the sponsor that they felt discouraged, "We are being outshone by others in the audience." "They are preventing us from asking questions." Now it so happened that we had a large international audience, people from Egypt, Europe, Australia, etc. Another person complained that "the Egyptians get to ask all the questions and we don't."

The next day I addressed the complaint. "I want to address all of our participants from Hong Kong." That got their attention. "I'm wondering why in the past three days none of you have asked any questions." No one spoke up. Silence covered the room like a morning fog on a river. I decided to *not* save the group from the discomfort of the silence, so I continued to wait. Finally one gentleman spoke up.

> "Well, so much of this information is new and we don't know the answer to our questions."

"I don't quite understand, so help me to understand what you're saying. I thought you would ask questions *when* you don't understand *so that* you could understand."

> "That may be how it works in the west, but here we only ask questions when we know the answer, otherwise we would look silly, and it would not be honorable."

"You only ask questions to which you already know the answers?" I repeated slowly and deliberately to call attention to that.

> "Yes, of course."

"This is new to me so please accept my question. And why would you ask a question if you already know the answer?"

> "It shows that we already know the answer because we wouldn't ask unless we knew."

Later, speaking with the sponsor and others on the team who lived in Hong Kong, I discovered that given the way "education" had been conducted there over the years, that was what many learned in school. "Be sure you know the answer to the questions you ask." Others learned other messages, "Don't ask dumb questions." "Questions are intrusive."

The solution I came upon, and used at that time, was to give everyone permission to ask questions, even dumb questions, regarding whatever they didn't know. That worked for a few of them. What turned the rest around was my follow-up statement.

> "As your teacher and professor, if you really want to honor me, please ask me questions regarding what you don't know; I would find it an incredible honor when you do that."

Questioning Sub-Skills

1) *Formulate a Question*. What is the inquiry that you want to engage in? What are you curious to think about, to search, probe, explore, and to know? What answers are you looking for? Years ago Kipling offered a poem that you can use to initiate a question:

> "I keep six honest serving men,
> they taught me all I know,
> Their names are What and Why and When
> and How and Where and Who."[1]

Nor do questions have to be complete sentences. In a conversation, you can use a single word to formulate a question. Simply say, "And?" "Because?" "When?" "So?" Yet in formulating the question, take a lot of care how you do that. After all, as Wendell Johnson noted in *People in Quandaries*, "The terminology of the question determines the terminology of the answer."

2) *Ask Multiple Questions*. It's almost never sufficient to merely ask one question. More typically, one question elicits another question and then another. So once you identify a subject, ask multiple questions about it. Inquire about its

> Your brain cannot *not* answer a question.

source, consequences, and frames. Ask about what others have thought about it and why. Ask about what's not been said. What questions do you have in mind?

Ask questions to establish the context. Ask about the what, when, where, which, who, etc. Then ask about the internal coding of one's ideas—the person's representations, beliefs, values, memories, anticipations, etc. These meta-questions will take you into the person's *meta place* thereby giving you the internal contexts.[2]

3) *Identify What You do not Know.* While it is much easier to identify what you know about something, it is also critical to begin identifying what you do not know. When you do this, you stand up to, and push back on, *the understanding bias*. This very common bias regularly blinds us to reality. This is the bias that leads us to assume that we understand. Often we are able to use things while completely *not* understanding how they work. In fact, we get so used to using electricity, driving cars, clicking with the mouse on a lap-top, etc., that we think we understand these things. More typically our "understanding" of such things is superficial at best. Test yourself. Attempted to actually explain how such things work to someone. You will probably discover that you know less than you realize. If you do, tha'ts actually a great discovery!

4) *Give Yourself Permission to Ask.* Go inside and say to yourself, "I give myself permission to ask questions because it honors the speaker, it shows engagement, and it accelerates my own learning." Many people are embarrassed or ashamed of *not understanding* or *not knowing.* Some are even self-contemptuous if they discovered (or someone else discovers) that they didn't know something. To say, "I don't know" is a major challenge for them. Why? Because there is a demand within their mind, "I *must* know and not let anyone know that I don't." Yet if you know, if you are certain, then you will have no questions.

To develop the question ability, invite the possibility within yourself of *not-knowing.* Give yourself permission for that also. In fact, the state of *not-knowing* is a great state for enabling and feeding questioning. The not-knowing state is not one of ignorance, it is one of being willing to suspend "knowing" (and pretending to know) and explore possibilities by asking questions.

5) *Wonder Deeply and Thoroughly.* As wondering about possibilities is a sub-skill for *considering,* it is also a sub-skill for questioning. That's because many of the very best questions are driven by wondering. As you take time to wonder, and use the wondering state of mind as a way to fuel

questioning, now *use your imagination*. Ask "What if..." questions. "What if this or that happens?" Wondering questions play a central role in creativity, in doing due-diligence, in planning for any kind of risk management, etc.

Be absolutely curious. When you are thinking—you are forming ideas that mentally map your understanding. You are exploring, wondering, searching, probing, inquiring—all essential ingredients of learning. Access curiosity, fascination, and wonder in order to set questions aflame in your mind. What can I learn here? What is new and different? What new insights and distinctions can I make? How can they think that way? What information do they have that I don't?

> "Certainty locks us out of their story; curiosity lets us in." (*Difficult Conversations,* 1999, p. 37)

In fact, the greater your curiosity, the less will be your fear of failure or of judgment. In this way, your curiosity chases out fears and worries. That's because in order for your curiosity to thrive, you have to suspend those fears and worries as you pursue the passion of discovery.

6) *Use Your Body to Question*. One of the amazing things about questioning is that you can ask questions quietly and silently by just using your body. You can do that by raising an eyebrow. Do that by opening your eyes with an inquisitive facial expression. Lift up your right or left hand turning the palm upward in a gentle sweeping motion upward. If someone presents a dichotomy, an either–or idea, question it. Gesture a continuum with polar opposites, then inquire about the possibility of an "excluded middle" by pointing to the space between the polar ends.

7) *Check Your Presuppositions.* Since every question operates from unspoken assumptions, flush out and check out those premises. Manipulative questions in particular come from a presupposition that frames the person as already guilty, bad, or sick. "Isn't that just another way your ego is getting in the way?" That question assumes the answer. And because it does, it is a rhetorical question. And as such, it is not so much looking for answers as it is presenting the assumed answer. Instead, to flush out presuppositions, ask, "What assumptions are built into this question?" "What does this question presuppose or imply?"

8) *Question your Answers.* Several values emerge when you rise above a question and question a question. First you can quality control the question.

"Where will this question take me?" Then there are the ecology questions: "Does this question enhance my life?" "Does it empower me as a person?" "Does it support my social system, my health, my finances, my children, etc.?"

By questioning a question, you can elicit other questions which may be elicited by it, "What question does this answer evoke?" In Meta-Coaching, we have developed *the realm of meta-questions*—questions about an experience. It could be a belief question, "What do you believe about resilience?" A value question, "What is important to you as a value about leadership?" An identity question, "When your learning skills include joyful learning, how does that affect your identity?"[3]

9) *Take a Meta-Position*. When you step back from a question, you move yourself to a meta-position to it. That's what enables you to then question the question. Other things also transpire. Now you can *own* the question rather than the question owning you. For example, if you are apt to ask questions like, "Why did I mess up that presentation again?" If you *answer* it without questioning the question, *that question will begin to own you.* It will take charge of your responses. It will directionalize your mind to invent reasons that you messed up.

Once you question it, however, "Is this a useful question?" "Does this question bring out my best?" then you can *own* the question. And to that extent, you can update it or eliminate it altogether. "How did I get the presentation out of the structured sequence and what can I do to prevent that from ever happening again?" In this way you can use meta-questions to expose the hidden structures and implications behind the question thereby allowing you a chance to re-design the question.

In questioning your question, check on the direction that the question sends the mind. "What direction does this question send your thinking?" "What orientation does this question create in me?" Not only does every question establish a direction and orientation, it also *prevents* other directions. Ask, "What does this question *not* allow me to think?" "What ideas does that question forbid me from even considering?"

10) *Interrogate the Subject*. Imagine taking a subject and putting it in a court-room and interrogating as as fully as possible to get as much truth out of that subject as you can. Interrogating suggests questioning in a direct

way, even in an aggressive way. That kind of questioning often becomes doubting—our next thinking skill.

Thinking about Thinking
While statements feel more powerful to you as you present them, yet they are actually far less powerful in influencing others. Why is that? It's because the human brain cannot *not* answer a question. By way of contrast, we can easily resist a statement. Ask a question and the listening brain will feel compelled to answer the question. The question engages the brain in such a way that it cannot be ignored. In this way questions not only access experiences, *questions also generate experiences.* David Epston said, "Every time we ask a question, we're generating a possible version of life."

Questioning, like considering, *lies at the very heart of thinking.* In fact, it is almost impossible to think without questioning. We could say that if you don't have a question in your mind, you are probably not thinking. Check it out this week, "As I think about X, what question am I seeking to answer?"

A Questioning Conversation
Because there are so many kinds of questions, and so many levels of questions, questions describe a multi-level and a multi-dimensional response.
Coach: "You say you are struggling with your sense of self?"
> John: "Yes, after leaving the corporate world, I thought that being an entrepreneur would be a great lifestyle. But when I'm at social events and introducing myself as an entrepreneur, it sounds so superficial and unreal. I always walk away feeling disappointed in myself."

Coach: "So it's your social roles that you're struggling with, not an internal sense of self?" (*Distinction question*)
> "Well, yes, it involves my social roles, yet it feels deeper than that. It feels like a part of me is missing."

"How does it feel 'deeper' than that?"
> "It's like I don't know who I am anymore."

"Before this, you knew who you were?" (*Inferential question*)
> "Well, yes, I was senior manager over product development; I knew who I was. I knew how to introduce myself. I felt proud of my accomplishments."

"Again, that sounds like you're talking about a social and/or career role. Were you identifying yourself with that role and position—a position that is now gone? [Pause] How well do you distinguish your inner self or person from your outer roles and positions?" (*Distinction question*)

"There's a difference?"

"Oh yes. Are you a person who can play different roles? Or are you just a role and that completely makes up your humanity? You are nothing but a role?"

"[Laughing] Of course, I'm a person!"

"Do you unconditionally value your person as worthy or have you been using your social status and achievements as conditions to bolster your value as a person?"

Exercising Your Questioning Skills

In a small group of three or four persons, identify a subject to explore (e.g., resilience, budgeting, criticism, exercising, creativity, etc.). If you were limited to asking only five questions for the purpose of understanding the subject, what five questions would you ask about the subject? Write down your five questions and when the group is ready, invite each person share your questions. Now evaluate: Which question was the most productive for you, and why? Which one was the next most productive one? What have you learned from this?

End of the Chapter Notes

1. *The Elephant Child*, 1956 NY: Doubleday. Kipling— A Selection of His Stories and Poems. (P. 383).

2. About the phrase, "meta place." This refers to your mind. Your mind is a *meta* place because it refers to what you are aware of which is *above and beyond* what you see, hear, and feel in the outside world. It is your inner world where you record the outside world and carry it with you and in that meta place, you construct all of your ideas, beliefs, decisions, understandings, etc. See *Meta Place* (2023).

3. For more about meta-questions, see *Meta-States* (2012), *Secrets of Personal Mastery* (1997).

Chapter 8

DOUBTING

"Doubt is the origin of wisdom."
Rene Descartes

"Doubt is uncomfortable; certainty is ridiculous."
Voltaire

"The fundamental cause of the trouble is that in the modern world
the stupid are cocksure while the intelligent are full of doubt."
Bertrand Russell

"To doubt everything, or, to believe everything,
are two equally convenient solutions;
both dispense with the necessity of reflection."
Henri Poincare

From questioning we now move into *the thinking skill of doubting.* When you doubt, you question in a specific way—you question the validity of an idea. In doubting, you may also question the way it is expressed, how an idea is being used, its relevance, source, etc. In these ways doubting allows you to *challenge* an idea or a proposal, and to *test* it. It's the design of doubting that you discover where an idea is valid and where it is not, useful or not, relevant or not. Doubting enables you to identify the limits of an idea—how far you can, and cannot, take it. And how far you let an idea take you.

In doubting, you have a feeling of uncertainty or a lack of conviction. This leads to being indecisive about the bottom line or the action to take. That's why in the state of doubt, you experience hesitancy. In doubting you are

using your skepticism about the truth, truthfulness, or trustworthiness of a person or a thing. In doing this, doubting becomes an incredibly powerful tool for determining the truth or factuality of an experience or action. Without doubting, you would naively believe whatever you are told or whatever you read. Thereby you would be without any discernment. But with doubts, you are using your skepticism to test a subject. That's why to get your thinking diploma, you will need to *learn how to doubt effectively.*

What is skepticism? Skepticism is "an attitude of doubt or a disposition of incredulity either in general or toward a particular object." This is critical because no one has complete knowledge about anything. So skepticism, as a method of suspended judgment, enables you to use doubt to test the reality of an idea. Now for something fascinating. The word originated from the Latin *scepticus, and from Greek skeptikos, from skeptikos* "thoughtful," which comes from *skeptesthai* which literally means "to look or consider." *When you doubt, you become thoughtful* and ready to think again. So doubting is deep thinking, thinking that makes you *thoughtful.*

Caveat: *Doubt is not cynicism.* Carefully distinguish doubt from cynicism because cynicism and doubt are two very different phenomena. Cynicism is actually a belief that dis-values things. The cynic *believes* the worst about people, namely that people are motivated purely by self-interest and nothing more. When you doubt, you are testing to prove the value of something. Cynicism is the opposite of that. Cynicism is negative and pessimistic and arises from a world-weariness. Not so with doubt.

This reveals the relationship between doubting and thinking. In doubting, you look deeply, you consider, scan, and explore thereby making you more thoughtful—full of thoughts. First there is open-mindedness wherein you, at least, *consider* something. Once you do, next comes skepticism to put flawed thinking to the test.

Doubting Sub-Skills
1) *Shift Out of Naivety.* As a thinking skill, you begin with naivety as you simply and unquestionably just accept whatever is presented to you—you *consider* it. You don't question it; you do not doubt it. By considering it as it was presented, you accepted it on its terms. Now it is time to shift out of that naivety and use your ability to doubt as you question it. Indeed, to question is to doubt. It is to skeptically question the limits, the credibility, or the validity of an idea.

Naivety works just fine as a beginning place, but not so much as an end. Take people at their word and consider what they say. That begins the conversation, but it does not conclude the conversation. People can be wrong. Ideas can be toxic. Some actions can be devastating to one's life. Experts can disagree with one another. Questions need to be asked and ideas need to be doubted to test their veracity.

As a side note, in Spanish the word for "question" is often translated "doubt." I first heard this when a Spanish speaker spoke it to me. As a good friend he came up to me after a presentation and, in broken English, said, "About what you said, I have some doubts." My first thought was "Oh so he doesn't accept what I said and doubts its validity?" But then the conversation that followed was simply one of questions so he could more fully understand the subject.

When you are naive, you *match* whatever someone says and take it on as if it were an indisputable fact. That's what you do when you 'consider.' When you doubt, you *mismatch* what the person says or presents. Now instead of looking for similarities, you intentionally look for differences. The questions in your mind are, "What is different?" "How could it be different?"[1]

2) *Challenge the Facts.* One of the first things to doubt are the facts. "Is that a real fact? Where did you hear that? What magazine or book did you read that in? How reliable is that as a source of information? What biases does that source operate from?" Doubting the source of information is one way to do due diligence when it comes to making sure that the stuff you feed your mind on is healthy, sane, and supportive of your well-being. So, ask for specifics. Ask for evidence of the facts that someone is quoting.

The tricky thing about a fact is that it can be a "fact" from one perspective and an evaluation from another. This is where *context* plays a significant role in governing the quality of a fact. During Covid the CDC announced that so many thousands, and then hundreds-of-thousand, of people were dying of the virus. Eventually, however, the CDC put out additional facts. One was that the average age of death by Covid was 79 years-of-age in the United States. Just prior to that, I happened upon the fact that the average age of death for men in the United States is also 79. That raised a question. "How many of the Covid-deaths were also, at the same time, the number of average men dying at that age?" Something seemed off and possibly

convoluted! In fact, the numbers were nearly the same. So how many Covid-deaths were actually outside of the number who would probably die anyway? And given that the average Covid-death had four co-morbidities —any one of which could have caused death, the whole thing of counting covid-deaths from that group seemed very questionable.

Facts have to be challenged. Merely saying that something is a fact certainly does *not* make it a fact.[2] Generally speaking, facts will be sensory-based information—empirical so that you could see, hear, and touch the reference. When it comes to statistical facts, things are less sure and more questionable, and should always be taken with a grain of salt. Ask a number of questions about how the information was gathered, by whom, in what way, etc. I quoted Voltaire at the head of this chapter, here's the full quotation:

> "It is only charlatans who are certain; doubt is not a very agreeable state, but certainly is a ridiculous one."

3) *Play Devil's Advocate.* One fun way to be the skeptic is to intentionally and directly "play devil's advocate." This generally reduces the sense of challenge or attack. "You may be right about that, but just to test it, I'd like to play devil's advocate to this proposal, would that be okay with you?" With that, you can then examine the evidence, turn it upside-down, inside-out, and see how robust the idea is in the process of being tested without the person feeling attacked.

You can play devil's advocate with "what if" questions since they typically elicit *doubts.* "What if you fail? What if you make a fool of yourself? What if she laughs at you? What if it doesn't work out the way you want it to?"

4) *Differentiate.* Beyond doubting the credibility, legitimacy, etc. of an idea, you can doubt whether the idea is well stated, or if the way it is stated involves a confusion. Many ideas are often presented without clear identification about what it is and what it is not. There's a lack of differentiation and so the subject is ambiguous and fuzzy. You may not know at first whether an idea or proposal can be differentiated, but you can, at least, attempt to differentiate. Ask, "Could there be some distinctions that you are not making? If so, what would they be?"

Most people, even psychologists, fail to effectively differentiate between self-esteem and self-confidence. While they should *doubt* that they are the

same, they do not. I see it all of the time even in psychological journals and books. Then, as these two terms and experiences are fused together, they create lots of confusion. Do that and then you will think (falsely so) that your *value and worth as a person* is dependent on, and the same as, your social value in what you *do.* Then your so-called "self-esteem" will go up and down depending on how things are going in your life. That's because by tying your value as a human being to the success of your achievements, you make it conditional. It prevents you from viewing your value as a human being as *unconditional—a given.*

5) *Question the Language.* Here's another thing to doubt—the words, phrases, and the language used to represent an idea. Because language can immobilize thinking, challenge it by using the questioning skills of the Meta-Model (Appendix A). These enable you to inquire into what is vague so that the person's answers become increasingly more precise. The questions enable you to fill in the details from what has been deleted. You can also reverse what has been distorted.

Language itself is tricky and is full of all sorts of limitations. To deal with that, begin with the realization *that language is not real,* it is only a symbolic system which stands for and represents something else. No word *is* the thing itself. The word "cat" cannot scratch you. The word "hamburger" cannot satisfy your hunger. So be suspicious and cautious about words. Because words are not real, don't take them for granted.

A good place to begin is to find out what someone is referring to and whether or not it has a true reference. *Pseudo-words* do not. There are "words" that sound like real words, and people attempt to use as words, which are not. They have no actual referent. And to vague questions, you can not get a clear answer. The problem is in the question itself.[2]

6) *Question Your Self.* In the field of critical thinking, I once came across a statement that I first questioned, and then doubted: "Self-criticism is a necessary element of truly critical thinking." I wondered, "What does this 'self-criticism' refer to?" The sentence only makes sense when it does not refer to 'self-criticism' as we normally use the term.

Instead, it refers to questioning and doubting *what* you are producing, not yourself as a person. It refers to *critiquing* your thoughts, and then your self as a thinker, something you *do* (not what you *are*). Use such critiquing as

a method of inquiry without being cynical. If you critique yourself, or your group, before others do, then you can catch a weakness in your thought or argument and correct it first.

> How could I be wrong? What am I missing?
> What are my blind spots?
> What cognitive biases could be creating a distortion in my thinking?
> What do others see and/or perceive that I am missing?
> What is the same as what's already known, what's different for what's not known?
> Can it be falsified? What is the hypothesis?

7) *Disconfirm.* When you are in a doubting frame of mind, your thinking moves you to disconfirm rather than confirm an idea. You may disconfirm the idea by presenting contradictory evidence to the idea. You may call in question the process that previously confirmed something. Disconfirming usually goes to the evidence used to validate it. "How solid is that evidence? Is it beyond a shadow of a doubt? Was it confirmed on evidence that was questionable?"

When you *disconfirm* you say "no" to an idea, belief, decision, understanding, etc. You say "no" to its validity or usefulness. If others are confirming it, then you are mismatching that point of view.[4]

8) *Set up a Test*. In doubting, you are questioning whether something is so or not. You can do this by making a hypothesis and then designing an experiment to see if it works or not. By testing the hypothetical idea, you will possibly find out where an idea works and where it does not work. When you do this, your doubtful thinking can occur along a wide range of possibilities. The probability may be very low (5%) or very high (95%). What is the likelihood? Karl Popper's principle of falsifiability is designed to determine if an idea is one that can be tested or if is it self-contained. "If your idea was wrong, how would you know? What could demonstrate that?"

9) *Look for What's not Present*. For everything that is presented, there are lots and lots of things *not* presented. There's a million things! There is information that is left out, overlooked, ignored, unconsciously deleted, etc. No one can present *everything* about any subject or idea. Therefore because all information is incomplete, *you don't know what you don't know.* You simply do not know what's missing. The solution? *Look for what is missing.* In doing so you are doubting whether what you have, and what

you know, is enough or sufficient for the presentation.

> "You can only really understand something when you know what it is not." Steven Pinker (*The Stuff of Thought,* p. 91)

Good doubtful thinking therefore questions what's absent. "What is not presented?" "What is missing that I'm not even looking for?"   In *The Black Swan*, Nassim Taleb called into question the common strategy of focusing on those who succeed. He says we are far too quick to assume that their thinking, believing, and actions alone explain their success. "What did they do that created their success?" Perhaps the answer is, "They created an inspirational vision." If that is the case, then it sounds like you have discovered *the key to their success!*

But no. Unless you "visit the graveyard," and ask the same questions for those who did not create the same kind of success, you won't know for sure if what you found is truly the critical piece of the puzzle. "Did those who fail also think, believe, and do the same thing as those who succeeded?" If they did, then perhaps what we are attributing as *the key to their success* is not the critical attribution at all. If we think an optimistic attitude and persistence are the "keys of success," and find that many who did not succeed were also optimistic and persistent, then what? It may be a *necessary* element, but not a *sufficient* element.

It is good to look for what is *not* present although this is especially difficult and challenging. Our brains are wired to focus on what *is,* on what exists, on what is present, not on what is not present. In one detective story of Sherlock Holmes, his elegance and brilliance of mind was demonstrated precisely by his doubt. In "The Dog that did Not Bark," the non-barking was the piece of *non-evidence* that cued Holmes to the solution. Inferentially he concluded that *whoever* the thief was—the dog must have known him. The "not barking" implied something about the dog and his relationship to the thief.

10) Test for Soundness. How sound of an argument do you have for or against the idea that you have? Not only can words be false and deceptive, so can sentences and statements that make an argument for or against something. False ways of reasoning fall under the category of the *cognitive fallacies* (Appendix D). And over the centuries, great thinkers have collected scores and scores of lists of cognitive fallacies. These are irrational ways to think. One aspect of doubting is to consider, "Could the way this person is thinking be fallacious?" "If so, what specifically is

wrong with the kind of thinking used?"

The Design of Doubting

To *think doubtfully* is to observe with a lot of care as you look for what does not match, does not fit, and/or that seems out of place. By looking for what could go wrong, where you could find that you have made a mistake, an error, or overlooked something critical—you are doing that in order to avoid larger problems and to correct things ahead of time. When you look for falsehoods, untruths, or deceptions, you are not necessarily being "negative." It could indicate that you have both the passion and skill to do *preventative corrections.*

If you find any of these problematic things, then you can check your thinking, assuming, language, etc. to identify, "How did I get here?" Knowing where you took a mis-turn on the highway of your thinking and reasoning enables you to back up and correct the mis-step. Remember also that you can't get clear answers to vague questions.

Thinking about Thinking

Once you are secure in yourself, you have the luxury to doubt. If, however, you are insecure, and you *need* to have reality fit your ideas, then doubting will seem dangerous and threatening. You will not want anyone to doubt you. The other's doubt calls *you* into question! Tyrants hate those who doubt and question them and their policies. Doubt exposes their vulnerabilities, weaknesses, and falsehoods. Use your doubt in your search for truth, facts, and evidence. Conversely, at the same time, doubt validates the truth—only it is usually not the tyrant's truth. Jesus welcomed "doubting Thomas," "Thomas, behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see me have." (Luke 24: 39). In saying that, he embraced Thomas' doubt in order to answer his doubts.

Once you are safe enough to step back into a more objective perception, you can then see things as they are, not as you wish them to be. And with that, you can now question and test things. You can test things from a state of being positively skeptical as you ask questions to gain clarity. Inquire deeply rather than naively accepting whatever is said.

A Doubting Conversation

Jim entered coaching with a request to deal with his fear and to become more courageous. A series of questions by the coach revealed that Jim is afraid of speaking up because it would risk being disliked and/or rejected.

Coach: "So you never speak up?"

> Jim: "No, that's not true, I have .... at times."

"And then you were disliked and/or rejected by the people around you."

> [Laughs nervously] "Well, no, it wasn't like that. But I was extremely nervous when I spoke up and I'm sure I came across as a pussy."

"It sounds like *you* are the one who is disliking you and rejecting you when you speak up!"

> [Long pause] "I never thought of that. I kind of guess that might be right."

"You kind of?"

> "Well, yes, I think that is right. I do dislike the way I speak up and I'm constantly worried that others will think I'm weak and indecisive."

"Are you?"

> "What? What are you saying?"

"Are you weak and indecisive? Could you be afraid that if you speak up you will confirm your fears that you are weak and indecisive?"

> "Well, I don't want to be. I want to overcome my fears and learn to be more courageous in social contexts."

"Good. But you didn't answer my question. Are you weak and indecisive? Could you be afraid that if you speak up, you will confirm your fears that you are weak and indecisive?"

> "I was doubting myself before I got here and you are now making me doubt myself even more."

"Hmmm. And still you have not answered the question [pause] because if that's the true fear which you are struggling with—we have to address that so you can develop the courage to overcome your fears."

> [Pause] "Yes, that is my deepest fear ... I just don't know what to do about it... I have suffered from it my whole life."

"No worries; that's my job as a coach. Your job is to be truthful and authentic. That ensures we will be addressing the real issue. Are you now ready to begin?"

Doubting Exercise

> In a group of three or four persons, pick a subject to play with and explore. Then, as a group, design and ask 12 doubting questions about the subject. Upon getting the questions, let one person present the subject and go through the doubting questions. Afterwards reflect on the 12 questions: Which was the best question? Which was the most productive? Which question yielded the most information?

End of the Chapter Notes

1. In the NLP model of Meta-Programs, matching and mis-matching is another meta-program, and one that shows up in many ways; it is #4 in *Figuring Out People.*

2. I wrote a whole series of articles on *facts.* You can find it in "the Shop" which is on the Neuro-Semantic website. It is a free document, The Neuro-Semantics about Facts.

3. There are such things as *pseudo-words.* This linguistic distinction was developed by Alfred Korzybski and I added it to the Meta-Model in 1997. See *Communication Magic* (2001).

4. Mismatching means looking for differences. As a meta-program, it is a thinking pattern and once habituated, it can function as a person's dominant thinking pattern. See *Figuring Out People* (1997/ 2005).

Chapter 9

DETAILING

"Thinking is literally power, sexy, and inspiring."
Michael R. LeGault, *Th!nk*

"The devil is in the details."
Anonymous[1]

Y*ou can think generally or specifically.* That is, you can think in global categories (e.g., forests, dollars, fruits) and you can detail the specifics (e.g., trees, pennies, an apple) that you are referring to. Both are important and valid. Both are also needed in order to make your *thinking* complete. And, in terms of sequence, to understand how knowledge and understanding is constructed in the first place—then moving from detail to general is the best strategy. For more clear, precise, and accurate thinking, it is also best to start with the details and then move to the classifications—that's *inductive thinking.*[2]

The power of *detail thinking* is that with it you can *index the specifics* of your thinking. You index the time (when), the space (where), and the person (who). Simultaneously this will test your thinking to see if it accords with the details of the world "out there" in the territory or not. This is what the NLP Meta-Model most essentially does when it asks, "Specifically when, where, how, who, etc.?" This language model of NLP enables you to *ground* your thinking in what is empirically real (Appendix A). To *index* refers to the process of identifying the *context.*

Alfred Korzybski introduced this kind of *indexing* in his classic, *Science and Sanity,* in order to create a more sane way of handling information.

Take the word "science." Does that term sound specific to you? Even though it may, it actually is a generic word and not specific at all. When a person mentions science, what exactly is she referring to?

It could be to $Science_{430BC}$ or to $Science_{1900}$ or even to $Science_{2018.}$

It could be to $Science_{Aristotle,}$ or $Science_{Einstein,}$ or even $Science_{Hawkins.}$

It could be to $Science_{Athens,}$ or $Science_{Germany,}$ or even $Science_{England}$

It could be to $Science_{Colorado,}$ or $Science_{Hall,}$ or even $Science_{2023}$

Each of these, and thousands of other choices, all indicate a different *referent* for the word "science" and all would be equally appropriate in a given context. To use one reference while others are thinking about another reference describes the structure of confusion which leads to disagreement. In this example, Korzybski introduced sub-scripting as a means for indexing the date, the person, and the place.

When you index the specifics and get the details of a precise context, *you enable thinking to be more accurate and clear.* After all, everything happens at a specific time, to an unique person or group, and at a specific place.

We detail specifics because nothing is always the same. Actually, as Korzybski noted, "There is no sameness because we live in a world where everything is in flux and process." Index thinking keeps this awareness in your mind.

There's another way to think about, and to express, the ideas of detailing or indexing. It also comes from Alfred Korzybski. When you think about an idea and *extend it out into its specifics*—you *extensionalize.* You *extend* the idea out into the world of facts. If you use the extensional orientation, you focus on *facts first.* Now you define things by enumerating its individual elements, members, and particulars. If you extensionalize the person that you may hire or marry, you specify the person's gender, age, build, intelligence, social skills, looks, habits, education, family background, and on and on. In that way, you get to know that unique person for him or herself.

By *extending* a subject or idea out into the world, you orient yourself to the non-verbal aspects of life, to the specific items that comprise that subject. You extend your description as you give examples and details. As this grounds the word or idea, it makes it empirical. Now you can see, hear, smell, taste, and touch it. You can test it and check the extensional facts.

This is the kind of thinking involved in inductive thinking.

The opposite way of defining things is the reverse orientation. Here you *go inside* and focus there rather than outside. Korzybski called this *intensional* or *intensionalizing*. Notice that this is spelt with a "**s**" and not a "**t**." This is not the word "intentional," that's a very different concept. This is *intensional*. Now the intensional orientation reverses the "facts first," and exchanges it for *words first*. Extension goes out (*ex*); intensional goes in (*in*).

The intensional approach to defining something does *not* focus on facts, but on concepts. Here you go to the dictionary (a literal one or the one you have in your mind) and defining something strictly by words of the definition as a concept. Look up "marriage" in a dictionary and you will find out nothing about John or Mary, only an abstract understanding about what it theoretically means to be married. Mary will not find out that John likes to watch five hours of TV each evening once they are married. He didn't do that when he was "dating" because "dating" and "being married" were two different phenomena in his mind—intensionally. Behind intensional thinking is deductive thinking. You start with an idea or concept and deduce downward to specifics.

When you use the *intensional orientation,* you do not *extend* your thinking out to specific details of actual things in the world. You rely solely on words and the definitions you have in your mind. This over-verbalization of an idea then, typically, results in circular thinking. That is, you define words by using more words which are defined by additional words. In intensional thinking you evoke similarities and dismiss differences. This led Korzybski to write, "Everybody is right by his own definitions" (*Science and Sanity,* p. 420, 415). And if everyone is right, no wonder that there are so many arguments and, worse, no final resolutions to the arguments!

While we have these two ways of orienting ourselves to ideas and to life as we live it, there is a proper order—*first facts, then words*. That is, learn to think in such a way that your words are defined extensionally first. Otherwise, all sorts of troubles arise.

> "The willingness to rely on words (intensional) instead of examining facts (extensional) is a disorder of the communication process." (S. I. Hayakawa, *Language in Action*, p. 234)

In the "dark ages" (600 to 12 AD), philosophers were severely limited by

the intensional approach. They would argue and debate about the number of teeth in a horse's mouth based on what they read in the older authors such as Aristotle. The idea of actually going out to the barn and opening a horse's mouth and counting the teeth—never dawned on them! That was long before the age of science arose.

Detail Thinking Sub-Skills
1) *Ask Meta-Model Questions.* Just as with the questioning skill and the doubting skill, there's no better set of questions than those incorporated within the Meta-Model. This set of questions was modeled from Virginia Satir and Fritz Perls using the linguistic distinctions of Chomsky's Transformational Grammar.[3] As such they were the very questions in the "talking cure" of psychotherapy that created the transformations by the expert therapists that sometimes seemed nearly miraculous. Accordingly, the power of these psycholinguistics were encapsulated in the title of the book, *The Structure of Magic* (1975, 1976), even though the "magic" is metaphorical; it simply refers to something being experienced as amazing. I updated this model at Bandler's request and produced *Communication Magic* (2001).

In terms of detailing, as the Meta-Model asks for specifics in terms of what, who, where, which, how, etc. They enable you to scrutinize a subject in a thorough manner. In linguistic forms of generalizations, the Meta-Model details what's missing, and what was left out, given that someone created the generalization. Details are also lost and distorted when concepts such as causation, equivalence, identity, etc. are created. (Appendix A)

2) *Set Contextual Headings.* Because statements are often repeated, over time we can lose or forget when, where, and to whom the statement was made.   It becomes a "lost performative" (a Meta-Model linguistic distinction). That is, the person who *performed* the creation of that mental way of mapping things has been *lost.* Now we don't know the original context or author. "Who said that and under what conditions?" As you think in terms of details, you will want to put that statement back inside of some contextual heading. In that way, you can clearly indicate the time, place, person, circumstances, etc. that evoked the statement.

"Boys shouldn't cry" is a lost performative. Who said that originally? Under what circumstances? Who said it to what boy? "You can only make money if you have money"—another lost performative. Statements like

these abound, and are repeated thousands and millions of times, so that eventually we don't even question their source, their actual meaning, or their ecology. They are the stuff of politicians, teachers, mothers, and anyone else who cuts thinking short with a "wise" saying or proverb.[4]

3) *Extensionalize.* When you extend the details of a word or idea and when you ask for or provide examples of something, you are engaged in *detail thinking*. You are fleshing out beyond the bare bones of information. In this way both John and Mary can be more psychologically ready for the semantic shocks of "marriage" when they begin living together as "husband" and "wife." Making it sensory-specific in details exposes the assumptions, illusions, deceptions, and hallucinations that occur when people operate intensionally.

Whenever someone would say, "I am a failure," to Irving Lee, a General Semanticist, he would ask, "When?" He would then follow that up with more extensionalizing questions, "Were you a failure last year? Will you be a failure next year?" Ah, the beauty of extensionalizing!

4) *Point to the Referent*. Pointing to something outside of yourself, that is, to a referent experience is what you do when you extensionalize the details. Now you locate or ground the idea or experience in something real and tangible, something that can be seen heard and felt, and therefore validated by other observers.   In infants, pointing begins just before the first year.

What's amazing about that is it indicates that they are beginning to develop a sense that there is a world beyond themselves and that what they are *thinking* has a real referent "out there." Years ago I tried this with the cats we had in our home. But instead of looking beyond to the referent, they would simply and exclusively look at my finger. Then, almost immediately, finding it uninteresting, they moved on to things more interesting.

5) *Identify the Class.* For words and ideas that cannot be seen, heard, or felt, more often than not they refer to a class or classification. *Cat* does not refer to one specific animal, but to a species. *Dog* belongs to another class. Now we can ask, "What are all of the members of the class of dogs?" "How many species in that classification?" This kind of thinking is detailing out who belongs in that class and who does not.

We think in classes. In part, it is how we frame things to make distinctions.

Yet a class itself is not a real thing. It is solely a mental concept, or frame, that we use to store real references. When you specify that a word refers to a class, you can then begin detailing the members of that class.

6) *Establish Tests.* Several tests were created in NLP to determine if a word is over-generalized word such as a nominalization or not. One test: "Can you put the word's referent in a wheelbarrow?" Try it. Can you put *relationship* in a wheelbarrow or on a table? If not, then *relationship* is not a true noun (i.e., person, place, or thing), but a concept created in the mind. So with *leadership, collaboration, resilience, depression,* even *angry, fearful,* and *joyful.* All of these are not "things" at all. None of them have substance and cannot be seen, heard, felt, smelled, tasted, weighed, measured, etc. They are not empirical as are true nouns: house, tree, toy, book, car, etc.

Another test is the linguistic template—"an ongoing ..." If the term makes sense when you put it in that linguistic template, then it is a nominalization. "An ongoing relationship." "An ongoing leadership." These two tests gives you a way to determine if the language you're using is referring to something real in the world or a concept in the mind.

Yet another test comes from Joe Cheal in his business book, *Solving Impossible Problems* (2012). He calls it *the opposite test.* If a word has a meaningful opposite, then it is probably a nominalization. In referring to "desk" he notes that there is no meaningful opposite. Conversely, a nominalization like "empowerment" does have a meaningful polar opposite, dis-empowerment. Also, lists of values are usually nominalizations and nearly all values have a positive polar opposite value.

Representational tracking is yet another tool. Here you take a word and track the word directly to what you see in your mind. See if you can represent the referent there. If you cannot, then you need to ask more questions about it. I can't track "rude" or "nice" directly to the movie screen in my mind, so I have to ask what the person is seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, and tasting that he or she is calling "rude" or "nice."

A Detailing Story
The biography of Buckminster Fuller is the story of one of the outstanding geniuses of the twentieth century. Fuller registered many patents and invented many things. He was an incredible person in his own right. Yet

he didn't start out that way. He was born with such a distortion in his eyes that he could only see shadows and could not see any details until he was four. Born cross-eyed as he was, he was "presbyopic to an absurd degree."

> "Until four I could see only large patterns, houses, trees, outlines of people with blurred coloring. While I saw two dark areas on human faces, I did not see a human eye or a tear-drop or a human hair until I was four."

This obviously set him up to focus on the larger level patterns, not details. His Biographer, Hugh Kenner, wrote:

> "Fuller, though he developed no disdain for minute things, became 'a student of large-scale patterns,' the world having presented itself for four years in large-scale patterns exclusively."

While this was obviously a problem, it was also his genius—his thinking was large and comprehensive. Known for his invention and patenting of Geodesic domes, the dome was his breakthrough, his one solid commercial success. You would think that would have set him up for life. But no. His meta-thinking led him to want others to see the big picture as well. Concurrently he was not able to translate his meta awareness into the details (as he obviously did with working out the mathematical and engineering details).

> "Bucky insisted on keeping control of the use of his domes. People who wanted to fool with geodesics met a wall of discouragement when they tried to get data. He wanted to indoctrinate them first. Geodesic orange-juice stands were proposed, and he might have gotten rich on the franchise. He scorned such trivilization. To some associates it seemed maddening behavior . . ."
>
> "That is why he is not a millionaire today; he would never stick to some invention and develop it as best it could be developed in an imperfect world. It was always necessary to change the whole world first, and never possible. Now just as he will not permit us to build special-case buildings, he will not permit us to think in special cases either." (p. 287)
>
> "He made houses, made cars, made bathrooms, made domes, always with a view to demonstrating some larger pattern. One reason they never made him rich was his lack of entrepreneurial fanaticism about the end product; they were not end products, but instances." (p. 300)

Here his inability to *detail* led to his financial failure. Buckminster Fuller had the *meta* perspective, but lacking *the ability to meta-detail it,* he found himself unable to achieve the productivity and success that could have easily been his.

A Detailing Conversation

Every day everyone of us hear all sorts of over-generalized and over-blown statements. They may not be very truthful, but they get headlines. Take the apocalyptic-type of warnings about global warming and climate change. These end-of-the-world warnings are presented as if this is something new and unheard of. But they are not. The weather has always been changing. Even entire continents drift and change so where there are deserts, there once were oceans. Where oceans are now, there once was dry land. I met Tim in the sauna at the local gym and the following conversation ensued.

Tim: It's just terrible about climate change, I may never have a family and see my kids grow up.

> "Are you assuming that the ever-changing climate is somehow different today than it has always been?"

"Well, yes, of course. It's in the news everyday."

> "Yes, the media and others certainly are creating a scare out of it and blowing it all out of proportion."

"So you are a conspiracy theorist?"

> "Is that what they teach you to say when someone disagrees with you? Sounds like name-calling to me."

"Well, you don't believe in climate change?"

> "Believe in it? Depends on what you mean by 'believe.'"

"That we have something like twelve years or we are doomed as a planet."

> "No, I definitely do not *believe* that."

"Well do you believe the climate is changing?"

> "Of course, it always has and it always will."

"But scientists have proved that it is now at catastrophic levels and we only have a few years to turn things around."

> "Scientists? What scientists specifically?"

"Al Gore."

> "Sorry, but he is a politician, not a scientist. And there are hundreds if not thousands, of scientists in the field of climate change who do not believe that things are catastrophic."

Later I sent him an email substantiating that many scientists do not believe in the media's version of 'climate change.' Since then a list of 1,600 climate change scientists have signed a petition saying that they do not believe in 'climate change,' as it is currently being presented.

> "There is vehement disagreement among climate experts all around the world about many aspects of the global-warming theory, including the very assumption that the global warming is occurring to any great extent or, if it is, that it is being caused by carbon emissions. Many thousands

of scientists disagree with the conclusion of the IPCC summary and especially with its estimate (based on a computer model) of two to ten degrees of warming over the next century. Dr. Claire Parkinson, Oceans and Ice Branch, NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, has found evidence that sea ice is actually thickening in the Antarctic ... The story is remarkable for the information it excluded." (LeGault, pp. 111-112)

Thinking about Thinking
When you think in details, you give your mind specific facts to focus on. Because of that your thinking is mostly empirical and sensory-based. Your focus is on the elements and components which we use to build up an idea or higher level concept. This thinking grounds you in reality. With detail thinking you can bring abstract ideas down to the earth and test to see if they are actionable and actualizable. The inductive thinking of science moves us from the world of specifics upward to where we can then construct concepts, beliefs, principles, laws, understandings, etc.

Detailing Exercise:
Play around with the idea of intensional and extensional. Pick a subject that you're interested in and compare the two kinds of definitions —intensional/extensional. Notice the difference in where you look and/or point as you talk about the two orientations. Notice the end results of each of these orientations. As you then reflect on the differences, what do you become aware of?

Notes at the End of the Chapter
1. "The devil is in the details" is an idiom alluding to a catch or mysterious element hidden in the details. It indicates that "something may seem simple, but in fact the details are complicated and likely to cause problems". It comes from the earlier phrase "God is in the details", expressing the idea that whatever one does should be done thoroughly; that is, details are important.
2. Another NLP meta-program, the size meta-program of global–specific, #3 in the list.
3. In 1974 because Transformational Grammar (TG) was the up-and-coming new linguistic model, and because John Grinder had recently finished a doctorate in TG, he introduced the TG language into NLP. That's where such terms as nominalizations, lost performative, modal operators, etc. came from.
4. See *Executive Wisdom* (2021). What is "wisdom" at one point of time in a given context is typically no longer wisdom in other contexts. It may be knowledge or understanding, but not wisdom.

Chapter 10

DISTINGUISHING

"We prefer sight to almost everything else. The reason is that this, most of all the senses, makes us know and bring to light many differences between things."
Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*

"If we identify, we do not differentiate. If we differentiate, we cannot identify."
Alfred Korzybski, *Science and Sanity*

"The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function."
F. Scott Fitzgerald

D istinguishing, as a way of *thinking,* focuses on identifying critical distinctions within an idea or experience. By way of contrast, a primitive mindset does not make distinctions in thinking. It does not differentiate relations enough and when it does not, then things which are different, and ought to be distinguished, are treated as if they are one and the same. Korzybski described this process as "identifying" and argued that *identifying* lies at the heart of unsanity. That's because *there is actually no sameness.* No thing *is* the same as another thing.

> "Identity is defined as 'absolute sameness in all respects,' and it is this 'all' which makes identity impossible. If we eliminate this 'all' from the definition, then the word 'absolute' loses its meaning, we have 'sameness in some respects,' but we have no 'identity,' and only similarity, equivalence, equality, etc." (1933, p. lxxxiv)

Other great minds who have addressed this subject have made other reflections about the critical importance of distinguishing. Gregory Bateson

is famously known for his statement about "the difference that makes a difference" (*Steps Toward an Ecology of Mind*). He noted that it is *difference* that gets mapped onto our mental maps. Sigmund Freud commented succinctly about the importance of sorting out differences when he said, "Nothing is too small." (Robert Dilts, *Strategies of Genius III*, p. 47). And Sir Arthur Conan Doyle who created the detective novel stories about Sherlock Holmes wrote: "Singularity is almost invariably a clue." For him, it was a clue to look inside to see if two separate things have perhaps been fused together. Similarly, Harry A. Overstreet wrote, "No one achieves greatness by becoming a generalist. The immature mind hops from one thing to another, the mature mind seeks to follow through."

All of these quotes refer to the importance of distinguishing—recognizing differences. When you distinguish, you make distinctions and separations about things which are often confused and lumped together. This creates greater clarity and understanding.

Yet not everyone is thrilled with *thinking in details and/or distinguishing as a thinking pattern.* Why not? Several potential problems arise to counter such thinking. One is irrelevance. "Won't details and distinguishing create a lot of irrelevant details and couldn't you get lost in those irrelevancies?" There are also several fears—one is the fear of boredom. Another, the fear of distinguishing being over-intellectual or seeming too pedantic. "It seems so academic!"

And yet boredom and irrelevance can also be attributed to generalizing, lumping, or fusing things together, and identifying differences as if the same. Then one could dismiss things as, "Oh it's the same old thing." That way of thinking undermines fresh thinking that makes important distinctions.

> "It was found that self-actualizing people distinguished far more easily than most the fresh, concrete, and idiographic from the generic, abstract, and rubrized. The consequence is that they live more in the real world of nature than in the man-made world of concepts, abstractions, expectations, beliefs, and stereotypes that most people confuse with the world. They are therefore far more able to perceive what is there rather than their own wishes ..." (Maslow, 1970, p. 153)

Distinguishing Sub-Skills
1) *Identify a Distinction.* When you make a distinction in a given context, it often enables you to become more effective. We call those distinctions,

critical differences or critical success factors. They are critical for the relevant subject in that they give it meaning by contextualizing things. Details without a relevant context or meta-frame result in being unable to distinguish the essential from the unimportant or the irrelevant. In whatever area that you're focused on or interested in, what are the possible distinctions that make or break your success? What distinctions are you making? What distinctions do you need to make?

Alfred Korzybski proposed the use of *extensional* devices as a way to make distinctions. In effect, they change the very structure of language as they more nearly correspond to the structure of the territory. In the end he presented five extensional devices: three "working devices" (e.g., indexes, dates, and the *etcetera*) and two "safety devices" (e.g., quotation marks and the hyphen.)[1]

> "A construct is essentially a *discrimination* which the person can make."
> (Don Bannister, 1972, p. 40)

2) *Look for Differences.* The thinking pattern known as *matching and mismatching* is based on a distinction—in anything you can look for what's similar or what is different. So plant the question in your mind, "How does this differ from that?" "What could be different?" In *People in Quandaries,* Wendell Johnson identified the creativity of difference.

> "Once we begin to look for differences instead of similarities, it is practically impossible ... not to get new ideas." (1946, p. 4)

Look for differences between facts, inferences, and theoretic statements. These are not the same. Especially be sure to differentiate between things and words, as "the map is not the territory," no word *is* its reference. When your thinking is based on similarities alone, you only see what is familiar to you while you overlook everything that's unfamiliar. George Kelly (1955) said that a "construct is essentially a discrimination" that you make. If you cannot make a discrimination, you are cognitively blind to it; you can't see it. In that case, it is one of your cognitive blind-spots.

2) *Specify Fused Items.* When items or facets of a subject are fused together, hence *con*fused, then you will lack a critical distinction you need. Explore: "What am I confusing?" "How much am I *fusing* things together as if they were one and the same?" "What effect is this having? What does it prevent me from doing or experiencing?"

> For example, if you confuse self-esteem and self-confidence, hence person (being) and behavior (doing), then you will only be able to think

about yourself, perceive yourself, and relate to yourself as if you are defined totally and solely by what you do. Yet *being* and *doing* are different. The confidence you have in yourself is confidence to *do* something, perform something, understand something. That's strictly about behavior and activities. The esteem you hold for yourself as a *person* is your self-esteem and it has nothing to do with your behaviors. It transcends all of your behaviors.

3) *Identify Critical Success Factors.* Given that what is critical or essential in a distinction determines whether you can effectively succeed in some area of life or not, what you need to distinguish are the *critical* success factors—the ones that make a difference. Fascinating enough, every area and every subject has certain factors essential for succeeding in that domain. So regarding your area of concern, *what are the factors?* What are the critical success factors for the domain in which you want to excel?

> For example in the area of relationships, leadership, management, etc. there is the distinction between being responsible *for* what you think, feel, speak, and do and who you are responsible *to.* These are completely separate and distinct. To experience *being responsible for* yourself describes "responsibility" and accountability. And given that you, and only you, can control your thoughts, emotions, speech, and behavior—you and only you can be *response-able* for them.
>
> Conversely, as a response-able person is another phenomenon—that of being responsible *to* other people. Now we have "relationship." While you are responsible for what you think and feel—your two private powers or responses, you do not directly give that *to* another person. What you do give is what you say and do. It's in your speech and behavior that you express your thoughts and emotions. Then from out of your thinking-and-emoting, you influence others via your talk and how you act. You are responsible *to* others "for" whatever you have agreed *to* give them.
>
> Fail to make this distinction and you may *feel responsible for* what others say and do. Yet that's impossible. Only each person can control how one speaks and acts. You can request, complain, demand, etc., but the other person's speech and behavior is not under your control and so is not your responsibility. "I am not responsible for what you think or feel."
>
> This distinction separates those who think, feel, speak, and behave in co-dependent ways from those who are independent in a healthy way and those who are inter-dependent in a healthy way.

4) *Detail Mastery.* If "mastery is in the details" then it is possible for us to make distinctions about those distinctions that develop and express mastery. It's possible for you to identify them in order to step up to a given expertise that's important to you.

For example, consider the reason/excuse distinction. These are not the same. They differ and differ significantly. But how? The distinction is that *a reason* provides a logical, legitimate, and appropriate understanding about how something works, what can disturb it, what can interfere with its functioning, etc. You can ask, "Is there a logical and relevant explanation for why X happened?"

An excuse, on the other hand, is an illegitimate explanation, one that does not hold water, one that is not relevant or accurate. Instead, the person is *excusing* oneself from doing what he may or may not really want to do or experience. Ask, "Is that explanation a legitimate reason or an illegitimate reason for why you can't do X? Is it actually an excuse which you are using to get out from doing X?" "If it is legitimate, what standards or criteria are you using that legitimizes it?"

Taking it easy at the gym and only working out for 15 minutes makes perfect sense if you have recently been in an accident or have an autoimmune system disease. Not going to the gym because you only have 15 minutes to work out, however, is probably an excuse. Even 15 minutes of exercise is better than none at all.

5) *Identify the Leverage Point.* When you can specify a distinction that separates what you would otherwise confuse, you have a distinction that gives you knowledge about how something operates. And with that, you probably have the potential power of knowing the leverage points for change and/or action.

For example, consider the distinction between a feeling and an emotion. These words are nearly always confused and identified with each other as synonyms. Yet they are not the same. They refer to very different experiences. A *feeling* is a sensory-based sensation. It is a kinesthetic sensation—hot, cold, rough, smooth, still or oscillating back and forth, etc. It may be an external feeling that you access by touch or it could be an internal feeling, a proprioceptive sensation within your body. Ask, "When you say that you feel X, are you speaking about a sensation in your body, some kinesthetic sensation, or are you referring to an emotion?"

An *emotion* contains both feelings (sensations) and cognition (thought). Together thought and sensation generates a larger experience, a gestalt experience, what we call an *emotion.* That's why certain emotions like fear, anger, excitement, and lust will have many of the same internal kinesthetic sensations, namely, the "general arousal syndrome." What's different in each emotion will be the thought. There will be different cognitions for each of those emotions. Fear and anger arise from the thought of danger or threat. Excitement and lust arise from the thought of desire and passion.[2]

6) *Identify the Category.* Once you have a distinction, a detail, and/or a critical success factor, you can now distinguish the details by separating them into different meta-contexts.

> For example, consider distinguishing a *problem* from a *symptom.* One of these (problem) operates as *the source* that generates the other (symptom). If you have a headache, while that may be problematic for you, it is not really the problem. It is *a symptom* of a problem. Perhaps the problem is that you drove with the glare of the sun in your eyes for a couple of hours. Now you have a headache. Or perhaps you drank too much wine. Or you were in a room where there was unbearable noise at a high pitch for a long time. Inasmuch as cause and symptom are not the same, distinguish them.

Meta-Detailing and Indexing

An amazing thing happens when you detail distinctions. That's because to do that, you have to *move to a meta-perspective* so that from there you can distinguish things. When you start with a classification and specify the members of the class, you are *meta-detailing.* That is, you are starting from a meta-level idea or experience and identifying the details which comprise it. In other words, *you are using a global perspective to inform a specific one.* You are moving from a category to sensory-specific details that flesh it out.[3]

> "You've got to think about big things while you're doing small things, so that all the small things go in the right direction." (Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock*)

In business, meta-detailing shows up as "watching the store." You detail the specific critical success factors. Your *business smarts* takes you into the variables that determine your success in that field (e.g., legal requirements, taxes, contracts, selling, marketing, cooperating, negotiating, building a support team, etc.).

Detailing transforms the experience of being "lost in details" to one where *you effectively handle details from a higher meta-perceptive.* You can now balance the nobler and pettier aspects of an experience so you don't discount anything as beneath you. Without this, you could easily become scornful of small details. Blotnick's research on wealth creation shows that those who succeeded were willing to handle both the nobler and pettier aspects. They did the "dirty work," the trivial details and minor tasks—they didn't think anything connected with their work as "beneath" them.[4]

Blotnick (1980) noticed that a poor relationship to details inevitably undermines a person's ability to succeed in wealth creation.

> "It will distress many to realize it, but work is 95 percent details. Far from being appalled by that fact, those who became millionaires either delighted in the details or (more often) never noticed them at all. Since the pettier aspects constitute so large a portion of each day's work, in dismissing them with a sneer you may find your life has become empty." (Blotnick, p.85)
>
> About Hill, *Empire Builder of the Northwest* (1996), "His genius lay precisely in his ability to master details while fashioning broad vision and strategy."
>
> "Good fund managers have to be able to immerse themselves in minutiae one moment, zoom out, and look at the big picture from thirty thousand feet, then dive back into the details again." (Fortune Mag. Dec. 29, 1997, B. O'Reilly).

In meta-detail thinking you access a higher level perspective from which you effectively deal with the critical details. Now you can see, hear, discern and differentiate crucial details through the lens of your meta-frames. *With the big picture in mind, you can zoom into the necessary details.* What keeps you from getting caught up in or lost in the details? The *meta* (or higher perspective). That's because you're operating from a higher sense of where you stand with things, what you are doing, why you are doing them, what you seek to achieve. This keeps your work with details clean so you don't go off on tangents.

Thinking about Thinking

Intricate to thinking is distinguishing. This is also the heart of critical thinking—sorting things out and making distinctions where you otherwise would not. Distinction thinking refines what you see, hear, and feel so that you have an increasing number of variables, and with more variables, you can make more refined responses. Ultimately, it is the master in a field who can make the most relevant distinctions and who can therefore recognize patterns before others.

A Distinguishing Conversation

During the time I was writing this chapter, I was asked to view and benchmark a video of a coaching session. So I did. Then I compared my notes with those of the benchmarker. The benchmark had marked that the coach performed three "acknowledgments" and indicated the exact time on the video. But when I checked, the coach did not actually perform a true acknowledgment.

"You are definitely learning the benchmarking process and I'm guessing that because you have a big heart, that's why the benchmarking marks and scores are so high. You are very generous! On one hand that's good for encouraging new coaches, yet on the other hand it has an unintended consequence, namely, the coach will think he is better than he actually is and not work to improve. Specifically, the 'acknowledgments' that you marked were actually not 'acknowledgments.'"

       "Really, but he repeated the words of the client."

"Yes he did. Yet merely repeating a client's words is not what we mean by an 'acknowledgment.'"

       "So it involves more?"

"Yes, to mark a response as an 'acknowledgment' the coach has to *repeat the precise words exactly* as the client did. He has to choose a statement that is semantically loaded and he has to pause afterwards so that the client gets a moment to 'hear' what he or she just said."

       "Does the coach have to do all of that or just part?"

"All of it."

       "That's a lot. That would mean a lot of the new coaches are not actually doing the 'acknowledgments.'"

"Yes, I know. *And* there's even more. The coach needs to be operating from a particular intention—that of *getting the client to hear the semantically loaded statement.* That's the purpose of the 'acknowledgment.'"

       "I don't understand that part. How would I know if the coach has that intention?"

"Partly from the context of the conversation and from the coach's *pause* at the end; if the client didn't seem to 'hear' it, the coach would repeat the 'acknowledgment.' The other way is to interrupt and ask the coach, "What was the purpose of that 'acknowledgment?'"

       "Okay, now I get it. An 'acknowledgment' will involve first, precise repeating of words, second, a pause, third, a semantically loaded statement, and fourth, the intention-in-action of getting the client to respond to his or her own statement."

"Yes, that's right. Well done!"[5]

A Unifying Thinking Exercise

       1) *Select a subject to explore.* What would you like to mentally map so that you have more understanding and skill? *Menu list*: Sales, resilience, leadership, business, coaching, group dynamics, wealth creation, listening, supporting, parenting, framing, etc.

       2) *Access a ferocious curiosity and detail your map.* Index and extensionalize the specific variables: When? (Time). Where? (Place). Who? (Person). What? (Subject). What else? How? (Process). To what end?

       3) *Activate your questioning.* What do you not know? What do you need

to question and explore? What are the most fascinating questions that arise? What fearful or doubtful questions arise?

4) *Activate your doubting.* What could be wrong about what you know? May I play the role of skeptic and ask—where could you be wrong? What facts and/or evidence is missing or somewhat inadequate?

5) *Integrate or somatize your learnings.* What have you discovered that you want to keep? How do you best express that learning? How do you feel it? What state does it access?

6) *Debrief your experience.* How were you *thinking* when you were indexing? When you were integrating?

Exercise #1: Distinguishing

With one or two others, *identify* a subject to explore. What do you or another person confuse about a given subject? What distinction/s do you not make? Create statements that confuse two items which should be separated and distinguished.

> "I want to work on my self-esteem because I'm not producing as well as I could."

Now invent three questions that enable a listener to make the distinction by answering the question. The amazing thing here is that by entertaining the question, the person discovers the distinction for his or her self.

> "Are you assuming that your esteem or value as a person is a function of your behaviors."

\

Exercise #2: Distinctions

We encourage *distinction thinking* in Neuro-Semantics in several ways. We do so by identifying the key differences within a pattern as "the difference that makes the difference." For each of the following, identify the key distinction:

- The difference between cause and blame, cause and effect,
- need and want, knowing and doing, decision and action,
- D-motivation and B-motivation (deficiency and *being*),
- content and process, evaluation and judgment,
- intention and intentionality,
- marketing and selling, marketing and market research,
- economics and social relations, equality and competence,
- equality and equity, introjection and integration,
- individualism and autonomy.

End of the Chapter Notes

1. See *Science and Sanity* (1933/1994) for a full description; also *Communication Magic* (2001).

2. Antonio R. Damasio, Neurobiologist, psychologist, in *Descartes' Error* (1994) consistently distinguishes feelings from emotions and presents an   argument for the necessity of this distinction.

> "What is a feeling? Why do I not use the terms 'emotion' and 'feeling' interchangeably? One reason is that although some feelings relate to emotions, there are some that do not: all emotions generate feelings if you are awake and alert, but not all feelings originate in emotions. I call background feelings those that do not originate in emotions..." (p. 143).

3. For more about meta-detailing, see *Sub-Modalities Going Meta* (2005).

4. See the book *Inside–Out Wealth* (2010) for a detailed description and application of meta-detailing.

5. An "acknowledgment" is a special coaching skill that we distinguish and train in Meta-Coaching, see the ACMC manual which is in "the Shop" on the Neuro-Semantics website.

PART III

CONSTRUCTIVE

THINKING SKILLS

Just as you learn to test and analyze thoughts and ideas by the *essential* thinking skills, with the *constructive* thinking skills you learn to *create new thoughts and ideas.* By way of contrast, with *essential* thinking, you pull ideas apart, and with *eureka* thinking, you put ideas together in new and creative ways. These involve *eureka* thinking because people commonly experience surprising moments of discovery. The "Aha!" moment often occurs as an unexpected and surprising moment.

Constructive Thinking Skills:
        6) Inferring / Inferential thinking
        7) Organizing / Organizational thinking
        8) Creating / Creative thinking
        9) Synergistic (or Systemic) thinking

Chapter 11

INFERENTIAL THINKING

"A delicate, inexorable lattice of inferences began to assemble themselves, like a crystal, in the old man's mind, shivering, catching the light in glints and surprises."
Michael Chabon

"Where there is an implication, you have the opportunity to infer the hidden structures in the back of the mind."
L. Michael Hall

We learn about some things by observing or experiencing them first-hand. In that way, you directly think, reason, and learn. More indirectly is to make inferences so you reach conclusions based on evidence and reasoning. You "figure things out" by applying your own knowledge and experience in a particular context. Understanding when information is implied, rather than directly stated, improves your thinking skills in drawing conclusions. In a sense, you are learning how to read between the lines, make educated guesses, intuit, speculate, and use the surrounding environmental information as clues.

Inferential thinking *infers what is,* or has been, *implied.* These are two sides of the same thing: implying and inferring. Something implied suggests an implication. When you infer, *you go beyond the data to what logically has to be there for something to occur or to make sense.* In mind-reading, a person engages in inferential thinking, but it is illegitimate. It is illegitimate because the statement is not owned by the speaker, not made tentative, or not checked out regarding the accuracy of the hypothesis. As a guess about someone's thinking, emoting, or intending, it is imposed. So even if it is correct, it is wrong because of what it does to the relationship.

Prime with Easy Inferences

Some inferences are super easy. Mention a second child, it takes no genius to infer, "There was a first child." The word *second* implies *first.* Then there is the inferential joke, "Have you stopped beating your wife?" If you answer yes in an attempt to say that you *are not* beating your wife, you have accepted the implication that you *did.* "Stop" *implies* that you were beating her. If you answer no, then the immediate implication is that you are *still* beating her. It implies that you are saying, "I have not stopped beating my wife." Requiring a yes/no answer sets up a double-bind so you are "damned" either way—by implication.

The child who asserts, "That's *my* bicycle," simultaneously is asserting—by implication—that it is not yours. To propose, "Let's meet next Monday" implies a time in the near future. It implies "not today." And since we cannot go back in time, it implies a future time. "I need to confront him, but I would hate to lose a friend" implies that there is a relationship between confrontation and offending. It may imply that this particular friend is over-sensitive to being held accountable.

These are easy inferences. And, as such, they are good for practice. Here you could take most everyday statements and *consider,* "What is implied by the words, but not said?" As you get better and quicker in your recognition and discernment of implications, take on more challenging statements and turn them into questions that deepen a conversation.

> "I don't mind the writing, it's the revising that gets me down." Can I infer that because revising points out errors, you have a problem with becoming aware of making mistakes?
>
> "This is the third time I've had to restart this business." Can I infer that you are really persistent and resilient? You are the kind of person who doesn't quit just because there are problems or obstacles."
>
> "I really can't stand it when she doesn't tell me directly and I have to find it out later." So it sounds like you want your communications to be straight and direct.

Inferential thinking skills play a big role in healthy inter-personal relationships. It's essential in order to express empathy and care, to hear a problem that's not explicitly expressed, to encourage someone who's frustrated or struggling with a goal, etc.

This form of thinking is obvious. Yet amazingly, in a textbook on cognition, Matlin makes a fantastic assertion, "Cognitive psychologists

typically do not categorize inference as thinking." (*Cognition,* p. 379). What an incredible assertion! How can she say that? I was stunned when I first read that. Yet after making that assertion, she offered no evidence or logical reasoning to explain that bold assertion or to justify it at all. My question is, "Why in the world would inference not be thinking? You have to *think* in order to come up with the inference. You have to reason from some evidence to your conclusion."

Inferential Sub-Skills

1) *Identify the Implication.* If an implication is true, then something has to exist or occur in order for it to be inferred. Ask, "What has to be true for this statement or this action to occur?" Probe behind the surface to identify what is logically implied by statements and action. Use the semantic template of *"There is..."* to identify the easy implications. "He said he needs to lose twenty pounds."

> There is a male. There was a conversation. There is a judgment that weighing twenty pounds is too much.

What has to be true for a person's words to make sense? First, he is conscious about his weight. Second, he has some reasons for losing weight. Third, he is using some criteria to make that statement. Fourth, he may or may not have made a decision yet to lose twenty pounds.

2) *Guess and Check.* Inferential thinking often involves guess-work. So make a guess about what you think has to be present, then offer it as a possibility. Do so with rapport and then check out how close your guess comes to the actual facts. Ask, "What does a person have to assume for X to be true?" "What is this person presupposing is the case?"

Sometimes you will have an intuition about someone, but as soon as you think it, it strikes you as preposterous, crazy, silly, or ridiculous. And it very well may be. Yet it also could be insightful; it may be useful in opening up a conversation. Present it as a "wild guess" and see where it goes. Once when a woman said that she was tired of feeling so much anxiety and wanted to put an end to it, Richard Bandler asked her, "What will you do with all that time?" An inferential question! Her immediate response was one of being stunned. She didn't know how to answer the question. "Well, how much time are you now experiencing anxiety?" She said "a lot." "So, what will you do with all of the time that you'll have when you don't waste it on anxiety?"

3) *Make an Educated Hypothesis.* When a guess is well-informed, that is, informed by the best knowledge that's available, it becomes *an educated guess.* It is based on lots of other information and, as such, can now be treated as a hypothesis that you can put to the test. "What do you guess are the assumptions, presuppositions, and/or premises that enable X as an experience or statement?" What is your hypothesis about this situation? What hypothetic construct can you test, and then use to discover the validity of your educated guess?"

"I've been trying to make a decision about whether I should make a particular investment, but I can't. I keep going back and forth." Hypothesis: Joe is trying to sort out a lot of details in his head. He needs to write the pros and cons down on paper so he can get some distance and perspective. Hypothesis: If Joe wrote down the pros and cons, he would be able to make a decision. Now run a test and see if that hypothesis is validate or not.

4) *Identify Class Membership.* When you infer, you are assuming that a particular factor occurs within a class membership. "Losing weight occurs as a member of the class of being healthy." "It belongs to the class of 'Looking good.'" These attributes arise from what's implied in the class or category that is inferred. Because the class contains the members, when you know a member, you are more likely to be able to infer the class or at least make a good guess about it. Ask yourself, "What class could this component be a part of?" "If this is a member of X-class, what would that mean or imply?"

5) *Think contextually.* Thinking always occurs in a context. Someone is saying something to oneself, or to someone else, about something. Joseph Yeager described this in his book, *Thinking about Thinking with NLP.*

> "Human thinking is illogical out of context. ... thinking occurs within a context, purpose or frame of reference that is unique to the individual. If you don't know the context of another's thinking, many things can seem illogical. ... In this sense, a context is a set of limits that defines what is and, reciprocally, defines what is not at issue. Context is a stabilizing reference point that locates where you are or are not in your subjective world." (1985, pp. 23-25)

Ask yourself, "In what context does this statement make sense?" "Would there by any other context within which it would also make sense?" Rollo May noted that whenever a client asks, "How am I doing?" regardless of

what he may be referring to, it *implies* that his experience is there to be evaluated. It *implies,* "Life is to be measured and evaluated rather than lived."

6) *Climb the Inferential Ladder.* Inferences do not just exist at one level of experience, but behind each inference, there is yet another. Together these make up a hierarchical ladder of inferences, what we call an inferential ladder.[1] To climb this conceptual ladder, hold the first state or experience, then in reference to it ask, "What informs it?" Upon receiving an answer, hold the answer, and ask the question again. Keep repeating this process four or five times. Each higher level meta-question about each layer will then evoke the next higher level. You can use any meta-level term as you do this—use belief, idea, meaning, understanding, metaphor, remember, expectation, rule, truth, etc. as you "go meta."[2]

> "Let's say that is true, what do you believe that supports that?"
> "Given that you think or feel that, what idea (meaning, understanding, concept, etc.) supports thinking that? Or maybe it is a metaphor? An experience you remember?"
> "Great, let's start there. Holding that in mind, what do you expect? And if that is your expectation, what rule, truth, or idea inform that?"

By holding the current frame, move up to the higher frame. Now you identify the level, or the frame, that supports, enables, and governs that previous state. In climbing the inferential ladder, you are here essentially opening up a conceptual system and finding the higher hidden contexts. This begins to give us a picture of the person's semantic system. Korzybski described this system as being "psycho-logical." The system's *logic* is derived from the person's *psyche*—her unique way of thinking and reasoning, her psychology, and her layers of meaning. The meaning is only *logical* to the referent system since it is derived from that system.[3]

To see a person's *psycho-logics* enables you to become more clear about how a person has reached his conclusions. And if critical thinking is disciplined thinking that's "clear, rational, open-minded, and informed by evidence," then by moving to the meta-levels, you identify the kind of reasoning which produces the ideas and beliefs of that system.

7) *Detect Assumptions.*
We all make assumptions about things. Inferential thinking and listening is the process of making educated and intentional assumptions to flush out what has been presupposed. That information is typically outside of

conscious awareness. Yet if you listen, you can hear via inferential thinking in language, metaphors, actions, and gestures. This kind of thinking and listening focuses on the implications from which a person operates. The challenge then becomes making the implicit frames explicit. Assumptive frames can be detected. Here you use this thinking skill to discover what's in the back of the mind.

- *Representation:* How are you representing what you are thinking about? What representational system/s are you using? What are the cinematic features in your system of thought?
- *Cognitive styles:* How are you processing the information that you are using? What cognitive distortions may be present as you think? What cognitive biases are present?
- *Cognitive filters:* What meta-program filters are you using as you process the information before you? What kind of thinking are you using? How appropriate is that kind of thinking for the kind of information or experience that you're working with?[4]
- *Strategy:* How are you putting together what you are thinking? How are you ordering the thoughts, events, awarenesses, etc.? What comes first, then second, third, etc.?
- *Contexts:* What meta-level contexts (frames) are you using as you think about X? What contexts are you not considering? What invisible contexts are you assuming but not specifying? What lens are you filtering X through?

Thinking about Thinking

Inference is built both into language and into the ways our brains work. You cannot *not* make inferences. They are inevitable, sometimes insightful, and often they get us into trouble—as we jump to unwarranted conclusions, assume we know what others are thinking or feeling (mind reading), and assume without questioning a statement or activity. We often claim that something is inferential by calling it an "intuition." Yet inferential thinking can open up hidden realities and reveal the operational system that makes an experience work. Newton inferred gravity which led to Newtonian physics. James Watson and Francis Crick inferred the double-helix structure of the DNA molecule.

To think is to infer, therefore when you learn how to accurately infer, and how to test your inferences against reality, you develop critical thinking skills. With inferential thinking you learn to think more deeply and more substantially. You make a deeper dive below the surface of what's obvious

and explicit. Finally a word from Samuel Butler:

> "Life is the art of drawing sufficient conclusions from insufficient premises."

An Inferential Conversation

Jim was very quick. He talked fast, he thought fast, he made decisions lightening quick—and he lived in life in fast time. Consequently, hardly anyone could keep up with him and he experienced most people as slow. What he thought about that, and hardly ever said out-loud, was that they were not as intelligent as him. Jim was highly intelligent and he knew it. Just about anything he undertook, he *got* almost immediately. In school and even in college, he never had to study. He just *got* things quickly.

Given all of that, why would a person like Jim show up for a coaching session? Because his impatience with people made relationships difficult, and if his impatience did not come out as frustration and anger, people would pick up on his contempt for their slowness. And his impatience with life led him to hardly ever stay with a job for more than a few months.

I started the coaching session in the usual way, "Jim what do you want to achieve in this session that would be tremendously important to you?" That's when he began talking about his current level of stress. When I asked about that, he talked about being frustrated in his career, that he had not been able take even one of his creative ideas and successfully get it to market. He said he was thinking about moving to another city, even though he had only been in this city for three months. He wasn't clear about what to do with his relationship with his wife or kids.

So much! I asked him to take a breath and then I offered a summary. I did that to let him know that I had heard him. Then I said, "Here's what else I've heard—in the background of your mind—tell me if any of this is accurate." Then I presented a series of inferential conclusions:

- Your intelligence is both your blessing and your curse.
- Nobody really gets you because all they see is how you jump from one job to the next, one city to the next.
- To them you look insecure and unstable; they think you talk a big game but can't pull it off.
- But you are simply looking for the best way to prove your intelligence and your creativity, which is so important to you.

"How do you know all of that?" he asked.

> "I don't, it's just a guess from what I've heard."

"Well, it is dead center; I can't believe that you *get* me as you do."

> "There's more and you may not like it. My inferences are just guesses,

I offer them as possibilities, and I do so not to hurt you or insult you, but as a way to discover what's going on so that together we can find the doorway to unleash your full potentials."

• While you strive so intensely to turn your ideas into reality, it seems you need for it to be perfect, and that is what keeps tripping you.

• You are never satisfied so you go from intense periods of activity to times of intense depression. You want things to be perfect, but they never are and never will be and you struggle to accept that.

• Yet you are also a never-say-die optimist and so you just get up and move on to the next big idea. "Maybe this will be the one." Yet, now after a dozen years, all of this is getting old and tiresome because it is still not working.

When Jim next looked at me, he had tears in his eyes. "All that is true, it is spot on." There was a long pause... "I've never said this to anyone before, but can you help me?" I told him, "It would be my honor and privilege to do so, I'd love to."

Exercise #1: Detecting Implications

In a small group of three or four persons present a problematic statement. Example: "I feel stuck. I can't see any solution to this problem. It's like looking at a fog— it's just a mist." Then identify what is *implied* by the speaker, but not said. What is logically required for the statement to make sense? Next, come up with two or three questions to identify what is implied.

Exercise #2: Inferential Listening

Take the following problematic statement and, using inferential thinking, identify the hidden assumptions. A father says about his 16-year old son. "He doesn't communicate with us; he's put up an impenetrable wall that excludes his mother and me from his life." Using just that statement, write down the implications that you hear. Then write two or three questions that you would ask in response which could identify the unspoken assumptions.

End of the Chapter Notes

1. Chris Argyris was the person who first developed the idea of an inferential ladder, see *Knowledge for Action* (1993).

2. In Neuro-Semantics we climb the inferential ladder when we "open up a semantic system" by using these kinds of questions. We do that in many patterns, especially in the "Coaching to the Matrix" pattern.

3. For more about *psycho-logics,* see Korzybski's *Science and Sanity,* or *Meta-States,* or *Mind-Lines.*

4. As thinking patterns, *Meta-Programs* is a NLP model for how to distinguish these ways of thinking and how to work with them. You can find lists of Meta-Programs in *Time Line Therapy* by Woodsmall and James, in *Words that Change Minds* by Shelle Rose Charvet, and the encyclopedia of Meta-Programs is in the book, *Figuring Out People.*

Chapter 12

ORGANIZATIONAL THINKING

"First comes thought, then organization of that thought into ideas and plans,
then transformation of those plans into reality."
Napoleon Hill

"Order is paramount for a serial set,
like nervous impulses in the nervous system." (p. 193)
"A map with the wrong order is worse than useless,
it misinforms and leads astray." (p. 498)
Alfred Korzbyski, *Science and Sanity*

A s a fundamental human capacity *thinking* does so many things. There's thinking by which you represent the world. There's thinking by which you edit your pictures and sounds to generate emotional responses. There's thinking that constructs understandings, beliefs, values, intentions, and on and on. In all of these experiences *thinking operates as an organizing force within you.* It organizes your awareness into different formats—each format offering multiple ways to think.

Ultimately your thinking creates information. And when it does, that information now literally *forms* you on the *inside,* hence, *in-form-ation.* Data turned into information then *informs* your mind, the way you think.

Here thinking takes what you've considered, detailed, distinguished, inferred, and *constructs "knowledge" out of it*. As such this thinking

enables you to *order the structure* of your thinking and your life. By so arranging things and/or systems in your life in a structured and systematic way, you are able to deal with things, people, systems, and even yourself much more effectively. Conversely, if you lack *organizing* as a thinking skill, you will suffer endless inefficiencies in everyday life, you will waste time, and you will deplete your energies. On the other hand, when *you set things in order* in your mind, you can then also more easily think and work which will make you more productive.

The thinking that organizes things involves several forms. It may involve such processes as planning, sequencing, structuring, ordering, testing, and checking. Ideally, *the design of this thinking pattern is to arrange things so that everything is in its proper place,* the place where it best belongs which facilitates a given experience. By this thinking, as you set out what to do, the order in which to do them, you thereby establish priorities.

More intimate and personal than ordering the structure of external things and activities, is the inner world activity of *organizing an idea.* Thinking through an understanding, its conceptual components, and formulating the idea requires a much higher level of thinking. *Every "understanding" has some structure, form, or fashion.* "Understanding" how a city is laid out, and how to move from one place to another, usually involves a picture of the roads, knowledge of where traffic gets jammed, etc. Different ideas have to be structured in different ways. Understanding music differs from understanding mathematics which differs again from understanding people, personality, teams, culture, etc. Each has to be organized in its own unique way.

Think of a difficulty. Now as you step back from that thought, did you organize your thinking by a past memory, a present experience, or a future worry? You could have done any one of those or a combination of them. This explores how you use *time* as an organizing factor. Perhaps you organized it by your *senses*—what you saw, heard, or felt.

Each way you structure or organize your idea leads to and determines your way of responding. The end result of organizing thinking is *the creation of a strategy* and/or a process that gives you a template for how to do something. You do this with nearly everything, from the simplest of activities to the most complex. By thinking, you organize how you get up

in the morning and get ready for the day, how you brush your teeth, get dressed, how you decide on what to eat, etc. When it comes to truly complex activities, we write how-to manuals. Engineers create extensive manuals for how to do all kinds of thing—build a bridge, a high rise building, a nuclear power plant, etc.

By structural thinking we humans organize resources and processes which enable us to create every aspect of our societies. From how to hunt, how to garden, how to work out conflicts, how to set up a government, we use our organizing and strategic thinking to create things. Organizing thinking ultimately leads to, and is the source of, creativity, inventions, and

> "Structures of which we are unaware hold us prisoner. Once we can see them and name them, they no longer have the same hold on us. This is as true for the organization as it is for the individual."
> Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*

innovations. It is also the springhead of redesigning organizations and cultures. By this kind of thinking we keep refining and improving the quality of life.

Organizing Sub-Skills

1) *Put Information Together.* Take the information you have about something and identify a way to organize it. Play around putting it together in this way and that way, noticing the structure or structures that emerge. How many ways are you able to organize that information? When thinking is organized in this way or that way, there will always be an order, sequence, and format—*a strategy* for how it works together.[1]

You can put information together sequentially using time. You can put information together using any one of a thousand categories: organic/ inorganic; plant/ animal; business/ personal; work/ hobby; financial gain/ contribution, etc. In his chapter on *Structure,* Korzybski argued for order and ordering by saying that—

> "... a number of isolated facts does not produce a science any more than a heap of bricks produces a house. The isolated facts must be put in order and brought into mutual structural relations in the form of some theory." (1933, p. 55)

2) *Create a Map.* As there are multiple ways to map anything, every map offers a different way to think about and relate to the experience. A map for

a city may be a map about roads. Another may be a map of the underground pipes, sewers, wires, and other things that are enabling the functioning of the city. There may be a map of the subways and all of the stations for entering and exiting the subways. Another map could describe the ground structure —bedrock, sand and soft soil, fractures in the earth's mantle, etc. Each map organizes data using different information resulting in different bases and forms of "knowledge." When my wife and I hike mountain trails, we often use a topographical map of a wilderness area. That gives us information about elevation, mountains, ridges, valleys, etc.

A fascinating thing about maps is that they do not have to be accurate (e.g., true, real, etc.) to be useful. They only need to have a structure that has some correspondence to the territory they map. It's the structure or order of things that makes them useful.

3) *Model the Structure.* For every experience and understanding, there is a structure. Or perhaps more accurately, *you can invent a structure* for that experience that can help you understand it, work with it, or experience it. In NLP, we call this a *strategy.* When you create a strategy, you create a mental map about how to do something: how to love or to be loved, to create a business, to be healthy and fit, to enjoy one's work, to patiently listen to a child, etc.

Doing this *models* how that experience works. Make sure the strategy is accurate, not erroneous, and clear, not distorted or convoluted. Given that every experience has a strategy, begin to model it by asking, "How do you do that?" Here's a list of modeling or strategy questions for eliciting how an experience has been organized.

- How do you do that?
- What triggers you to do that?
- When do you do that? When not?
- Where and where not? In what contexts?
- What's first thing that you're aware of ? Next? And Next?
- What comes before that? How do you know to think or feel that at that point?
- What do you believe, understand, know, etc. about that?
- Now that you see and recognize how you do that, what are you aware of? What do you realize?

4) *Identify a Strategy's Efficiency.* As you interview and model the experience, you can now identify the steps or procedures to specify the best

sequence of the strategy. As you do this, you can now also work out different procedural sequences and find those that work most effectively and efficiently. By sequencing the precise order of the steps in how to do something, you do several things. First, you create a model for how the experience works. Second, as you think orderly about the sequence, order, timing, relevancy, etc., you can figure out the most efficient way to achieve your objective.[2]

5) *Sequence the Time.* Because time plays such an important role in every strategy, use your temporal thinking (e.g., remembering, imagining, sequencing the present tense actions, etc.) to organize the *timing* of the experience. When does it start? When do some of the sub-skills come in? When do they merge together or come to an end? How long does any piece of the experience last? What shortens the time element, what expands it?

Temporal thinking (past, present, and future) can use time for different purposes. Past thinking taps into precedents, tradition, stability, resources, etc. Present moment thinking focuses on the now, the immediate, the urgent, the actual process, etc. Future thinking focuses on potentials, goals, trends, objectives, development, possibilities, etc. Nothing happens all the time or all-at-once. Every experience occurs over time and takes time for it to develop, grow, and mature.

6) *Carefully Use Statistics.* *Collective behaviors* require a different kind of thinking in terms of organization. When it comes to the collective behavior of a group, shift your thinking to considering things "on the average." While you are still ordering, structuring, and organizing your thinking about something, when you use statistics you are no longer thinking about a specific individual, but a group of people.

For example, you may discover that the average family has 2.4 children. That 60% of families have both a father and mother and that 40% of families have only a single parent and 90% of those, the mother is the sole parent. On the whole the statistic may be insightful, and when applied to any particular individual, it may be completely off.

Thinking statistically organizes understanding about how something works in a very different way from individual thinking. You now also have to include in your thinking, probabilities and likelihoods. "What is the probability that X will occur?" Given that likelihood, if it does occur, what

will you do? What plans do you have?"

7) *Streamline a Process*. By streamlining, you make a process quicker and more elegant—*efficient*. Then with sufficient repetition, you integrate the process to such an extent that it becomes an automatic response. Then it will operate outside-of-conscious awareness. Efficiency is about eliminating redundancy and waste. The waste may involve a waste to time, effort, energy, money, or any other resource.

Think in terms of how to make something more efficient. Streamline a process so it becomes smoother as it progresses, and more elegant. This is especially valuable for behaviors and activities that occur frequently—fixing breakfast, getting ready for the day, exercising, etc. Streamlining eliminates the things where an activity may become clogged (like a traffic jam) and/or when one step causes everything to slow down and everything has to wait for a single thing.[2]

8) *Integrate the Structure*. For ultimate efficiency, after you have created an effective structure that organizes the experience, the next step is to integrate it fully into yourself. Repeat it until it drops out of conscious awareness and becomes "wired into" your neurology. This is what distinguishes an expert. His or her strategy of expertise becomes now automatic. After years of practice, the expert no longer can tell you how she does what she does. The expertise has become part and parcel of the person's programming.

Every strategy will habituate and become a part of your unconscious programming. As you repeat a linkage between an environmental context and your internal response, the neurons that fire together, wire together and now you have a built-in program for how to respond.

9) *Frame to Your Heart's Content*.
When you organize your thoughts and structure them in a certain way, as you give them form, you are thereby framing them. In this, *to think is to frame*. Every frame you set organizes the world of meanings that it manages. The frame you establish may be a context, a category, a classification, a meaning, an interpretation, and on and on. When you think, "Learning increases your competence," you thereby set a frame about learning. You make learning a member of the class of "ways to become competent." That frame then manages your world of learning.

Now because thinking sets frames, as you keep thinking, your inner world (or Meta Place) becomes organized into patterns. By thinking, you layer one thought upon another thought to create a set of thinking frames—a matrix of layered frames. What you create could be a belief system, a set of logical levels, your psycho-logics, etc. Each thought about another thought establishes *a mental context*. It establishes an internal context that classifies and thereby governs the previous ones. It governs how you give meaning and intentions which then control your attentions.[3]

You cannot *not* frame. It is inevitable and it is inescapable. Given that, embrace it so that you can do so consciously and mindfully. How would you like to think or feel about something? When you name it, you thereby put it into a frame. You are classifying and categorizing it. In response to a behavior, you say, "This is creativity." Or, "That is rude." "This is low level competence." Whatever you say, so it becomes—to you.

Thinking about Thinking
When you use *the organizing thinking skill,* you put things together and invent a structure. You not only categorize and classify, you plan, strategize, sequence, etc. You create your inner Meta Place world as you *in-form* yourself. You create ways of doing things, ways to approach a problem, and ways to structure an idea.

Out of this creativity then arises *constructs* that you use to govern your responses. You also generate *templates for thinking.* And these thinking templates become the thinking-formats you use thereafter. For example, if you organize your thoughts around sports, you will have a sports-thinking-format. You will now see just about everything in terms of sports. You can do this with money, love, success, religion, etc. The way you organize your thoughts creates the way you see and experience the world.

An Organizing Conversation
While demonstrating executive coaching for Meta-Coaches I met Carlos, a senior manager in a car manufacturing company. He said he needed to learn how to deal better with difficulty. I asked him, "So what do you need to learn?"

> "I'm great with all of the executive skills for my job, but when it comes to facing a difficulty, I don't know why, but I just begin feeling helpless. The feeling comes upon me so quickly [he snaps his fingers] and boom, all I want to do is quit, or give up, or find someone to deal with the problem. It's irrational, but I don't seem to be able to deal with it."

"And tell me about what kind of thing happens that you call a 'difficulty.' What

would have to happen for you to code something as a 'difficulty?'"

> "It could be the performance of my division, we didn't hit our numbers of productivity this month. It could be that one of my employees has created a problem and isn't taking responsibility."

"Okay, that's all work related. Anything at home or more personal?"

> "Yes, when my wife and I argue about something silly like where to go for dinner."

"And you immediately feel what?"

> "Helpless! Depressed. Angry."

"And the 'difficulty' means what to you? What interpretation are you giving to the difficulty?"

> "Interpretation?"

"Yes, it *means* something to you. I'm interested in what it means to you. Obviously it means something negative to you or about you. Do you know what it means?"

> "I don't know. ... It feels like it must mean that I'm a failure, that my future is dark and every success was fraudulent."

"It sounds like you have somehow *organized* things in your mind so that having to 'deal with something,' face and expend effort on solving problems has gotten connected with calling you and your value into question. Does that seem right?"

> "Yeah, it does. But how could that be? Normally I'm pretty positive and optimistic."

"What immediately comes to mind when you think of things needing to be perfect?"

> "You think it is perfectionism?"

"I don't know. I'm just wondering, do you think things need to be perfect?

> "Well, they should."

"And when they are not?"

> "Then I feel helpless. I feel that everything is wrong, nothing is good, and this set-back will be the end of me."

"Wow! There it is. [pause] That's the frame of your inner interpretation that's doing all of that damage to you."

> "Say that again. I didn't catch it.   What are you saying?"

"You've just identified the *interpretative frame* in the back of your mind that's creating your emotions—your sense of being helpless, your depression, your anger. You must be assuming and demanding that things be 'perfect,' that there should be no problems, no set-backs, no difficulties."

> [Pause] ... "Yeah ... but why do things have to be so hard?   So disappointing?"

"And your answer to that question is what?"

> "Well, they shouldn't be!"

"Great. 'They shouldn't be!' ... [pause] and what is the reason that they shouldn't be so hard or difficult?"

> "I don't know. They just shouldn't be! Why can't life be easier?"

"Ah another question. ... I'm interested, how old do you feel as you say these things?"

"Funny you should ask that. I feel like I'm 6 or 7 years old."

"Sounds like you *organized* your thinking-and-feeling at 6 or 7 so that you *expect* and *demand* that things go just as you want them to, or you feel like a helpless 6-year old, and then cope by either depressing or angering."

"[Long pause] ... yes, that sounds right. ... So what can I do?"

"Ah, easy. Change your mind. Create a new way of interpreting a difficulty. For example, instead of thinking of something as a failure, what else could you consider it?"

"I know that some people think of it as a challenge."

"Okay, great. So what if you go with that? 'It's a challenge, not a failure.' 'It's a chance to use my executive skills and demonstrate my adult resources for solving problems.' What if instead of interpreting it as a signal to give up, depress, and act like a 6-year old boy, you interpreted it as a signal to step up as a man and courageously take it on as a sign of adulthood?"

Strategy Exercise

With a partner, identify either a strategy that you desire to discover and use or a strategy that is unuseful and you want to change it. Start a conversation, "What strategy are you interested in understanding better or in changing?" Then use the strategy questions (in #3 above). Ask enough of the questions to be able to map the person's strategy on a piece of paper from beginning to the end.

End of the Chapter Notes

1. This describes the modeling process of NLP. The best NLP book for strategies and for modeling is *NLP: Volume* I (1980). For Neuro-Semantic books, see *NLP Going Meta* (1997), *Meta-States* (2012), *The Matrix Model* (2004), and *Thinking as a Modeler* (2018). There are also other materials, two training manuals: *Neuro-Semantic Modeling* and *Cultural Modeling.*

2. There is an Efficiency Pattern that we use in Neuro-Semantics. You can find it in *Sourcebook of Magic, Volume II.* Also see *Thinking as a Modeler* (2019).

3. For more about this, see *Meta-States* (2012), *Neuro-Semantics* (2011), and *Winning the Inner Game* (2007).

Chapter 13

CREATIVE THINKING

The human brain is completely free to create and recreate life
in a thousand ways. It is essentially creative.

"I like nonsense, it wakes up the brain cells."
Dr. Seuss

"I thought about it all the time."
Sir Isaac Newton on Discovering the Law of Gravity

From the thinking ability of organizing and structuring arises *creative thinking.* Thinking can and does go beyond inferring to *creating* —inventing, conceptualizing, imagining, making intuitive leaps, experimenting, testing, using metaphors and/or analogies for unexpected comparisons, strategizing, etc. And all of these lead to new and fresh ideas enabling you to know, understand, and comprehend aspects of reality that you want to explore and/or develop.

The good news is that *creative thinking is everyone's heritage.* No one is exempt from it. Although creativity is often focused on the arts (e.g., music, painting, art, writing, etc.), it also shows up in the simplest of everyday activities. Creativity shows up in how you fix a meal, dress yourself, arrange a room in your home, and sign your name. You are engaged in creative thinking when you think about different ways to do anything. Obviously some creativity is undisciplined, wild, and even useless. In a book on creativity, Howard Gardner argued that what is considered "creative" depends on the culture, who is making the evaluation, and the standards being used.[1]

Yet creativity is everyone's birthright because *to think is to create.* It is to create thoughts, ideas, anticipations, propositions, decisions, etc. And every thought creates a neural activation as neurons fire and are repeated often enough to generate a mental/perceptual pattern—a learning. Everything you learn is a creative act—even the dumb stuff.

Now the danger is that creative thinking sometimes undermines life and well-being. Is that shocking? Creative thinking, in and of itself, has no ecology built into it. You have to use your conscious mind to "check the ecology"—to check that the idea you have created is not toxic or dysfunctional. Many ideas are. Also, if you *cannot* follow a process, and have to always be re-inventing a well developed process, you may over-value your creativity to your own detriment. In that case, what you cannot do is simply imitate another's creativity. The essence of creativity involves in transforming and re-envisioning existing concepts. Merely replicating another's ideas without infusing them with your own ideas and/or experience is a flawed approach to creativity; it is creativity gone wrong.

Creativity Sub-Skills
1) *Playfully Combine Things.* Put two or more ideas (or things) together and you are likely to create something new. In the movie in your mind, see not only what is there, but what *could* be there. Ask yourself and/or someone else, "What if..." questions. *"What if* I add X to the third step?" *"What if* X is a resource which is just misplaced?" *"What if* I map out what the solution would look like when I attain it?" As you pose "as if" frames, you invite possibilities. *If* you act as if you were loving and caring for a year, what would happen in your marriage? If your frame of mind was one of courage, what would you do in your business?

Real thinking *plays* with ideas. You *play around* with possibilities. This playfulness means experimenting, testing, joking, and seeing what happens under various conditions. And in real thinking, humor gives you a way to shift your perspective so you can view things in fresh and new ways. It also works the other way around, as you engage in mental and emotional play, humor frequently emerges. Humor, as "that which is out of place in time and space without danger" (Aristotle), enables you to see the incongruent (what is out of place in time and space) and the unexpected.

John Morreall says that humor (and the laughter it inspires) results from "a sudden and pleasant psychological shift" (*Taking Laughter Seriously*).

Thinking shifts when a stable expectation is pleasantly jarred. Humor catches you "off guard" so you see things in a very different way. In creativity, when you are puzzled it is typical to say, "That's funny." Humor jolts, jars and disturbs your ordinary way of thinking. So jokes end with a "punch line" that jolts your thinking and sometimes your *being.*[2]

As you mix things together in wild and crazy ways, thinking gets a chance to go in ways that are utterly unpredictable. Randomly choose or mix ideas from different realms without any consideration or concern about it being practical or realistic. Play around with ideas in your mind.

2) *Imagine New Possibilities.* Do this by identifying as many other possibilities as possible and then stepping into one of those possibility in your imagination. Your imagination allows you to create details, images, scenarios, etc. which do not yet exist, but possibly could. *Imagination gives you a thinking playground.* As with Star Trek's holodeck, your imagination is your internal holodeck for experimenting with ideas. What imaginative playgrounds have you developed that you can easily access for playing with ideas? What new ones will you develop in the next few weeks? George Kelly (1955) described this as construing.

> "Construing is a way of seeing events that makes them look regular. By construing events it becomes possible to anticipate them." (p. 76)

All thinking is *imagining* in that you are generating *images* for the theater of your mind. Most often these are visual images, but they can also be auditory images, a feeling sensation, images of smells and tastes. You can also invent and imagine using other symbolic symbols—mathematics, geometry, fantasy, etc. Now, *when you imagine, you are hallucinating.* That is, you are seeing, hearing, feeling, knowing, perceiving, etc. an internal world that is not externally real. If you are doing this consciously and intentionally, you are "running your own brain." If not, it will seem out of your control and so we generally call that a hallucination.

3) *Invent and Expand References.* The more things, experiences, places, and people you can reference, the broader and deeper your creativity can be. Knowing that, read broadly, explore all sorts of experiences, and get acquainted with people from as many different backgrounds and cultures as possible. Then when you are seeking to understand something, you will have a great many references that you can tap into to expand your thinking.

Nor do you have to have these experiences personally. When you read, see movies, research new fields, etc., you can develop and use *vicarious* experiences. That's what novels, stories, documentaries, movies, etc. offer. Using them, they can take you places *in your mind* that you could then use as reference experiences.

4) *Metaphorical Play.* When you identify a metaphor, it offers you a different way to think about a subject. You start with what you already know and understand, e.g., a river, a path, a plane, a wall, etc. Then you apply the metaphor to what you want to understand more completely or in a different way. "She is a wall between me and my dreams." "Our life together is a journey of wonderful discoveries." As a *source,* the metaphor gives structure to the *target* subject. That's because the *meta*phor is *meta* to it. At a higher level, metaphors provide a thousand different ways to look at a singular subject.[3]

```
 _____ Source _____
/                  \
      Target
```
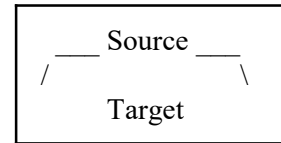
Metaphors as generalizations create over-arching categories. Reasoning by metaphor is analogous thinking. In this kind of thinking you compare one thing with another. Some analogies are rich and expose common properties In metaphorical thinking, the stories you read and experience can order and invest meaning. To reason by a metaphor is to reason using similarity. If a metaphor "carries one thing (meaning) over to another," what is being transferred over? Ask many questions.

- It is like what? It stands for what?
- How does the source referent inform and/or change the target referent?
- What are the entailments that come along with the metaphor?
- How is X like Y? What are the places of similarity?
- What are the boundaries and limitations: where does the likeness break down?
- How is it not like that? What is it like?
- What is similar to this? What is different?
- Where is the center of the comparison?
- Where are the edges of the comparison?
- Where does the comparison fail?

Metaphorical Thinking Caveats: First, keep in mind that the metaphor you're using is a comparison. *It is not real*. It simply offers you *a way to think* about something. Epistemologically, it does not make it what it *is.* Second, be careful also to *not* take the analogy too far. Inquire, "In what ways is X like Y? In what ways is X not like Y?" Third, pick up on the

connotations of the metaphor to accept some entailments while realizing when you push the metaphor too far. "What entailments come along with X (metaphor)?" Finally, if you get activated emotionally reactive by the metaphor, then change that metaphor.

5) *Create a Category.* Intentionally create a new category for a subject. Do that by putting it into an unexpected category or even in a "silly" category. Why? *To stretch your thinking.* Because all categories are inventions, not discoveries, all are products of human creativity. None are externally real. By comparing one thing to another using a single category, you can expand your understanding and introduce something new or different into your current understanding. And as categorizing puts an item in a category or class, re-categorizing recreates your world. Each category creates a frame for defining an item and for evoking action. To categorize is therefore to invent.[4]

When you place something into a category, you select its identity inside that frame. By placing something in a class, you invite a different identification. "It's not a lousy question, it is name-calling and a way to avoid embarrassing yourself." That's because in categorizing you also collect items under a classification and with a smaller one, your abilities to predict grow. As you create a new category, remember, "The smaller the category, the better the prediction."

The most unconscious thing that you create is your thinking templates. After all, when you go through an experience, it is natural to use that experience as a reference. Everybody does. So it's no wonder that later *you use that external reference as your way to think.* Grow up in poverty and guess what you will tend to think and be conscious of? Grow up in a home of classical music, art, and education, guess what you will have on your mind? The challenge is to *step back and think about your thinking-referents.* Then you can choose to keep those that enhance your life and release those that do not.[5]

6) *Be Suggestive.* Non-propositional language gives you another way to invent new ideas. You can do that by using a story, narrative, analogies, poems, riddles, poetry, music, etc. As a comparison, ask, "How is X like Y?" "In what ways?" "How are they not alike?" Use analogies to shed new light on something or suggest new hypotheses. With a meta-narrative you can create an entirely new template that will construct new meanings

in your life. When you put the story of your life into a new narrative, it will call out different understandings and values. And you can do this with a word or phrase, "Is your inner Rambo ready to come out and vanish your enemies?"

In using your imagination, in using metaphors, and in playing around with ideas, you are tapping into the power of hypnotic language.[6] This is the language by which you move *upward* into the Meta Place to construct more abstract ideas such as beliefs, mental models, understandings, etc. which establish higher level constructs.

7) *Openly and Flexibly Adapt.* Sometimes an invention arises due to small adaptations rather than the creation of something brand new. Do this by flexibly adjusting a representation, word, or idea. Sometimes a single word can change an entire narrative. Suppose you were told that you acted *rashly and thoughtlessly,* then someone else says that he admires your *courage* for putting yourself forward so unselfishly. That's a reframe based on a single word which re-classifies the experience, a small adjustment that creates a significant change in perspective.

There's power in flexibility. "The person with the most flexibility in a system, will be the controlling element in that system." This also speaks about the shaping power of deliberate practice because in that experience, small incremental adaptations make up the essence of an expertise.

8) *Think Out-of-the-Box.* As you search for additional meanings which you can give to an idea, suggest something non-conventional. One way to do this is to take multiple perspectives. In this way you can jump outside your current frame. See it from your own eyes (first person perspective). Then see it from another person's point of view (second person perspective). Next step out of the system and see it from outside of the system (third person perspective). You could also see it historically from the 1400s or from the year 2500 in the future. You could adopt a dog's perspective, a cat's, or any of a thousand other animals. And because we get stuck when we perceive things strictly from what we consider a "realistic" perspective, when you use an "as if" point of view, you can step out of the thinking box you have been trapped in.[7]

9) *Get a Thinking Partner.* Because it is so easy to fall into thinking ruts, it's a great idea to develop one or more thinking partners. Invite someone

who has learned to think to become someone that you can *think out-loud* with just for the fun of playing with ideas to see where they may lead. When you engage in co-thinking, that is, collaborative thinking, set the frame that for a time, there's no judgment and that no one will hold any idea that emerges against the other.

In this way you can also tap into the power of scaffolding. Russian psychologist L.S. Vygotsky, emphasizing the social origins of the higher mental functions, recommended *scaffolding* for enabling learning in children and new learners. Yet every one of us has a *zone of proximal development* (ZPD), a zone that identifies what we can learn on our own and what we can learn with the assistance of another mind. Scaffolding works when a person who may know something you do not prompts, gives cues, suggests a new and different focus, etc. Then together we can learn beyond our current abilities.[8]

The Creative Conversation
When I met with Susan for a coaching conversation, she said she wanted to feel safe when she was being criticized. Outwardly, this seemed a bit surprising. That's because Susan was a sophisticated young executive in her early 30s, who carried herself with such elegance that gave the impression of being older and more experienced than she actually was. "You don't feel safe when you are being criticized?" I asked to initiate the conversation.

> "No, not at all... [pause] ... I feel under attack like the person will rip me apart and show that I'm a fraud and that I'm worthless."

"That sounds really intense ... you feel attacked like someone will rip you apart ... [pause] ... your fear is that you will be exposed as a fraud, as worthless... [pause]. How intense is this?"

> "[Tears in her eyes] It's very intense. When I'm criticized I sometimes begin to feel dizzy, I usually get a terrible migraine, and sometimes my stomach gets all out of sorts."

"And if you felt safe, what would you be feeling?"

> "I'd be relaxed. I'd be able to think and not blank out. I wouldn't have any of the other physical symptoms that I mentioned."

"And *feeling relaxed* in just that way, what would you be thinking about the criticism or the person doing the criticizing?"

> "... I guess I would think, 'I don't care what you think or say! You're opinion is worthless.'"

"Ah, so to feel safe, and gain some psychological distance from the criticism, you have to totally discount the criticism and the person. You have to *insult* the person and learn nothing from it."

> "... [pause] that sounds terrible. Like I'm a terrible person."

"Great! So you don't want to be a terrible person? [No!] So when you say the word *'safe'* what images or memories come to your mind?"

> "Safe ... well a castle, a fortress ...   Safe, a resort with a beach where I can be myself and enjoy the relaxation of the white sands..."

"Okay, let's do that. Go there. Let's build an invisible castle as your inner fortress, a castle that feels like being on the beach at a resort."

> "That's really weird."

"Weird enough to be memorable?"

> "Oh yes, definitely memorable."

"And weirdly memorable enough so that you can *feel completely okay within yourself*—competent at what you do, respectful of the woman that you have become. [Nodding yes.] Take a moment and experience that as fully as you can."

> "Yes, I like that."

"Now let's see what happens when you create an imaginary bubble around you—a sphere that is protected by an invisible force field and in the middle of that sphere, there is your inner fortress or sanctuary ... And you *can be there right now ... feeling safe...* [pause] How is that?"

> "Good. I like it."

"And outside the fortress are words ... words that others say, some that you like, some that you don't. And some person may even use words to try as they may, to assault your fortress, but their words can only splatter up against the invisible force field like on a plexiglass wall... Got that? [Yes.] And you can *keep the words out just observing them* on the force field. And they can stay there while you remain safe within."

> "That's good. I like that. But what shall I do with those words on the wall?"

"What do you normally do with information, whether you like or don't like it?"

> "Well, if it fits and is good, then I use it. If not, then I just let it go."

"Sounds like a plan to me. Try that on. Look at the words of criticism and use your assertive and critical thinking skills to decide, 'Good for me,' 'Not good for me,' 'Something to consider,' 'Something to flush down the toilet.'"

Thinking about Thinking

All people are creative, but not all are equally creative, or even productively creative. As a power of the mind, you can be creatively destructive with your creativity as well as creatively constructive. The ethics of creativity lies in your hands as the person wielding the power of creativity and your use of your resources and skills.

Because to think is to create, the heart of creativity goes to thinking itself and especially to fresh thinking. Creativity is built into us human beings. It comes along with the capacity to think.   It occurs when you create

representations and ideas. It occurs when you create a referent experience and then use it as your way of thinking about something.

Creative Thinking Exercise

> Pick a subject to play with and then identify 20 metaphors which you could use and apply to understand a given subject. Explore where a metaphor is useful; where it is not. Identify its limitations and where the metaphor no longer carries a valid comparison.

End of the Chapter Notes

1. Howard Gardner, *Creating Minds* (1993). Gardner examined the cultural contexts in which "creative" people arose and were recognized. This means that creativity is not an absolute thing, but relative to the culture in which it arises.
2. See *Thinking Humorously* (2020).
3. See *Metaphorical Thinking: Becoming a Skilled Metaphorian* (2021)
4. When you re-categorize or re-classify you are *reframing*. That's the theme of *Mind-Lines: Lines for Changing Minds* (1997/ 2012).
5. It is your ability to create a thinking template which explains how it is possible to set up self-fulfilling prophecies with our beliefs, values, expectations, etc. Once a thinking template is set up, it operates as a filter giving you eyes and ears for the ideas of that thinking template.
6. For a study in hypnotic language patterns, see *Thinking Hypnotically* (2019), *Hypnotic Conversations* (2020), *The Hypnotic Language Patterns of Milton H. Erickson* (1976), *Trance-Formations* (1981). The brain naturally and inevitably thinks hypnotically; this is not a special, unique, or magical kind of thing. To entertain a movie in your mind from some experience you've had, which is *not* currently going on, is a hypnotic experience.
7. See *Creative Solutions* (2017).
8. About scaffolding, see *Executive Learning* (2022), pages 196-7, 208.

Chapter 14

SYNERGISTIC & SYSTEMIC THINKING

"Creativity is intelligence having fun."
Albert Einstein

*"Few people think more than two or three times a year.
I've made an international reputation for myself
by thinking once a week."*
George Bernard Shaw

You can't isolate a person from the systems he lives within.
Alfred Korzybski

T here is thinking that sees and reckons things individually, one thing at a time, and without relating them to its context. That kind of thinking focuses first on a singular distinction, then on another one, and another without any concern for how the pieces may be related. Then there is an opposite kind of thinking. It looks for the many multiple variables and how they are inter-related. This is *systemic thinking* or *synergistic thinking* and it entails questions about variables, relationships, and context.

- What is X connected to? What is the relationship between the key factors of this experience?
- What other factors influence X? How does time play a role?
- In what context do each of these factors occur?

An interesting facet of systemic thinking is that it requires holding several,

to many, variables in mind simultaneously. That's not easy. Nor is this to be confused with global thinking, even though systemic thinking is able to recognize the whole as it emerges from the parts. Recognizing that a systemic experience requires multiple activities at the same time and the coming together of those parts at the right time means tracking the experience over time. It requires *seeing what is invisible*—the relationships between the parts and how they develop over time.

Given that a system is a set of inter-related variables, then systemic thinking means being able to *see things as a whole—as a system*. System thinking embraces a holistic approach, it sees *both* part and whole in synergy with each other. Doing so, it is if you are synthesizing the many variables into a whole, a larger context that unites the parts. You can now also follow the information through the system—feedback from the outside enters the system, then that feedback goes back to oneself or to the organization within the system. Then with that data feed-forward begins, first to self and then to the outside world. It is a circle. As circular, data enters the system and is then processed and transformed by the system. Then it can be used. The data is then used to make changes both in the system itself (adjusting itself) and the system's information out to the outside world.[1]

The most natural way to learn to think systemically is by observing living systems and how they develop over time. Study a forest and how it grows or study the way of raising crops from when you till the soil until you harvest the crop. In a natural system, there are multiple variables interacting with each other in multiple ways over time as things change.

Thinking Systemically Sub-Skills
1) *Identify the Variables.* Begin by identifying as many of the variables in the system that you can. Make it as exhaustive of a list as possible. "What are all of the factors that play a significant role in this idea, concept, or the experience?" Once you have completed your list, interview others who know the experience, organization, or conceptual system. What do they consider as additional factors that play a role?[2]
- What are the variables that determine if someone is resilient? How many variables are there in the experience of resilience?

Where you find that *either/or thinking* has separated the variables of a system, see if *both/and thinking* will put that system back together. Much damage is done semantically by polarized thinking, "this or that" when we

do not have to map things by that kind of dichotomizing.

 Hyphenate disconnected words. This was one of Korzybski's "inventions." He said that we can put a system back together again by using hyphens, hence, mind-body, neuro-linguistic, neuro-semantic, space-time, etc. As you find parts of a system which have been torn apart, hyphenate the words to restore the system. Einstein did that with "the time-space continua."

2) *Think in Continua.* Another way to shift out of polarized thinking into thinking in terms of degrees and probabilities is to imagine the idea or experience you're considering on a continuum. As you do, ask:
•   "What are the polar opposites on the continuum?"
•   "What occurs on the continuum as a person moves from one end to the other end?"
•   "Where are things on the line at this moment in time?"
•   "What factors can move one to the right?"

3) *Find Relatedness.* When you next identify how each of the variables are related to each other, you are discovering *the dynamic structure* that makes it all work. "Which part is related to X-part as the system starts and in what way?" "How does this change over time as the system processes information and energy?" "What is the overall patterning that's occurring in the system?" Once you have the inner workings, step back to perceive the environment or context that the system is within. "What contextual factors influence the system?"
•   What is the first variable that's required for the ability to bounce back after a set-back? The second element?
•   What elements are peripheral and play no central role in the system?

4) *Transcend Linearlity.* Begin by thinking linearly. "What are the linear connections between the parts?" "What are the cause-effect relationships between various parts?" Once you have the linear structures, move to the non-linear ones. "What are the non-linear connections? How do the interconnected networks work?" Non-linear includes several things. It includes the principle of simultaneity, the gestalts that arise as emergent properties. It includes self-organizing attractors, correlational factors, etc. Simultaneity is not easy to see. In fact, you can't actually *see* it; you have to *know* it. By listing the items that occur at the same time, you mentally take them into consideration in your thinking.

When you have a system, then it's critical to consider the emergent properties which are likely to arise in the system. Ask, "What intransparent factors emerge or could emerge in the process?" "What unexplained gestalts arise?" These are experiences that are "more than and different from" the sum of the parts. Adding up the parts, in other words, cannot explain what emerges.

- The idea that a hurtful event is 'personal, pervasive, and permanent' (3 **P**s) obliterates the experience of resilience. So framing the bad thing as 'that, there, then' (3 **T**s) enables a neutral state for resilience to arise. While it is not resilience that arises as a gestalt from this, neutrality is.
- If resilience arises as an emergent property in the mind-body system, what are the necessary and sufficient elements?

5) *Find What's Multi-Causal.* Not only are numerous things occurring at the same time, but many of the facets of a system are caused or influenced by multiple things. A particular aspect of an experience may be generated by X at one time and at another time by Y, and both may work depending on environmental factors A, B, and C. To observe and note multi-causality, you will probably have to visit and revisit the experience you are studying (e.g., resilience) as a system.

- While neutrality is central to resilience and arises from the three **T**s, how do other variables such as a robust intention, a vigorous set of values, and a commitment to oneself, work in the process as multi-causal factors?

6) *Track the Feedback Systems.* Feedback loops within a system are also extremely difficult to see. To identify how information is coming into the system (feedback) and how the information moves out of the system into the external world (feed-forward) requires knowing about the many different kinds and sources of information. Some information that comes back to us from the world are coded in words, others in non-verbal expressions, some visually, some in sounds, etc. Some information comes back to us in the form of contextual information—where, when, who, etc. Feedback within ourselves to ourselves is coded in linguistics (words, values, beliefs, etc.), or coded visually (images, memories), coded in sounds, or coded in neurology (kinesthetic sensations).

Tracking from the inside to the outside refers to tracking *how we feed-forward information to ourselves* in our mind (the Meta Place), and then forward in our talk and behavior. We feed-forward our responses to make adjustments in ourselves or to affect the environment of things and people

around us.
•   With a set-back, what information do you want to monitor as you bounce back from a set-back and get into the game of life again?

A healthy system will include a full circle or loop regardless of where it begins. If an external trigger is noted, received, and represented (input of feedback), it is then processed.   The person thinks about it, draws conclusions, decisions, creates understandings, etc. (feed-forward to self). From that processing, it is then sent forth in emotion, speech, and behavior (feed-forward into body and then out to the world), where someone will respond again offering another external trigger.

Feedback-loops establish self-organizing and self-perpetuating forces. This explains why beliefs and values so easily become self-fulfilling prophecies. Look for self-sustaining loops as cues about the presence of a system.

7) *Include Temporality.* As you consider the systemic element of time, ask questions about the time and time frame of the experience or organization. "How long does it take for information or energy to pass through the system?"   "What is the processing time for any given element in the system?" "Are there stages or 'seasons' for the growth or development of the experience?" One source of temporality arises from the fact that we live in a process-world, a world that is always changing. Stuart Chase noted, "a fact is a rapidly aging event."
•   How long did the set-back take? It occurred over what period of time?
•   If the set-back has knocked down (or shattered) your sense of self, how long will it take to recover your hope for the future or your optimism about your world? How long will it take to recover your original mindset and recover your passion for life?

8) *Embrace Complexity.*   Because the world is not an additive affair "in its more fundamental structural aspects" (Korzybski, 172), effective systems thinking is not simply about adding things together. For example, the "sum of the parts or characteristics" which occur when you add one molecule of oxygen and two molecules of hydrogen does not simply result in more oxygen and hydrogen molecules. In fact, something new and very different arises—*water*. This is *emergence* in systems language.

With all of this, expect and embrace complexity. Shift to thinking in terms of complexity (e.g., the multiple parts and facets), dynamic interactions (things moving and changing in the system because systems do not stay

still), independency of the parts, holons (parts in wholes in a dynamic structure), structure, and intransparence such as the role of "time" in the system. Human beings, as dynamic systems, are not simple due to these many factors. Every attempt to simplify people to four types or even 16 is doomed to failure (i.e., the Ennegram). The passion to find a magic wand that will explain people in easy and simple terms is a passion that only leads to frustration. There is no such silver bullet. Much better to anticipate complexity, to expect the unexpected, to expect constant change, and to know that systems can, as it were, take on a life of their own.

- While your physical health is not absolutely required to be a resilient person, how aware are you that how you feel physically, and the state that you are regularly in, always plays a contributing factor?

9) *Identify and Use the Leverage Points.* While there is complexity, emergence, and the surprise of the unexpected, there are also *patterns.* People do tend to habituate responses and create identifiable patterns. And because the human system is structured dynamically, people operate by producing patterned behaviors. And within these patterned ways of thinking, feeling, speaking, and behaving are steps—specific turning points. In these turning points, the system can go in one direction rather than in another. Look for these. Look for and identify the turning points which are critical leverage points in the system. These are places in the system where a small change produces a large transformation.

- Have you neutralized the devastation of the three **P**s and exchanged them for the three **T**s?

The Holistic or Systemic Conversation
While Harvey was not in touch with his emotions, he actually liked it that way. For him, emotions make a person weak. "Emotions give others leverage to manipulate or blackmail you." For him, emotions interfere with good thinking, rational decisions, and therefore the ability to make lots of money because "business is not about emotions." In fact, for Harvey the very idea of emotions was so overloaded semantically with negative connotations that even a hint that he should be more emotional (e.g., caring, kind, forgiving) in his dealings with people made his stomach turn. The idea literally made him sick.

Yet, for the most part, things worked just fine for him until he reached his late 40s. That's when the lack of close friends, the inability to create and sustain a love relationship with a woman began to weigh on him. Finally, his loneliness led him to decide to find out what was wrong and how to right it.

"I know I need to be more open to my emotions, but the thought sickens

me— it disgusts me."

"And what is that thought exactly?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, if the thought about emotions, or being emotional, disgusts and sickens you, then what do you specifically think about emotions that makes them so disgusting?"

"I don't know ... it just disgusting..."

"Give me a metaphor. 'And it is like...?'"

"It is like being a child, being undisciplined, out of control, weak."

"And what immediately comes to mind when you think about being a child, undisciplined, out of control, and weak?"

"It's the opposite of everything that I am and want to be."

"And...?"

"It's despicable ... it's damnable."

"So there's your answer. By framing emotions in that way, no wonder the idea makes you sick. It now makes perfect sense. So, now you know."

"Yeah, but what am I suppose to do?"

"Easy, change your thinking about emotions."

"Easy? It doesn't sound easy to me. Actually it sounds impossible. I can't even imagine being emotional."

"Of course not. Not as long as you think of emotions as you do. After all, as you think, so you feel. You create your disgusting, sickening emotions from your current thinking. When you change that way of thinking, your emotions will change."

"But how do I do that?"

"Let's start with permission. As you take a deep breath, and let your eyes close, go inside and say these words to yourself and notice what happens inside you. 'I give myself permission to welcome emotions as just emotions.' . . . Now is there anything inside you objecting to that?"

"Yes! Definitely. If I do that I will become weak and out-of-control."

"Let's now integrate that objection to create a new permission and a new meaning. Again, say these words to yourself, 'I give myself permission to welcome my emotions and to do so with my strength of knowing myself, the strength of my convictions.' Now how well does that settle?"

"A bit better, but there's still an objection. What if my emotions make me vulnerable to being manipulated?"

"Let's add that. 'I give myself permission to welcome my emotions as the effect of my thoughts and do so from the strength of my inner powers with an awareness so that no one manipulates or takes advantage of me.' Any objections now?"

"Strangely... no. But things feel uncomfortable and weird inside."

"Yes, that's to be expected, after all you are changing your orientation to yourself and to the world. You are allowing your emotions, which are expressions of your thoughts, to be without the cognitive non-sense that you started with. ... [pause] ... so how many times do you need to repeat that permission until it really settles

down inside you as your new orientation?"

Thinking about Thinking
Thinking about systems is difficult enough, but thinking about systemic-thinking—now that is a real challenge. It is not easy! And it takes time and effort, and lots of practice, to become skilled at systemic thinking. *Yet* it is possible! Whether it is the human system or a social system like a group, a family, a business, a corporation or even an ethnic culture —systems are structured and operate by a certain patterning that's been established.[3]

To think systemically requires that you engage in meta-thinking. That is, you have to *go meta* to attain a higher perspective so that you can *see the system* as if it were a living entity inside of a contributing environment. When you can *step back,* and begin to recognize the functioning of the system, then you can begin to comprehend it and how it works. This will become clearer in the chapter on meta-cognition.

End of the Chapter Notes
1. See *The Matrix Model* (2003/2016), this model serves as a systems model in Neuro-Semantics. The first experience that we used the Matrix Model to model stuttering. From that Bob Bodenhamer wrote a whole book on the modeling experience. Also see, *Systemic Coaching: Coaching the Whole Person with Meta-Coaching* (2012).
2. See *Resilience: Becoming the Phoenix* (2020).
3. See *Systemic Coaching* (2012) and *Cultural Modeling.*

PART III

The Executive Thinking Skills

T his next set of thinking skills develop the executive functions in your prefrontal cortex. These express your highest faculties for cognitive enrichment and understanding as well as for cognitive reserve and resilience. The first thinking skills—your essential and eureka skills (e.g., considering, questioning, doubting, detailing, distinguishing, inferring, organizing, creating, synergizing)—give you the ability to embrace and explore reality. The thinking skills above and beyond these are *the executive thinking skills*—the thinking powers that ultimately run the show. By these we make executive decisions, learnings, discernments, reflections, and value-judgments by which we define ourselves and our lives. Done well and you will live effectively, productively, and wisely. You live with a sense of dignity, meaning, and purpose. You live with energy and vitality as you contribute richly to others and leave the world a better place.

But there is a problem. *Most people are poorly trained in these thinking skills.* Why is that? Because no one has taught them *how to think* in these executive skills. Many people, in fact, don't even know that they have these internal powers. They assume they are victims of life's cruel events, that they are doomed to merely survive, and that they have no choice in the matter. Others think they are evil or "bad seed" and have no choice but a life of drugs, crime, and addiction.

While you can create a wonderful life using the eureka powers (inference, organizing, creativity, and synergizing), the real magic occurs with the executive powers. By *learning how to learn,* by *discerning* the key factors that make for wise choices, you can make *executive decisions* for your life. Then by *reflecting* on your reflections and *sacrilizing* the *being*-ness of

everyday life—you can create a beautiful life that vibrates with meaning. You become the executive of your life. You become the architect of your future. You become the captain of your soul.

      10) Learning.
      11) Deciding (Intending, Choosing).
      12) Discerning (Wisdom).
      13) Reflexivity (believing, assuming, framing, etc.).
      14) Sacralizing (non-instrumental thinking and mindfulness).

The Executive Functions in Brain Anatomy

What does an organizational executive, a CEO for example, *do*? *He or she works with the whole organization making decisions about the functioning of the whole.* An executive exercises numerous executive functions and powers—managing information from and to the whole, reflecting on choices and decisions, integrating for implementation, etc. Similarly, *the higher levels in the brain* (the cortex, neo-cortex, the prefrontal lobes, parietal lobe, and the higher cortical levels) *involve the cognitive executive functions.* From these higher level functions arise the central competencies of human intelligence. These enable you to detect and change the quality of your thinking.

Neuro-scientist Elkhonon Goldberg (2009) describes the connections governed by these executive functions.

> "The frontal lobes are more connected to all other parts of the brain than any other region." (xiv). "The frontal lobes perform the most advanced and complex functions in all of the brain, the executive functions. They are linked to intentionality, purposefulness, and complex decision making." (p. 5)

Antonio R. Damasio (1994) describes the executive functions as *privileged* in terms of their functions and positioning in brain anatomy.

> "The prefrontal cortices contain some of the few brain regions privy to signals about virtually any activity taking place in our beings' mind or body at any given time. ... [they] receive signals from several bio-regulatory sectors of the human brain... The prefrontal sectors are indeed in a privileged position among other brain systems. Their cortices receive signals about existing and incoming factual knowledge related to the external world; about innate biological regulatory preferences, and about previous and current body state..." (p. 181)
> "Convergence zones located in the prefrontal cortices are thus the repository of dispositional representations for the appropriately categorized and unique contingencies of our life experience. ... The entire prefrontal region seems dedicated to categorizing contingencies in the

> perspective of personal relevance." (p. 182)

Alfred Korzybski (1943/1990), in speaking about the higher levels of the brain, speaks about their broader perspective.

> "The difference between 'high intelligence' and 'low intelligence' consists in the fact that a 'high intelligence' has a larger outlook backwards as well as forward ... a 'high intelligence' has a larger span or field; it knows more about the past and looks further into the future." (*Science and Sanity*, 1933, p. 483)

Neurological Basis for Higher Levels of Thinking

In the front area of the cortex are the frontal lobes, on each side are the parietal lobes, and in the back are the occipital lobes. This is the powerhouse of the brain—responsible for thought, reason, perception, voluntary movement, language, responsibility, "self," intentionality, etc.

> "The frontal lobes mediate the behaviors that most distinguish man from animals" (Cummins & Miller, 2007, p. 12). In addition to speech and language abilities, the larger size and qualitative development of the left prefrontal cortex provide the ability to plan for the future, organize resources to achieve goals, develop problem-solving strategies, think abstractly, create values, and develop social skills to live in complex social networks (Joseph, 2001). The left hemisphere organizes information into temporal units and logical sequences, making it possible for humans to identify cause and effect and thereby plan for the future.

These executive functions generate the highest of our thinking powers. They integrate functions, align and coordinate processes, translate information into neural energy, etc. At the lower levels the brain abstracts from the "energy manifestations" "out there" which impact the nervous systems. From those first nerve centers, each level of abstraction transforms things all the way to the top, and then back down again. In this way the lower levels regulate and coordinate the body's nervous systems, including the regulatory functions.

At the higher levels, the executive functions organize, integrate, and synthesize the many simultaneous functions of the brain. Here the cerebral cortex exerts an inhibitory influence on subcortical functions. Here we experience language and logic as we think with, and in, words. Here reasoning enables us to conceptualize ideas and develop understandings about all sorts of concepts (i.e., time, self, morality, responsibility, etc.). From here "human methods of solving problems depends on higher order abstractions..." (Korzybski, p. 272).

Among the two dozen executive functions, *intentionality* is decisive for our humanity. With intentionality, we "make up" our minds, we choose, we decide, we say "yes" and "no" to various choices. Intentionality not only gives us veto power, it enables us to set intents that establish a sense of direction and purpose. Intentionality gives rise to values and criteria. Executive thinking in your frontal lobes enables you to live consciously and mindfully. You can decide on the direction of your life and its quality. Here you set goals, think long-term, and exercise your "will" power and your "won't" power as a self-directing person.

By intentionality, you create your *self.* You invent your sense of yourself, your self-awareness, social self, your ethical self (or conscience), your temporal self which all gestalt into "personality." From this auto-biographical self, you become an "I" who thinks, feels, acts, chooses, relates, etc.

Exercising Your Executive Functions
You can develop your neo-cortex and get your executive functions to grow, develop, and become fully alive. Here are some quick suggestions.

1) Consciously set intentions every day—purposes and goals as you plan for what to do, who to be, who to relate to, etc.
2) Develop mindfulness by using your reflexivity—by reflecting and monitoring your thoughts and emotions.
3) Develop the many aspects of your memory, from your short-term memory to your long-term memory, your autobiographical narrative memory, your semantic memory, etc.
4) Develop your reasoning powers so your ability to think things through, reason upward from facts and downward from principles, conceptualize, infer, etc. will be well practiced for accuracy and elegance.
5) Develop your problem-solving skills in how you define, gather information, create solutions, innovate smart strategies, and resolve problems.
6) Develop your intra-personal skills for self-awareness, for being kind and gentle with yourself, for being disciplined in acting on your word, being trustworthy, etc.
7) Develop your inter-personal skills for how you relate to others, how you show empathy, love, care, compassion, understanding, etc.
8) Align your beliefs and values with your actions for the personal power of congruence.

Chapter 15

LEARNING

"The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write,
but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn."
Alvin Toffler

"Don't just teach your children to read.
Teach them to question what they read. Teach them to question everything."
George Carlin

"A man who reads too much and uses his own brain too little
falls into lazy habits of thinking."
Albert Einstein

"Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at 20 or 80.
Anyone who keeps learning stays young.
The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young."
Henry Ford

You cannot *not* learn. The question is never, "Are you learning?" The real question is, "What are you learning?" The reason for that is simple, *when you think, you learn.* What you learn may be great or it may be disastrous. It may brilliantly open up new vistas for you or it may lock you into miserable prisons of pain.

While *thinking* is the heartbeat of learning, *learning is more than thinking.* To learn is to gain knowledge about something; it is to comprehend and understand something. When you learn you come to *know* what you did not previously know, now you can "figure out" how something works or what to do with it.

The word *learn* originally meant "to follow the track." Question: What is the track that you follow when you learn? *Track,* as a metaphor, refers to how you follow a track through a wilderness to find game, or a way home. In learning you are following a *thinking track.* You are following *a line of thinking* or reasoning to understand a concept, someone's words, or an experience. You are tracking how a person reaches a conclusion and/or you are tracking how to think in reaching an understanding.

We think to learn. Every thinking skill gives you another way to learn and to understand. In *questioning,* you learn to dive into the inner structure and its elements. In

> *"We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools."* Martin Luther King Jr.

doubting, you learn to test things and find opposites. In *detailing and distinguishing,* you learn to separate what's joined together. In *inferring* you learn what is in the background that supports an idea, experience or task. In *organizing* you learn how to put an experience or concept together. In *creating* you learn how to invent new ideas and posit hypotheses which you can then test. In *holistic and synergistic thinking* you learn to see what's invisible, namely the system in which something occurs.[1]

Learning takes place within different kinds and dimensions of thinking. This unveils an astonishing truth: *Learning itself is not distinguished by any singular form of thinking.* Now isn't that amazing? I didn't expect that. Prior to writing this chapter, I thought would identify one specific kind of thinking that would be "learning thinking." But no. Learning occurs in and through every form of thinking making it multi-dimensional.

> "... learning is not a special class of psychological processes; it is synonymous with any and all psychological processes." (George Kelly, 1955, p. 75)

Learning, in its strictest definition, *starts at the point where you do not know something,* just as thinking does. If you are hearing what you already know, you are not actually "learning." You are rehearsing or remembering. Learning occurs when you hear new information and mix information in new, strange, and/or weird ways.

All learning is not the same. Some learning is high quality, some is not. Yet, *because the quality of your thinking is also the quality of your learning,* you control it. Just as thinking can be clear and precise or

confused and vague, so can learning. Similarly, while we all think, we do not all think equally well or learn equally well. Some people are *great thinkers and learners*. They come up with new ideas that change the world. They invent new products that improve the quality of lives. They create new businesses and possibilities.

Anyone who does not think clearly, precisely, and accurately cannot be a truly great learner. That person needs to be trained in how to think more effectively for the purpose of learning. So even though thinking/learning is natural, inevitable, and effortless, it requires discipline and effort to do it well and to move beyond lazy and muddled thinking. Task one is to train yourself to develop all of the required *thinking skills*. That will move your thinking/learning beyond vagueness and imprecision.

As learning involves language, it entails *linguistic thinking*. When you learn you come to *understand* a person or thing—what something is, how it works, how to get the best results from it, its significance, etc. Such understanding is heavily dependent on language which, strangely enough, can be incredibly tricky, even deceiving. That's why you have to constantly use your *essential* thinking skills to test language. You have to consider, question, doubt, detail, and distinguish the concepts that language presents.[2]

Ludwig Wittgenstein described this as "the bewitchment of language." He said, "Philosophy is the fight against the bewitchment of our understanding through language." The central problem we all face in thinking using language is the temptation to take words and labels as having inherent meaning, as if meaning resided in words. It does not and can not. It is this confusion of map with the territory that essentially deceives us.

Synergistically all of the many kinds of thinking build up critical thinking —thinking which is real, precise, accurate, and of high quality. Critical thinking as "disciplined thinking that's clear, rational, open-minded, precise, informed by evidence..." describes the essential thinking skills. Critical thinking is also reflective, creative, and holistic—the eureka thinking skills.

Combining critical and creative thinking gives us the kind of thinking that entrepreneurs, business leaders, millionaires, geniuses, and the best executives use. Without this, thinking and speaking become flawed—disorganized, irrelevant, ambiguous, incomplete, etc. Charles Duhigg noted that thinking is the one thing you cannot delegate. In

Smarter, Faster, Better, he wrote, "You can't delegate thinking."

> "Individuals who cannot think critically are *like rudderless boats,* destined to flounder through life at the mercy of every eddy and cross current that touches them." (*Introduction to Critical Thinking*, p. 7)

The Sub-Skills of Learning

Given the strange thing that there is no unique thinking skill that describes *learning,* and that actually every form of thinking leads to some aspect of learning, we can say that learning occurs throughout all of the *essential* thinking skills and all of the *eureka* thinking skills. And, not surprisingly, learning occurs within all of the *executive* thinking skills.

To Learn as an Executive Thinking Skill:

1) *Follow a "Line of Thinking."*

Given that the word "learning" originated from the metaphor of literally "following the track," the track under consideration is a person's line of thinking or reasoning. It is that "track" that you *get* when you *get* a person's point, or when you gain insight, or a learning from what you read or hear. This is what you have discovered that you did not know previously. Ask yourself, "What is the line of thinking here?" "How has the person gone from X and Y data points to this conclusion?" See if you can follow the line of thinking. If not, ask questions to discover the details and distinctions the person is using.

2) *Gather Up Your Take Aways.*

When you learn something, *you take something away with you in your mind and memory.* What? It could be an idea, an insight, an understanding, a connection between two ideas, etc. Ask yourself, "What am I taking away from this information or conversation?" As you collect your thoughts, state your learning as best you can. Often this is initially difficult. "Just exactly what have I learned?" By attempting to put into words what you are taking away from the experience, you make that learning more available to yourself and therefore more real. You are also engaging in the owning process. It is becoming *your* learning. Because deep within your brain, your neurons are firing together, as you repeat this process, they will begin to wire together.

What results is what we call "learning." You are connecting ideas which may be new and different and *considering* them perhaps as if for the first time using an "innocent eye" or the "beginner's brain." And as you

question them, doubt them, detail them, distinguish them, etc., your learning is becoming stronger and more robust. You are now "drawing conclusions" that you can take away.

Learning begins with an idea. Yet just having an idea is not enough, you need to connect an idea to other ideas. Combine the ideas to create an understanding. What do you now understand? What have you learned that you did not know before? At the heart of learning is connecting—connecting one idea with another or in a new context. Identify how your connection of ideas provides a new level of comprehension. What set of questions does it suggest?

A wonderful thing about ideas is that ideas are entirely democratic. Ideas do not discriminate at all. Great ideas do not care about skin color, ethnic origin, or economic status. All they need are independent thinkers who are willing to follow facts and truth wherever they lead. They need lifelong learners willing to go on the joyful journey.

3) *Stand Under the Learning.*
When you learn, you *understand.* That is, literally, you *stand under* the point, the frame, the insight, and/or the structure of what you learned. As a result, what you learned becomes the framework of the house you live in. The learning governs, supports, and covers you and you "stand" "under" it. When you truly understand, you have a sense of *standing*—stability, strength, uprightness, etc. You *stand* because you recognize the supporting overhead frames which operate as your premises.

4) *Keep Your Learning in Mind as Knowledge.*
Learning leads to *knowing.* If I ask, "What do you know?" You will tell me about ideas and understandings that you have come to "know" and which make up your personal "knowledge." What you *know* is something that you have learned so well that it is *stored* inside you—it's in your memory and available for you to act on. You *know* it. You know what it is, how it works, what to do.

Knowledge differs from beliefs. If I ask about an aspect of your knowledge, "So you *believe* that you can drive a car?" You will probably counter my question saying, "No, I don't believe it, I *know* it." "You *believe* you know how to play tennis?" "No, I *know* I can!" Regarding the areas that you have thoroughly learned, you don't experience them as *beliefs.* You *know* that

information *in your neurology.* You have extensive knowledge about them as well as experience. It is your neurological knowing, based on repeated experiences, that moves it up from a belief to knowledge.

There's a next step. Learning becomes much more real and dependable when you *know about your knowledge* (meta-knowing)*.* When you experience this level of meta-cognition, you have a deeper and more robust sense of confidence to handle the area you are referring to.

5) *Implement Your Understanding and Knowledge to Solve Problems.*
Now because you have learned and you *know,* your learning now enables you to *use* your knowledge to do things, to solve problems, to function effectively in the given domain. At this stage the information that you have learned is no longer just intellectual or academic, your learning is practical and pragmatic. You have, or you can, *implement* what you have learned.

If you can't apply what you know, then you have not yet fully learned. It is not yet *practical knowledge.* This means that true learning ends in *implementation;* it ends at the point where you can execute your knowledge into action and make things happen. In Neuro-Semantics we speak about this as closing the knowing-doing gap.

6) *Establish a Strong Intention to Learn.*
When it comes to learning, you can read, you can experience, you can be taught, but without a desire to learn, a willingness to learn, and/or a passionate intention to learn, you will learn very little. You may even learn nothing at all or the wrong thing. Because learning occurs from the inside–out, you have to begin with a compelling reason. Why learn? What is the value of learning? What are your highest reasons to learn? What are the benefits that you seek by learning?

"Learning begins in delight and flourishes in wonder" wrote Kenneth Eble. To fully realize that, all you have to do is observe a young child at play. That's what makes him such a ferocious and passionate learner—*he's having fun* as he explores his world. How would things change for you if you were to understand that *learning is the ultimate form of play*? Schools especially need to learn this and use it to create an environment where students have fun learning together.

7) *Lock in Your Learnings.*

Will you remember what you've learned? While some things can be learned so thoroughly, you can and will forget most of the things unless you learn the next piece—*how to sustain your learnings.* It's estimated that we forget 90 percent of what we read and/or hear. *90%!* As repetition is "the mother of learning," abundantly and intelligently use repetition to lock in your learning. Take what you have learned that's important to you and repeat it over and over until it becomes automatic.

Next, lock in your learning to sustain it by recording it in some form. You can record it in your mind via repetition and use of various memory devices. You can record it via reproducing what you have learned in each of the sensory modalities. You can record it with pen and paper. Yet regardless of how you record it, learnings need to be recorded. Then you'll have a record of the learning. Your record could be you skill, your memory, your notes, etc.

If you really want to learn and to remember what you've learned, *teach someone.* Whatever you are reading and studying, whatever you are learning and understanding, teach it. When you engage in the process of attempting to transfer what you have learned and encoded to someone else, you push yourself to develop crystal clarity about what you know. Typically, you will learn much more. And you'll be surprised at how much you think you know until you try to explain it.

8) *Get a Learning Partner.*

If one brain is good, shouldn't two brains be even better? And what about 10 brains? We now know that groups can be *smarter together* than the smartest person in a group. This is not always the case because groups have to *learn how to think together,* learn together, decide together, and act together.[3] And when they do, the group's overall intelligence can be much greater than the most intelligent person in the group.

Vygotsky discovered this same principle which he articulated as the "zone of potential" that a teacher, parent, or colleagues can do together. One person's mind can scaffold another person's mind. From that arose the idea of *thinking partners.* Getting someone to think with you as a partner in thinking can amplify your thinking skills. This works wonders when each have the required social skills. Because of mirror neurons, because the brain is a social organ, and because brains seek connections to what's

already known, we can potentially learn best from one another.

This kind of *collaborative thinking* can take thinking to a whole new level. Using your social brain, you can learn best from others. Peter Senge argued for this kind of thing when he argued that organizations need to become *learning organizations.* Why? Because ultimately, *ideas create everything.* Of course, for that to happen, they must first become thinking organizations as well as organizations that value collaboration and encourage the social-emotional intelligence.

Then people engage in thinking, *not* to win debates, *not* to be superior, and *not* to show others up, but to find the best ideas and the best solutions. When a group of people have that intention, they will inquire about each other's thinking. "How did you come to that conclusion?" "What are you thinking about X?" "What premises are you working from?" This helps us stop ourselves from falling in love with a particular idea and instead, *fall in love with the thinking-through process.*

9) *Learn about your Learning.*
While learning is inevitable to such an extent that you cannot *not* learn, meta-learning is not. This is what most people lack. They have not learned how to learn. *When you meta-learn, you learn how you learn*— how to learn best, and how to learn new strategies for learning. When you meta-learn, you take charge of the learning process itself—monitor it, enhance it, contextualize it, eliminate learning difficulties and deficiencies, etc. Now the experience of learning is in your control and no longer dependent on the right conditions or the right teacher. Now when a particular learning strategy does not work, you simply search for and learn the appropriate strategy.

10) *Test Your Learning.*
When you challenge yourself by testing your learning, you can strengthen your learning. And doing this is as simple as asking, "What did I learn?" "What do I now understand that I did not understand previously?" "How can I best express this discovery?" Use this testing process to deepen and to expand your learning, you give yourself a chance to make your learning redundant. Do that to make it more accessible in your memory.

What do all of us mostly seek to learn? How to solve problems, of course! Problems, obviously, drive us to discover solutions. What's less obvious

is that *how* you look at a problem—your perspective and frame—and how you define a problem—affects your ability to solve it. So if you are stuck and a problem seems unsolvable, *test* your definition of the problem "How is your definition and framing of the problem potentially *the* problem?" Also ask, "Do you know *how* to find out what you *do not know*?"[4]

A Learning Conversation
When I met Brenda, there was a lot going on with her. As a public speaker and as a coach, she felt a tremendous amount of stress—the stress was about money, budgeting, getting along with a brother, tolerating a controlling mother, and making her business work.
"So your business is not working? And what does that mean?"
> "It means that I'm always worried about making enough money and having enough clients."

So you are not making enough money? You need more money to keep your coaching business going? And when you say...
> "No, it's not that. I'm making enough money for that. What I'm always thinking is that it will not last and that I won't succeed..."

So you are making enough money, and that means you have sufficient number of clients and that the issue is *your worry* about the future.
> "Yes, but will I have enough clients next month?"

That's your question. How long have you been coaching as your livelihood?
> "Four years. But I'm really worried that I can't keep it up and that I'll end up being a failure at coaching."

You have done this for *four years ...* that is amazing! And yet you are still not convinced? It doesn't sound like you are *counting* what you've done as a success.
> "No I'm not because it is not!"

Really? What would you call it then?
> "I don't know, but not a success because I'm stressing out about money and I'm always thinking that there's not going to be enough money for my expenses."

Brenda, take a deep breath ... that's right ... now I want to take a meta-moment to reflect on what I'm hearing and check with you if I'm getting you. ["Okay."] ... I'm hearing a lot of *discounting* of the things you have succeeded in doing. I'm hearing some *all-or-nothing thinking* about things—I'm guessing that life seems *either* a success *or* a failure to you. I'm also hearing a lot of *worst-case scenario thinking* about the future. ...   How does that fit?
> "It's all true; I knew that you would see that I'm such a fraud."

Wow! Is that what you are going to conclude? ...   It seems that you are doing those very thinking patterns right this moment?
> "What do you mean?"

I mean that it sounds like making that conclusion—concluding you are a fraud is *discounting, all-or-nothing,* and *worst-case scenario thinking. ...*

"[Long pause] ... So I don't know what to say. I kind of feel like you are blaming me for these things."

I would be if *you* were the problem, but you are not.

"I don't get it, then what is the problem?"

Your thinking and what you have learned. That's the real problem. It seems that you have learned to think with those thinking frames and they are the problem. If I were to think that way—I would be feeling all of the symptoms you are feeling—stress, worry about money, fear about the future, etc.

"I *learned* that? I think I have always thought this way. It's how my mom thinks; it's how most of my friends think."

There you have it.

"Have what?"

That's where you *learned to think* in those negative ways and self-insulting ways. And you probably have years and years of practice in thinking in those ways. ["Yeah."] And my guess is that it is now so unconscious, you're mostly unaware that *the problem are those thinking patterns.*

"Well, sometimes when things are going pretty good, I put on a 'happy face' and 'think positive' and force myself to *not* think negatively."

And ...?

"And what?"

Well, how long does that last? ["Not long."] And how much energy or 'will power' do you have to expend to *force yourself* to 'think positively?'

"A lot. And it never lasts very long. ... It's actually really 'not me,' and I feel like a fraud when I do that. I think people see through it also."

And do you know why it doesn't feel natural, why you feel like a fraud, and why it doesn't last?

"It's just the way it is, isn't it?"

It's the same thing as I already mentioned ...

"You mean something about *learning* or *thinking?*

Yes, exactly. You have *learned a particular way of thinking,* and trying on a different way, when you have not unlearned the old way and practiced learning the new way, will obviously feel unfamiliar and not natural to you. ... So let's do another meta-moment. ... What are you learning?

"I'm learning that how I think is the key."

Great! Well done. And what else?

"I'm learning that change is a matter of learning a new way of thinking."

Another great insight. Anything else?

"That change takes time?"

Is that a question?

"No it is something that I'm learning."

[This dialogue continues in the next chapter.]

Thinking about Thinking

While there's no single thinking skill that distinguishes learning, there is good news. *Every kind of thinking evokes an aspect of learning.* And the highest quality of learning involves multiple thinking styles and processes. Ultimately, because learning involves multiple *dimensions, learning is a gestalt of thinking.* Inside of learning it is your openness and curiosity that drives your search for understanding. At a meta-level, you believe in its importance. You search for feedback so that you can adjust your responses as necessary.

End of the Chapter Notes

1. See *Executive Learning: Learning How to Learn* (2020).

2. While we mostly think in language, in words, *thinking linguistically* is not a separate thinking skill. It involves all of the essential skills. First you *represent* the words using your sensory representations (representational tracking). Then you construct category words to represent a classification or a concept.

3. See the book, *Creative Solutions* (2017), there are four well-formed conversations in that book: a well-formed outcome, problem, solution, and innovation. The section on the well-formed problem provides a lot of information about problem solving.

4. See *Group and Team Coaching* (2013). Getting a group of people to *think together* is the first step in getting them to learn together, decide together and then decide together.

Chapter 16

INTENDING & DECIDING

"He who has a why to live can bear almost any how."
Friedrick Nietzsche

*"Without goals, the very concept of intelligence is meaningless.
Intelligence is the pursuit of goals in the face of obstacles."*
Steven Pinker

*"The last of the human freedoms—the ability to choose one's attitude in
a given set of circumstances. ... Between stimulus and response, there is
a space. In that space it is our power to choose our response. In our
response lies our growth and our freedom."*
Viktor Frankl

While in every form of thinking, you learn—you learn something, you may not *decide* something. Here's an important distinction. In every aspect of thinking, you do not necessarily set an intention or make a decision. Isn't that amazing? And it means what? It means that—*you can think without deciding.* You can consider choices and you can contemplate possible pathways of action without "making up" your mind. You can consider without concluding. Concluding brings thinking to an end—to a decision. Now that is an amazing discovery, wouldn't you say?

Again, you can question, explore, infer, and even organize your thinking and still not "make up" your mind. The kind of thinking wherein you *make up your mind* is uniquely special—we call it *deciding, choosing, willing, intending,* etc. All of these words refer to the psychological capacity of

conation—volitional choice. You have thereby moved to a choice point and you are now in a position to transform things.

The act of "making up your mind" about two or more choices involves a lot. It involves *comparing* each choice with values and criteria, *weighing* the pros and cons, opting for a choice, *evaluating* by criteria, and then *drawing a conclusion.* All of that, and more, is entailed in decision-making. In deciding you make a choice, you choose an option or a possibility, and you decide on a course of action. And ultimately, it is *your action* that changes the course of a life, the course of history.

> **The Decision-Making Process**
> 1) Intentionally Set an Objective
> 2) Gather High Quality Information
> 3) Establish Your Criteria
> 4) Check Your Filters
> 5) Identify and Consider Options
> 6) Skeptically Test Everything
> 7) Draw a Conclusion
> 8) Establish Effective Risk Management Procedures
> 9) Set up Moments for Reflection
> 10) Commit to the Decision
> 11) Set up Feedback for Monitoring

When it comes to "making up" your mind, you can do that or you can leave it "unmade" just as you can make up your bed or not. Getting out of bed, your blankets, sheets, pillows are probably in disarray. So you straighten out the sheet and covers, tuck them in so that the bed covers are tight and the pillows are in place. You make it neat and attractive. If you didn't make it up, it would look like a mess with sheets and covers crumpled up in all sorts of weird configurations. A messy, unmade bed is not ready to be slept in. First, you have to sort things out.

Making up a mind also involves sorting things out. It's nearly impossible to make good decisions when your thoughts are not sequenced properly and/or when your thoughts are unfinished. Which thoughts go where? What thought will you rest your head on? What thoughts will cover you? What thoughts are crumpled up and need to be straightened out?

The speed by which you make decisions differs considerably depending on how many variables go into a decision. Decisions can sometimes be made very quickly, in a moment, at the snap of a finger. Sometimes they can, and should, be made much more slowly. If there are many factors and many contexts, criteria, and if the consequences are significant or could be, even life or death, then it is wise to slow down and make the decisions slowly and thoughtfully.

When it comes to decisions, there are many kinds and degrees of decisions. There are big decisions and there are small decisions. Some decisions can be processed and completed in a few seconds, others can take months. Decisions can involve a single person or an entire group. Decisions can be simple and/or complex.

While not all thinking inevitably or necessarily leads to a decision, effective deciding requires the full range of the thinking skills. Effective deciding, like learning, covers all of the basic forms of thinking—considering, questioning, doubting, detailing, distinguishing, creating, etc. Without this thinking foundation, decision-making would be empty, shallow, and superficial. Effective deciding requires the foundational thinking processes as its essential processes.

Some people have learned to be quick in deciding, they are decisive. "They are often wrong, but never in doubt." They have a quick response style and are not afraid of making mistakes. Others have learned to make decisions very slowly, and some are so slow that they never get around to deciding. They are indecisive and fearful of making mistakes. These thinking patterns, as meta-programs, influence the decision-making process.[1]

Deciding Sub-Skills
1) *Intentionally Set an Objective.*
Before you make a decision, use your intentionality to set a goal as your objective and the purpose of your decision. Where do you want to go? What do you want to achieve? Once you have an idea about a desired outcome, then check the reasons for why your intention is important to you. "Why is it important to reach this goal?" "What do I want? What else? What is my intention?" "What is my intention about that intention?"

When you intentionally think, you are *intending*. Intend literally refers to "leaning forward" into your future. Intend ("to lend toward") implies that your goal, objective, purpose, criteria, or outcome has a direction. You are going somewhere. When you consciously intend, *you create an intention*—what you propose to do. This is your purpose, your agenda, and your motivation for that intention. Thinking intentionally creates a sense of purpose and direction because your thinking is informed by a vested interest —you are attempting to do something. Is the agenda clear and transparent to yourself and others or is it hidden? Intention is what is in the back of your mind about all of the other things in your mind.

With intentionality, you engage in *thinking strategically.* "What do I need to do, to consider, to plan, etc. in order to achieve my outcome?" Strategic thinking refers to thinking in terms of where you are now in relation to reaching your goal. "Where is the goal located, how far is it, and how best to obtain that objective?" In strategic thinking you develop or identify a strategy that will lead you to achieve your objective. You then test it and keep refining it until you create a well-formed strategy.[2]

Your ability to set an intention is your ultimate power. It is *the* human power which separates us from the animals. To think of something that you want, and to set that in your mind, is your power to establish what you want to live for, how you want to live, the values you will use as criteria, and much, much more. In setting an intention, you establish your purpose and orientation in life. It begins to define you —your personality.

2) Gather High Quality Information
To have a great decision, you have to have great information. So set out to gather as much *high quality information* as you can. "No good comes out of a knowledge vacuum" writes Steven Hall. Set your aim to get the facts. Then submit the facts to rigorous testing. Use the *essential* thinking skills to test the facts for validity and reliability. Then draw your conclusions from the facts (the *eureka* skills) so that you build up some solid "knowledge" from them.

What information do you already have? What information do you need? Where will you get that information? How will you collect the facts? What interpretative frames will you use to understand the facts? What information is unknown; what is unknowable?

In the information gathering process and in the evaluation process, you will never, and can never, have *all* of the information that you need. Question: How much will you need? That's always a judgment call. There's no absolute answer. Nor can you assume that all of the information that you do have is perfectly valid. There's always the possibility of hidden assumptions in the information you have, dubious and unfounded implications, biases, etc. So, as you give up the demand for perfection, aim to get the best information that you can in the time that you have.

Inasmuch as all knowledge is flawed, allow yourself to *act* on what you know. As you do, get feedback so you can keep updating your knowledge.

At some point you will have to put a limit on the information gathering stage. Otherwise you will never leave it! Decide on a "good enough to go" limit.

3) Establish Your Criteria

You need criteria to decide. If you have no standards, there can be no true decision. You can flip a coin, but not make up your mind. To "make up" your mind, you have to rely on your values and criteria. Herein you make a decision about what values you will use to evaluate the decision that you will make. Nor does the process stop there; next you have to *prioritize* your values in each decision. "What is most important in this decision?" Decisions in different contexts (e.g., home, work, friends, children, colleagues, health, finances, etc.) will require a different priority set.

It's smart to start with your criteria for yourself as a person—the kind of person you want to be, the kind of life you want to live, the kind of legacy you want to leave. "What's most important to you?" "What are your highest intentions?" "What do you dis-value?"

4) Check Your Filters (Meta-Programs).

You have filters (thinking patterns) for the content of your thinking, you also have meta-filters for your thinking. Think about sports and you have a *filter* made up of the content of what you think about a sport or about your team. You also have cognitive filters which are *meta to* (higher than) your content programs. These are your thinking patterns. With regard to "making up" your mind, the following usually play a significant role.

- *Direction:* toward or away from. Do you mostly move toward what you want or mostly away from what you don't want?
- *Attitude:* optimistic or pessimistic. How do you primarily see life?
- *Alternatives:* options or procedures. Do you like following a procedure or do you prefer to look for alternative ways for doing something?
- *Speed:* slow or fast. How quickly or slowly do you make decisions?
- *Somatic response:* Active or reflective. Do you like to think about things first or do you prefer to act first?
- *Person:* decisive or indecisive. Do you think of yourself as a decisive person or more indecisive.
- *Convincer:* Visual, auditory, or kinesthetic. What convinces you about a choice: what you see, hear, or feel?
- *Number:* Once, twice, many, never, always. How many times to you need to be convinced?
- *Authority:* internal or external. Who do you check with for the 'right' to

decide? External authorities or yourself.
- *Reference:* facts, emotions, circumstances, others. What do you refer to when making a decision?
- *Goal striving:* skeptic, perfection, optimize. How do you strive to achieve a goal?
- *Responsibility:* appropriate, over, under. How do you think about being responsible *for* and responsible *to*? Are you sometimes over-responsible? Under-responsible?
- *Time:* short or long term. What time frame do you use in your decisions?

5) *Identify and Consider Options.*
How many options do you have regarding how to reach your goal? How many of these options are truly feasible? Which are realistic? Identify the options that can realistically achieve your outcome so that you can evaluate each of them at a time. If you only have one option, you actually have none. If you have two, then you have a dilemma—"This or that." Options actually begin when you have three. Russo wrote, "Options are the lifeblood of decisions." With more options, there's a greater chance of finding an excellent option for reaching your goal.

To have options, expand the ways by which you could reach your objective. To do that, learn to do *means thinking*. Once you set a long-term goal (your end) focus on *how to reach* that goal---your *means*. Effective deciding for achieving it requires distinguishing between *means* and *ends* of your objective. These two different kinds of thinking can work together or work against each other as you consider your goals.

When there are means to an objective, you can engage in *means thinking. Means* thinking focuses on the processes for reaching a goal—instrumental thinking. There are also the ends of your objective and therefore the kind of thinking that focuses on the final result. *Ends* thinking focuses on the end-product. If you are overly concerned about the product (end result), you may very well miss the processes. Conversely, if you take care of the process—the product will usually take care of itself.

There are not only options within a decisions, there are numerous variables. To make a sound and insightful judgment, start by considering all of the variables that play a role in the decision.   As you think in terms of probabilities, risks, doing due diligence, you take into account in your decision-making possible consequences and anticipate the resources that you will need. You will probably need to set up some contingency plans for

possible problems or risks.[3]
- What are your options? How many?
- What options are you not considering?
- How will you expand your options?

Figure 1:	**The Advantage vs.**	**Disadvantage Chart**
	Advantages +	Disadvantages -
If I go with the decision to change:	_____ __ _____ __ _____ __	_____ __ _____ __ _____ __ __
Weight of Emotional Value	__	__
If I don't make the decision: to change:	_____ __ _____ __ _____ __	_____ __ _____ __ _____ __

Because your brain is "an anticipation machine," you are always predicting (or attempting to) what will or could happen. What consequences could occur? As you make potential predictions, track the predictions for what proves valid and what does not. Here you will want to be aware of what's unpredictable and strive to anticipate possible consequences so that you are not blindsided by something unexpected.[4]

In Meta-Coaching we use the *Advantage / Disadvantage Chart* (Figure 1) as a way to detail the pros and cons of a decision and distinguish the criteria by which we consider each one a benefit or a disadvantage.

6) *Skeptically Test Everything.*
As you go through these processes, tap into your skepticism thinking skill so that you can test information, ideas, beliefs, etc. as you go. Continuously

look for hidden assumptions behind the conclusions that you draw. Be on the alert for biases that may create cognitive or emotional blind spots for you. Use your long-term thinking to consider unintentional consequences that could arise in the future. By capitalizing on your ability to question and doubt, you can put a check on over-confidence, conventional thinking, and opting for the path of least resistance. You can play devil's advocate with yourself, or you can find others to do that with you. Do so to flush out possible blind spots.

7) Draw a Conclusion.

From the comparing and weighing, now you are ready to make an overall evaluation or conclusion. Actually there's multiple levels of evaluation going on inside of every significant decision. Quickly or slowly, you are evaluating each value for its advantage and each disadvantage for the "cost" it implies. Yet within each item that supports it or that questions it, there are evaluations and even evaluations-of-evaluations.

In the final analysis, a decision comes down eventually to a final digital conclusion of "yes" or "no." If the decision does not fall in one of these categories, it could be a "maybe," "partial," or "later." While there may be a long build-up to the moment of a decision, when it comes, *it occurs in a moment.* Then it happens quickly as a yes/no that either validates the decision or dis-validates it. When you choose, you decide by saying "yes" or "no." You use your affirmation power or your veto power.

8) Establish Effective Risk Management Procedures.

Once you have a plan, *plan for contingencies* within that plan. Why? Given that the future to be unpredictable, plans are notorious for going wrong and for unexpected things to arise. Effective decision making draws conclusions about what could go wrong and makes alternative plans for when that happens.

Additionally, consider the level of risk your decision implies. There's always a risk. The question is, "How much risk is involved in this decision?" "What is at risk? What risk management processes can we use to lower the risk?" At this point, your thinking can be unhelpful, problematic, or even dangerous. Do you even know the potential risks that could arise? With the decision, what effects and/or changes will it lead to? What vested interests of others might be affected?[5]

9) Set up Meta-Moments for Reflection

Within the decision-making process and afterwards, it is always good to *reflect on the decision.* For this, develop some excellent questions that you will use to facilitate your reflection.

- How should this decision be made?
- Should this decision be made? What necessitates it?
- How will this decision affect other facets of my life?
- Have I used all of the thinking skills in thinking through this decision?
- What is the ecology of this decision?

10) Commit to Implement the Decision

Amazingly, the decision-making process does not end with the decision. Once a decision has been made, the whole *implementation process* is still ahead of you as you *execute the decision.* The time for action has come, the time for *doing.* Now as Jean-Luk Picard of the Starship Enterprise would say, "Make it so!" and "Engage!" Once you make a decision, never move on without *doing something to translate the decision into action.* Otherwise, you sabotage the whole decision-making process. William James argued that we should never leave the scene of a decision without taking some specific action with regard to it, no matter how small.

11) Set up Feedback for Monitoring

After *action,* there will be feedback. Something will happen, there will be some response, but what? Will the action from the decision move you toward your goal or away from it? You need to know. You need feedback so that you can monitor the progress and process that you have set in motion in your desire to achieve an outcome. You also need to know what to look for. What feedback will tell you that things are moving forward according to plan? What milestones have you set up? Who will you look to for that information? What are the key variables that will indicate your next steps?

Thinking about Thinking

Deciding not only involves *thinking,* it involves *all* of the thinking skills. All of them are involved in generating the final yes/no or go/no go decision. The thinking of deciding is not as focused and pure as the *essential* thinking skills. As an executive thinking process, deciding uses all of the previous thinking patterns. Having weighed choices, used criteria, considered contexts, you now direct your mind to go in one direction or another as you work out what to do, how to do it, when, etc.

Deciding on choices above the common everyday choices of what to wear or eat, or how to carry oneself about one's everyday routines, takes us to the context of risk and risk management. The more risk-averse one is, the more indecisive and the longer it takes one to decide. The more risk-embracing you are, the more you will be decisive and efficient in making decisions.

A Decision Conversation

I ended the coaching conversation with Brenda in the last chapter at the point where she was articulating the things she was learning. But that's not where the conversation ended.

Brenda, those sound like some very significant insights that you are learning— insights that can absolutely change your life.

> "Yes, I believe they will. If I can remember them."

So let's now work on that. You have identified three new ideas: 1) How I think is the key to how I feel. 2) Change is a matter of learning a new way of thinking. 3) Change takes time.

> "You're writing them down, is that for me?"

Yes, and I want to write down a few more. We found that the way you have, up until now, *learned to think* is by *discounting* the good, framing things as *all-or-nothing,* and viewing things in terms of *worst-case scenario.*

> "Yes, my negative thinking."

So if these thinking patterns are the problem, what do you need to learn to reverse them or to unlearn them?

> "[Laughing] I was hoping you would tell me."

Then it would be my learning, not yours.

> "You're right. ... Okay, for discounting, I guess I have to learn to *count* and to think that even little successes *count.* [Great!] And for all-or-nothing, I have to think... I don't know what ... maybe what's inbetween?"

Yes, that's right. Think of the continuum between all-and-nothing, all of the things that lie between the two polar ends.

> "And for worst-case scenario, to think in terms of *best-case scenario.* [Pause] But isn't that the positive thinking that I was forcing myself to do?

It can be. So why not try on multiple *future scenarios*—best, worst, the most likely, and the average? ... Now that you more fully understand these thinking patterns and know how to catch your thinking during the day in real time, will you do this?

> "Yes, I'm pretty sure I will."

'Pretty sure?' That's your commitment? How about a stronger and more robust decision? ... And remember, the decision isn't that you will always and only think with these new patterns—like all humans, you will undoubtedly fail at times. "Two steps forward; one step backward." The decision is to keep catching the

slips and get right back up, learn whatever you need to learn and resiliently bounce back.

"I can do that and I will!"

End of the Chapter Notes

1. There are several Meta-Programs implicated which make up one's decision style. There is the Risk Taking meta-program (46), the Security meta-program (J), and the Decision-Making meta-program (47). See *Figuring Out People* (2005) also "New Meta-Programs" (2022) which is in the Shop.

2. See the Intentionality Pattern in APG and in *Secrets of Personal Mastery* (1997).

3. See *Executive Decisions: Deciding Wisely* (2021).

4. See *Predictive Thinking: Unleashing a Brighter Future* (2022).

5. For how to conduct a "risky conversation" see it in *Inside-Out Wealth* (2011) and in LPG: Living Personal Genius, Day 3.

Chapter 17

DISCERNING

"Wisdom is not a product of schooling,
but of the lifelong attempt to acquire it."
Albert Einstein

"We need to start thinking smarter, more comprehensively,
more creatively."
Joey Reiman, *Thinking for a Living*

O nce you use intentionality and its expressions of deciding and choosing as a way to think, you have a way to "make up your mind." You can also use systemic thinking as a way to see the whole and the inter-relationships between the parts. These meta-cognitive thinking formats give you the ability to rise up to transcend your more fundamental thinking processes. Now by reflecting on your thinking itself, you can make sure it is fitting and ecological. What happens when you put together all of these advanced forms of thinking? The answer is that a new kind of thinking begins to emerge—*discernment*.

In discerning, you are getting to the heart of things. You are getting deeply inside the structure and meaning so that you can focus on what really counts. Discerning applies to everything in life. We need to be discerning about the situations we get into, the people we trust, the emotions we experience, the problems we seek to solve, etc. Paradoxically, discernment occurs in and with every form of thinking. Via questioning, doubting, detailing, extensionalizing, distinguishing, etc, you use your thinking to discern the finer features within your thoughts, what's factual and what is not. As you make distinctions, you become more discerning in your

perspectives and understandings. Further, as you infer, organize, create, think holistically, learn, etc., you take on many more perspectives which enable you to discern how true or false something or someone is.

With all of these forms of thinking, you can now *take multiple perspectives* to the situation, idea, or experience. Bateson described this ability of holding multiple perspectives simultaneously as an inherent part of the structure of wisdom. Here you think with distinctions which enable you to see and discern what would otherwise be undetectable.[1]

Discernment is what lies beyond all of the thinking variables that we have covered. As a result you are able to *discern* the best and wisest choice in a given set of multiple and complex circumstances. Now you think in terms of relationships, politics, and relative values of the criteria as affected by immediate concerns. Now you discern motives, intentions, background knowledge and influences, resources or the lack of them. Your discernment also enables you to recognize that *what is wise* one time in one context may not be wise in another. No wonder discerning what is wise is a complex experience involving so many factors!

In different degrees, discernment occurs at the very beginning of thinking, continues to the constructive thinking skills and then to the pinnacle of thinking, when thinking culminates in its highest executive forms. From beginning to the end, discernment occurs throughout the process. Why is that? Because *to think is to discern.* You experience a first level of discernment when you detail your thinking (chapter 3) and when you distinguish things in your thinking (chapter 4). Discernment, as a thinking pattern, arises out of these, and then transcends them to become much richer and more profound. When it fully blossoms, it is "wisdom."

Discerning Sub-Skills
1) *Identify Key Distinctions*.
For discernment, first identify all of the parts of the experience. What are the key distinctions required for seeing deeply into a subject, distinctions that would otherwise be undetectable? Begin by first identifying the elements of the concept or the experience. As you make a list of the many variables, make the list as extensive as possible. "What else could affect or influence this?" When you have a full list as possible, ask, "Can I divide or distinguish two or more items within any item?" This distinguishing often leads to more exquisite discerning.

Downloading all of the variables that you can think of is just the beginning. Once you have your list, let it sit for a day or two. Some time later, when the list has cooled, revisit it with fresh eyes as if for the first time. Usually, you will think of more items. Later, ask your thinking partner what other variables he or she can add to it.

2) *Embrace the Whole.*
Take hold and embrace the many multiple perspectives simultaneously. Once you have the list of variables, consider them as a unit—as all working together. Once you do that, step back from the variables to sense their overall effect. What do you now see? What whole emerges in your perspective? Run through the four perceptual positions, trying on each one to give you a different perspective.[2] Having done that, try on historical perceptual positions. Look at it through the eyes of Socrates, Einstein, Jesus, Lincoln, etc. Every person's perspective has the potential of expanding your awareness and extending your thinking.

By moving in and then out, you expand your larger comprehension of the subject. As this ends the either-or kind of thinking, it allows you to see both sides and how each influences the other, as well as the whole.

3) *Identify the Context.*
As you hold "the whole" in mind, note that beyond it is its immediate context, and beyond that, a context-of-that-context. What is the context that you are dealing with? What is the environment, the criteria, and the special conditions that influence the experience under consideration? As the environment or atmosphere, context determines everything. Whatever meaning arises is a function of the context. This includes most especially the inner contexts of your frames-of-mind. Identifying all these contexts enables you to learn to discern a higher level phenomenon— the appropriate contexts and the contexts that are not appropriate.

Use your systems thinking for thinking synergistically to see what's happening simultaneously in those contexts. Notice how time plays a role in the function of the system. Notice how contributing factors excel or restrain the push and pull of a system. By identifying opposite contexts, contexts that would nullify the wisdom, you get a sense of the vital role that contexts play. Further, because nothing exists within only one simple context, identify the hierarchy of contexts to develop insight into the more subtle and hidden contexts.

4) *Access Criteria Standards.*
Every decision and discernment also occurs within *a context of values.* Some criteria or standard is presupposed. So as you determine the pros and cons of a decision, you are *discerning a weight* to give to each advantage and each disadvantage in that context. Yet what's often hidden is that you do so against some standard. What is that standard? Identify the values that you are using for your criteria and the value-hierarchy that you are using. How ecological are the criteria? What standards are you using— conventional, personal, family, financial, health, spiritual, etc.?

Don't expect all of the values and criteria to be in harmony. Anticipate that a value at one level will conflict with a value at another level. Using Maslow's hierarchy of needs, at the survival level your values will differ from what you feel driven for at the social level (love and affection) and even more different at the self-actualization level. Wisdom ultimately involves managing the multi-level differences in values.

5) *Claim Your Discernment.*
You are now ready to recognize your discernment. "What are you discerning from all that you've been exploring?" "What *insight* do you now have about the idea, experience, or task?" "What are you aware of?" Take the time necessary to get in touch with your thinking, to reflect on what you're learning, what you are concerned about, what you would recommend, what you anticipate as potential consequences, etc.

The most obvious, and less used way to step aside and to gain perspective about your discernment is to *write it down.* So simple, yet so neglected. Most people attempt to try to "step aside" in their head. The challenge with that is you are trying to step aside *from* your thoughts *in* your thoughts. That's challenging! Instead, writing gives you a tool for stepping aside from your thinking. Write your idea on a paper, then step back from it. What do you think about it? Now you can refine your thoughts expressing your discernment more fully and elegantly. Writing also forces clarity as you search for the right words to express your insight.

One of the wisest men ever once said, "Cut the baby in two and give a part to each of the mothers." Wisdom!? Are you kidding? On the surface it actually sounds cruel, barbaric, stupid. Yet in the context of two mothers arguing over whose baby is the living one, Solomon discerned a higher level context—that the true mother would give the baby away rather than let it

die. And so it was. A discerning response in that moment and in that context.[3]

6) *Humbly Own Your Perception.*

After having developed your discernment comes the communication step wherein you present it to others. If you have refined your perspective and found the best words for expressing it, you are ready to get into your optimal state for expressing it. Then realizing that you still could be wrong, and that there are multiple places where your information could be flawed—*express your discernment tentatively.* Avoid presenting it as if it is absolute or definitive. It is not, so present it tentatively. Do that because you know it is always provisional and that there are many moving parts. Contexts can change, different elements can change, etc. A discernment is, at best, the best thinking that you are doing in this moment of time in that particular situation as you have come to understand it.

Socrates claimed to be wise precisely because *he knew that he did not know.* That was in contrast to the scholars and elders of Athens who claimed to know everything. "I am wise because I know what I don't know." The attitude of wisdom involves knowing three things—what you know, what you don't know, and what you know that you don't know and perhaps cannot know.

7) *Discard Your Discernment.*

Discard your discernment. "What? Discard it? After all of the work to discern a situation and now you want me to discard it? Why would you ask me to do that?" There's actually a good reason. The reason: *Wisdom has a very short shelf life.* What may be the epitomy of wisdom one moment may become foolishness the next. One additional piece of information could arrive and completely negate your great discernment.

This is why proverbs are both wonderful and dangerous. As crystallized forms of previous wisdom, their value depends completely on the unique circumstances under which they arose. That's why you can find conflicting wise proverbs in the wisdom literature (see below). It's not that one statement is true and the other is false. It's rather that each one will be true in some situations and false in other situations.[4]

> Nothing ventured, nothing gained. / All things come to he who waits.
> Let sleeping dogs lie. / The early bird gets the worm.
> A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. / Without vision, the people

perish.
Carpe diem: Seize the day. (Horace) / Plan for the winter is coming.

Thinking about Thinking

When you move up to true discernment—a discernment beyond detailing and distinguishing, beyond inferring and creating, beyond learning and deciding, you move into one of the most profound forms of thinking that is possible to engage in. For many, it seems mysterious, even magical. It may even seem divine which is why we call it *wisdom.* It is this kind of discerning-thinking that enables you to make smart decisions and give wise advice. As such this kind of thinking is worth a fortune, especially when you consider all of the pain, distress, and grief that's caused by impetuous thinking that "rushes in where angels fear to tread."

A Discerning Conversation

When I met Clive, he said that he was ready to be independent as a consultant and that he knew it was time "to launch out on my own." But he was hesitant. "I also know that I need nurturance and I can't imagine not having a supervisor or someone in authority that I can turn to or report to."

So it sounds like you want two conflicting things, you want independence as a consultant and you want an authority figure to give you support and comfort. Is that right?

"Yes, I guess so.   ... It sounds a bit strange when you put it that way."
So should I phrase it in some other way?

"No. That does summarize it. It's just jarring to hear it that way."
Okay. So how strong are these two conflicting desires relative to each other? Are they about the same or is one stronger than the other?

"That's the problem; they feel as if they are equally important which is why I keep hesitating and don't know what to do."
Being an independent consultant, out on your own, feels as important as feeling supported and nurtured by your manager?

"Yes, that's right."
Tell me this, what is the value, the importance, and the semantic meaning of being an independent consultant?

"I'll be my own man. I'll be able to make my own decisions in the business, and about clients, and I'll not have to share the money with the company I now work for."
Lots of benefits. Okay, and your fears or apprehensions about any of that?

"Well, what if I make a bad decision? What if I don't know what to do in the consulting and feel blocked or if I just blank out?"
Okay, some fearful *what ifs....* And what is your answer to those questions? What

would you do?

> "[Pause] ... I guess I could ask for advice from people, from my colleagues, I could even ask my current manager what he would say."

So you could handle it? You have the resources around you that you could access.

> "Yes. ... It's strange I never thought through the 'what ifs' before, I just let them stop me cold. But yes, it would not be the end of the world."

And about feeling cared for and nurtured by someone older and in authority, what is the value of that for you?

> "Well, it obviously feels good ... I feel supported. I know that there's someone I can turn to."

And ...?

> "I'm now realizing that I have people to turn to whether I'm doing contract work in the company, or if I launch out on my own, and I'm realizing that I could also support myself ... and it would be like being an authority to myself."

See if you can turn that into a discernment for me. What are you discerning now that you did not earlier?

> "I'm discerning that I have internalized a lot of the support, learnings, insights, and resources that I've experienced over the years of being a consultant and that I can be my own authority to myself, I can manage myself as I launch out on my own. I think I have created a false dichotomy between independence and support."

That sounds like some really great learnings! Well done. But I want to push deeper, beyond what you are learning, what wisdom is emerging for you, what are you discerning from all that learning?

> Wisdom? I'm discerning that my problem was self-created by the either-or thinking I was doing.

End of the Chapter Notes

1. Gregory Bateson commented that wisdom is being able to hold multiple perspectives together simultaneously, that one can hold his perspective, the perspective of others, a systems perspective, etc.

2. There are four perceptual positions in NLP. The first one involves seeing things out of your own eyes. Second perceptual position is seeing yourself from the other person's point of view. Third is seeing the two of you from an outside point of view—a fly on the wall. Fourth is seeing the system that you both are in.

3. King Solomon's story of the two women is found in I Kings 3:16-28.

4. For a list of contradictory proverbs, see *Executive Wisdom: Becoming one of the Wise Ones* (2022), page 25. Another example of contradictory proverbs or wise sayings: "Look before you leap. He who hesitates is lost."

Chapter 18

REFLEXIVITY

*"You cannot **not** meta-communicate"*
Virginia Satir, *Conjoint Family Therapy*

"Critical thinking is thinking about our thinking with the intent to improve it."
Richard Paul, Ph.D., General Semanticist

"The kind of thinking that creates a problem
will not be the kind of thinking that can solve the problem."
Albert Einstein

D o you find Virginia Satir's edict above, "You cannot *not* meta-communicate" a bit confusing? After all, what is meta-communication and why is it inevitable? Let's begin more simply with 'communication.' To communicate is to express yourself—to reveal your thoughts, emotions, intentions, etc. Yet even when you do not explicitly *reveal* yourself—you are communicating. To be quiet and not say anything *is* a communication. Hence, you cannot *not* communicate.

Okay, so far, so good. Now for meta-communication. If I say, "Don't take offense, I just want to tell you what Karin said." I have not only expressed the content subject, that Karin has said something and it might be offensive. I have also communicated what I'm trying to do in my upcoming words— my intention to not offend. I have communicated *about* my upcoming communication. That's a communication *about* a communication, a *meta*-communication. And I cannot *not* do that. I am constantly sending signals (verbal and non-verbal) to you *about* what I'm saying.

To think about any thought and about my communications arises from our innate meta-cognitive skills. This means that whether you are aware of it or not, *you are always meta-communicating both to yourself and to others.* And not just a little bit, you do it a lot! This lies at the heart of thinking because it is an aspect of your self-reflexive consciousness. You do not just think, you also *think about your thinking.* You frequently are aware of *what* you are thinking or experiencing, that is, you are entertaining second-level thoughts about your first-level thoughts.

This describes an executive function—which is, in turn, what makes you uniquely aware—self-aware. *You are now self-reflexively aware.* You layer one thought upon another as you keep responding afresh to yourself. You are now meta-stating. You are *embedding* your communications *inside* the state (e.g., confident, doubting, love, sarcasm, etc.) which you use in communicating. At a higher level, you communicate that state in addition to your words—you are *meta*-communicating.

This kind of advanced thinking, which goes under the rubric of *meta-cognition,* enables you to do many incredible things. One is that *you can now think without acting or reacting.* How amazing! You can just observe without having to commit yourself to a course of action. You now have time and space to think again—and then again. You can reconsider so that you gathered higher quality information and can make better quality decisions. Your meta-cognition also gives you a way to make conscious what's been unconscious.

Within meta-cognition are a large range of thinking patterns. As you think about your thinking, your meta-awareness enables you to choose and manage your thinking by checking its quality and ecology. There's a strange thing about this kind of thinking. *Self-reflexive thinking generates a sense of transcendence* so that it seems *as if* you can "step back" from your experiencing, and reflect on yourself. This generates the philosophical inquiry: "Who is this person who is observing you?" Yet the answer is paradoxically simple: *You.* It is you operating at multiple levels.[1] Because of your meta-cognitive abilities, you not only learn, but you meta-learn. You learn how you learn, how you can learn, and how you can enhance your learning. What an amazing capacity!

By your self-reflextive thinking you create *meta-states.* Just as your thinking-and-feeling creates states—when you reflect on one of your states,

you create a state-about-a-state. Like fear-of-anger, anger-about-fear, joy-about-learning, calm-anger, playful-seriousness, etc., a meta-state results from your complex layering of thoughts-and-feelings. So as you emote about your emotions, and think-and-emote about your thoughts, you generate all sorts of higher level mind-body states-about-states—meta-states. These meta-cognitive states, resulting from the executive functions of your prefrontal cortex, then govern your everyday experiences as your frames-of-references.[2]

Reflexive Thinking Sub-Skills
1) *Step Back to Think Again.*
Your meta-cognitive abilities arise from your brain's reflexivity mechanism. This is what enables you to "go meta" to your thinking. As you go meta to your thinking, reasoning, metaphoring, imagining, theorizing, remembering, conceptualizing, etc., *you*—as it were—*gain distance from yourself.* This is a prerequisite for developing your most advanced thinking skills. Metaphorically it is like stepping back so you can recognize and follow your thinking's reflexivity—how you layer one thought or emotion upon another. In this reflexivity you are stepping back from your thinking ... which thereby frees you so you can entertain next-level thoughts about what you're thinking.

Alfred Korzybski spoke about reflexivity in the original quote in *Science and Sanity* (1933):

> "A map is not the territory it represents, but, if correct, it has a similar structure to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness. ... If we reflect upon our languages, we find that at best they must be considered only as maps. A word is not the object it represents; and languages exhibit also this peculiar self-reflexiveness, that we can analyse languages by linguistic means. *This self-reflexiveness of languages introduces serious complexities, which can only be solved by the theory of multi-ordinality.* The disregard of these complexities is tragically disastrous in daily life and science." (p. 58, italics added)

While NLP quoted the first part of this, "The map is not the territory," the founders overlooked the second part of Korzybski's distinction about self-reflexivity and multi-ordinality. Apparently they ignored it as they did not even include multi-ordinality as a linguistic distinction in the Meta-Model. How can we explain this? Apparently also they did not recognize the importance of *reflexivity.*[2]

Reflection takes time, so slow down to reflect. The fact is, *speed kills this high quality executive thinking.* You never do your best thinking when you are racing inside. To reflect takes time as you let ideas incubate. As you ponder something, take time to ponder it again. Every model of creativity includes the incubation stage; you often just have to let an idea incubate before you are ready to run with it. To accelerate the quality of your ideas and to become mindful, you have to slow your thinking down.

2) *Climb the Inferential Ladder.*

When you ask, "What are you thinking *about* some consideration?" you move up a level to the thinking behind it. The design is to get to the person's thinking, assuming, expecting, believing, etc. Metaphorically climbing the ladder operates like a staircase into the higher levels. Chris Argyris developed a theory of double-loop learning which he used to develop a higher quality of organizational learning. He described moving up logical levels as climbing an inferential ladder.[3]
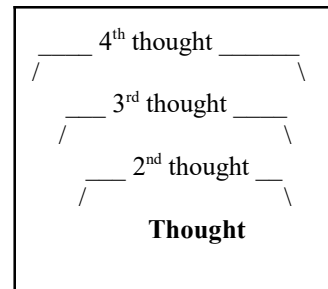
3) *Reflect on Your Thinking.*

Use your reflexivity to reflect back onto your experiences — thoughts-about-thoughts, states-about-states. Again, this reflexivity will often generate a sense of transcendence as you *rise above* the subject. You transcend the first experience and enter into the ideas above it (as the framework) which make it possible. Reflecting in this way will often induce a state of meditation or mindfulness. Here as you *reflect* on your previous experience, you take a meta-position to that experience and to yourself. Now you are operating at multiple levels of experience.[4] Kenneth Johnson explains:

> "The self-reflexiveness of language and the human nervous system provides us with an open-ended system: we can make statements about statements about statements, indefinitely; we can react to our reactions to our reactions indefinitely. At no point can we say, 'That's the last word on the subject.'" (1991, p. xv)

Meta-thinking means learning to catch yourself thinking as well as the thinking process itself. This enables you to become aware of how you think, the patterns you use, and the quality of your thinking. This actually is one of the key healing elements in therapy. As a client learns to take a

meta-position to himself, he steps out of being the *subject* of his thinking-feeling experience. Stepping out of that experience he becomes an *object* of his perception. Now he has a new vantage point and new perspective.[5]

4) *Detect the Levels.*
These levels are categories, classes, and frames of the layered system which determine and govern how your mind-body system works—in enabling you to understand things. In the process of stepping back you are able to detect and create all sorts of psychological states and experiences (i.e., psycho-logics, logical levels, unconscious frames, assumptions, presuppositions, meta-programs, etc.).[6] This will give you a meta-awareness about the structure of your experience. Detecting the levels enables you to see the invisible structure that holds the experience together. And when you can do that, you can model and re-model your experiences.

Once you detect the levels, learn to *identify* them. "At any given moment, at what level are you operating from?" "At what level are the words you're using?" Samuel Bois, a General Semanticist, described the layering of thinking in this way:

> "Consciousness of abstracting brings about an awareness of the fact that *thinking is a multi-level affair:* our statements may travel close to the ground of first-order experience or they may soar to the stratosphere of almost limitless generalizations. Thought traffic is more like air traffic than like ground traffic." (*The Art of Awareness,* 1966, p. 89 italics added).

Another General Semanticist, Kenneth G. Johnson, put together two kinds of thinking—critical thinking and creative thinking. He named the hybrid, *creatical thinking.*

> "Creatical thinking depends upon that little known and seldom discussed characteristic of the human nervous system—self-reflexiveness. ... the self-reflexiveness of language and the human nervous system provides us an open-ended system: we can make statements about statements about statements, indefinitely; we can react to our reactions to our reactions indefinitely." (*Thinking Creatically,* 1991, p. 1)

5) *Monitor Your Thinking.*
As you think about your thinking, you can now monitor *what* and *how* you are thinking. You become highly self-aware, and with self-awareness, you are able to begin to regulate, and even manage yourself and your experiences (the executive function of being self-determining).

> "Where is your thinking going?" "Where does your thinking take you?"

"How effective is your thinking?" "Could your thinking be more efficient or more compelling?" "Is my thinking going round and round in circles?" "Is my thinking bringing out my best or is it holding me back from achieving my goal?"

6) *Quality Control Your Thinking.*

As you step back to gain the distance from what you're thinking and experiencing, you can now examine the content and context. You can check out the validity of claims and explanations of your thinking. You can check out *the quality* of your thinking. You can quality control it for numerous criteria.

> "Thinking critically involves thinking logically and having at one's disposal the capacity for analyzing the validity and soundness (or strength and cogency) of arguments and explanations." (Galen Foresman, et. al., 2017, p. 308)

7) *Look for Structure and its Correspondence with Reality.*

When Korzybski said that *the source of knowledge is structural,* he meant that an effective mental map will have a similar structure to the facts and events in the world "out there."

> "Antiquated map-language, by necessity, must lead us to semantic disasters, as it imposes and reflects its unnatural structure... As words **are not** the objects which they represent, *structure, and structure alone, becomes the only link which connects our verbal processes with the empirical data."*
>
> "Words are not the things we are speaking about... If words are not things, or maps are not the actual territory, then, obviously, the only possible link between objective world and the linguistic world is found in *structure, and structure alone*. The only usefulness of a map or a language depends on the similarity of structure between the empirical world and the map-languages." "That languages all have some structure ...we unconsciously read into the world the structure of the language we use..." (*Science and Sanity,* 1994 edition, pp. 58-60, italics added)

If your map *fits* the form or structure of the world, it will more than likely serve as an adequate guide. You will be more likely to succeed in doing or experiencing when you follow it.

8) *Reframe Meta-Levels.*

When you are meta-thinking, you are exercising the activity of self-reflexivity. This leads to many forms of higher thinking—integrative

thinking, ecological thinking, believing, intending, remembering, problem-solving, etc. Self-reflexive thinking enables you to take a meta-perspective about thinking, levels of thinking, context, etc. Here you "think again." You take a "second look" in your mindfulness. Now you can check the quality of your thinking, monitor your thinking, and make executive decisions. *Via these meta-cognitions, you can change your thinking* as you step aside and transcend your current thinking.

What frames are you operating from? What frames do your words imply? To get to what's behind a statement to the "real" issues, step back and explore the kind of thinking being used to draw conclusions. *Assumptions are hidden frames*—frames that hide in the back of the mind. And given that all language is loaded with assumptions, every term has presuppositions built into it— presuppositions which need to be examined, scrutinized, and investigated. Behind every explicit statement are assumptions. You simply accept some as true, as unquestioned, or as unquestionable. Some take the form of beliefs, understandings, myths, conclusions, stories, narratives, etc. Assumptive frames are typically not implicit, but unconscious. They create blind spots in your awareness.

The art of changing a frame can be positive or negative, useful or harmful. Take care to notice the effect of any reframe you create—is it a more positive and resourceful frame of reference? Make that your aim in all of your reframing.[7]

A Reflexive Thinking Conversation

When I first worked with Dave, he was in a really bad place. Just a week earlier he had been fired from his job, yet he was still reacting in shock and anger as if he had just heard the news.

> "This always happens to me, whenever I just get to the place where I think things will settle down and become normal, all hell breaks loose. I knew Jim was looking for a reason to fire me; he thinks I'm too paranoid about other people and too pessimistic about things."

So this did not come as a complete surprise? You had a suspicion that this might happen? What led you to think your boss might fire you?

> "The same argument we have had over and over during the past three or four months. Somewhere he got the idea that I'm my own worst enemy with my negative attitude."

But you disagree with that?

> "Well, I may be negative about things at work, but there's a reason for it and he just will not listen or do anything about it."

And when he doesn't listen or doesn't take any action to correct things, what do you do?

> "[Pause] ... well, I get even more negative."

And that means what?

> "I criticize him to my co-workers, and that sometimes causes some arguments, then I get even more pessimistic about working there. ..."

Anything else?

> "Well I curse at people. I know I shouldn't but I got so angry, so I call them names and curse at them."

[Pause] ... Let's now step back for a moment. Take a deep breath, that's right. Okay, now what do you think and feel about all of that?

> "It's all shit. Sorry about that. It's just all stupid; Jim is so stupid, then I'm stupid for mixing it up with him."

And?

> "And ... I hate myself for it. I feel bad like I know I'm being my own worst enemy, but I can't help it."

What do you believe about yourself in terms of changing and rising above that way of thinking and feeling?

> "I want to change, that's why I'm here but I don't think I can. ... I've tried but it never lasted."

Do you believe that people—human beings—can change?

> "Kind of ... but probably, not really."

Well, now we know one of the key beliefs which has been holding you back and perhaps has set up a self-fulfilling system inside you.

> "I'm not following. What are you saying?"

I hear several frames that you are using to *think and feel* about this situation as you do. I'm hearing that—in your mind—you are not very kind or gentle at all with yourself or others. The frame is one of judging yourself and them as stupid, as maybe worthless, as going nowhere, and as stuck. Does that describe the way you are *interpreting* things?

> "Yeah it does."

Then, *that is probably the problem. ...*   You are not the problem, that frame of mind is the problem. If I thought about myself that way, or others that way, I'd probably been experiencing the pain, pessimism, and distress that you're experiencing. And the good news is that we don't have to change *you,* we only have to change these interpretative frames that are putting you at odds with you.

Thinking about Thinking

Via self-reflexive thinking, *you are setting your internal frames of reference* which, in turn, determine everything about you. Everything! *Thinking about your thinking* is one of your highest and most powerful skills especially when it comes to determining the direction and quality of your life. While a high level function, it is also the most democratic function—

everyone does it. It is inevitable. In fact, you cannot *not* think about your thinking. The real issue is *how you are thinking* about your thinking. Are you doing so by being kind and gentle with yourself? Or, are you being judgmentally harsh?

Many people, unaware of their meta-cognitions, don't realize that their *thinking about their thinking* puts them into a downward spiraling loop of feeling more and more judgment, distress, and self-attack. They call it "over thinking." They think it is natural or inevitable and so have no idea of the semantic damage they are doing to themselves, or how to stop it.[8]

All the other higher executive thinking functions involve meta-thinking in its many forms. Meta-thinking uniquely distinguishes us as a species and explains how we have been able to create new "realities" as we learn, discover, and create innovations. As such it is at the same time, our glory and our agony.

Stepping Back Exercise

> Take a stand in a room and make sure there is plenty of space behind you for walking backwards. Access a low-level unresourceful state (e.g., stress, anger, fear, etc.) and step in that state so that you experience it again. Now because you know this experience, be with it to register it in your body [e.g., unjustified anger, fear, frustration, etc.]. When you are ready, step back to a state that would be better, more resourceful. As you step back into a better state, notice your breathing, muscle tension, face, etc. What state is this? How much are you experiencing it?
> Repeat this process by stepping back three more times each time into a more resourceful state. When you are in the third resourceful state, bring it into the second one. Then bring those into the first one, and finally bring all of them into the original state.
>
> Another format for this: Begin the same way by accessing an unresourceful state. Then step back into *calmness,* take a moment to enjoy the calmness then step back into the first state bringing it. Now you have *calm anger* or *calm fear* or whatever was the first state. Step back to calm. Next, step back into *solution focus* and do the same. Taking a solution focus into calm and then into the original state. Again, step back to calm, then solution focus, and now into *joy.* Now bring all of them into the original state.

End of the Chapter Notes

1. A multi-ordinal term is a term that can reflexively refer to itself. Can you love *love?* Can you fear *fear?* If so, the same term is being used in a different way at each higher ordinal level. For multi-ordinality as a linguistic term, see Korzybski's work or *Communication Magic* (2001).

2. See *Meta-States* (2012) for a full description of self-reflexivity and how it works. *Neuro-Semantics* (2011) also addresses it.

3. See Chris Argyris. His books include *Organizational Traps: Leadership, Culture, Organizational Design* (2010), *Teaching Smart People How to Learn* (2008).

4. When there are multiple levels, then we have *multi-ordinality.* This is the term that Korzybski used to describe the multiple levels.

5. See *Meta-Therapy: Psychotherapy in the Meta Place* (2023). The bottom line: all therapy actually occurs at a meta-level to everyday experience, therefore therapy has to be *meta* to the person's immediate experience.

6. All of these psychological experiences describe our humanity and define our personalities. See *Neuro-Semantics* (2011).

7. Regarding framing and reframing, there are at least seven major directions. You can deframe, reframe content, counter-frame, pre-frame, post-frame, analogous frame, and outframe. In each reframe you can change from one frame to another frame which would be more effective. See *Mind-Lines: Lines that Change Minds* (2012).

8. Self-reflexivity is mis-used when a person turns his thoughts and emotions *against* oneself. Then we fear our fear, fear our anger, anger at our fear, etc. This creates "dragon states." See *Dragon Slaying* (1995).

Chapter 19

SACRILIZING

"Thinking is the technique whereby mankind creates something new,
which in turn implies that thinking must be revolutionary
in the sense of occasionally conflicting
with what has already been concluded. ...
Thinking might almost be defined as the ability
to break our habits and to disregard our past experiences."
Abraham Maslow, 1954/1970, p. 222

*"How a man thinks cannot be separated from what he **is**,*
*and the question of what he thinks he **is**,*
is never independent of what he is in fact."
Maslow (1971, p. xix)

As you "step aside" from all of the ways that you express yourself (i.e., by thinking, emoting, speaking, acting, relating), it is common to experience a sense of transcendence. As you rise above your current thinking and emoting, you reflect on them with the next-level set of thoughts and emotions. Taken together these create an existential sense of being and becoming—an experience which transcends doing and having.

Maslow called this kind of thinking, *being-cognition*. He described this drive as thinking about *being,* about one's essential self, and about life beyond instrumental "getting." I'm going to call this *sacrilizing thinking* because this is the kind of thinking that looks for and sees *value* in everything, and not only for what a person can get from something, but what one can contribute. *Being* is as much about giving as getting.

Being cognition, or sacrilizing, refers to the highest form of thinking as you reflect on meaning, or significance, and especially on the meaning of life. And because in this kind of thinking, you move beyond everything you normally use to achieve your goals, *being cognition* moves you from

instrumental thinking to non-instrumental, or "sacred," thinking. In this thinking, you view value as inherent in the experience rather than the result of an achievement. When engaged in *being-cognition,* the value of the experience is contained in what you do. You are not doing it to achieve some other objective. The experience is valuable in itself, and for itself, and it has no purpose beyond itself. Maslow's famous quotation elegantly describes this as a drive to *be* who and what you are.

> "A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write. What a man *can* be, he *must* be. He must be true to his own nature. This need we call self-actualization." (1954, p. 46)

Being thinking impressed Maslow to such an extent that when he asked the question, "Who is best equipped to engage in clear and focused critical thinking?" he focused on his self-actualizing subjects. He said that self-actualizing people have a "more efficient perception of reality and more comfortable relations with it." What explains this? How does this work? How is it that a self-actualizing person has, or has developed, a more accurate perception of reality?

> Being-cognition can observe without needing to immediately change things: if we let it be, we can perceive it fully.

> "What are the factors that make it possible for healthy people to perceive reality more efficiently, to predict the future more accurately, to perceive more easily what people really are like, that make it possible for them to endure or to enjoy the unknown, the unstructured and ambiguous, and the mysterious?" (1970, p. 154)
>
> "Our healthy subjects are generally unthreatened and unfrightened by the unknown, being therein quite different from average men. They accept it, are comfortable with it, and often are even more attracted by it than the known." (*Motivation and Personality* (1970, p. 282)

In moving upward from the lower needs (the D-needs) to the self-actualizing needs (the B-needs), the focus shifts to *being,* that is, *being a human being* rather than on what you are doing or what you have. You focus on *being and becoming* the person that you are and that you can be.

The premise in *being-cognition* is that ultimately your *being a person* (e.g., your character, your sense of self) exercises the strongest influence on your thinking. It especially influences your ability to think accurately and cleanly. If in your *being*, you are grounded in yourself, and are inwardly secure, then you have less to fear, and with that you have less need to distort reality to

protect self-fantasies and/or childish wishes. You are free to embrace reality in your thoughts—to face what is out there without defending against it.

Figure 1

	Needs	*Non-instrumental Thinking*
B-Cognition	transcendence	
	contribution -difference	Giving, capacity grows
	quality - excellence	"The more gratified, the more the drive."
	beauty- order- justice	Being motivation process
	know -meaning	Counter-cultural thinking
	↕	*Instrumental Thinking*
D-Cognition	self	Getting. Scarcity, based on deficiency.
	social	Cultural Thinking; means to an end.
	safety	Coping, meet needs and drives.
	survival	"The more gratified, the less drive."

Being thinking requires that you separate your inner self from your behavior. It requires that you unconditionally esteem your core self as a human being apart from what you can do, your achievements, or any of your expressions. Doing that changes how you view your behavior—your actions are not *you,* they are only an expression of you. Your behaviors are not your "real" self, they are your expressions which you can improve and upgrade. Now you can look clear-eyed at your actions and experiences without blinking (ego-strength). Now, without being afraid that inferior behavior will undermine your personal value, you can embrace reality for whatever it is.

Grounding self in unconditional value frees you to face truth or reality without distorting it. Your attitude is, "Reality is what it is, and whatever it is, it takes nothing away from me." "There's no need to defend myself, prove anything, or arrogate to myself qualities I do not have." Because you are already unconditionally valuable, you can afford to be modest and humble. You are free for critical thinking and can make ever-better adjustments to reality. You can more fully accept reality on its own terms, not on childish demands and fantasies.

What happens when you are free in your person to accept and face reality? Life becomes an adventure of exploration and discovery. This encourages thinking clearly, accurately, skeptically, and practically. Actualizing your highest and best in any domain (psychology, anthropology, sociology, politics, management, leadership, health, fitness, family, and so on) requires your best critical thinking skills as you separate what's real from what is unreal (myths, false, misrepresented, etc.). This inner freedom enables you to be open to discovering things that will probably shake old attitudes and beliefs.

Figure 2   **Contrasting the D- and B- Realms**

The Deficiency Realm	*The Being-Realm*
Characterized by need and lack	By want and desire
Operates as means for getting instrumental	As sacred ends for experiencing
Focus is primarily external	Entirely internal and intrinsic
Focus is on how-to cope	Focus on value and experience
Procedure dominates	Wonder and fascination dominates
Perception is partial	Perception is holistic, seeing the whole
Actions are expressions	Actions are of one's essence or nature
Interfering (needs intrude)	Contemplative, non-interfering
Empirical and practical	Phenomenological and conceptual
Focus on getting and striving	On experiencing and being
Temporal	Atemporal, timeless

Being-Thinking Sub-Skills
1) *Shift Out of Instrumental Thinking.*
To think *instrumentally* is intentional thinking. Your thinking is goal-oriented and focused. This thinking aims at an end-result. It is purposeful and, because it is, it is focused on the future. As *essential* thinking, it enables you to survive and to create the quality of life that you want.

Non-instrumental thinking aims at no goal apart from itself. It has no purpose other than *being* and *experiencing* what it focuses on. It has no intention beyond itself. If you immediately think that's weird, you're right. It is. It is not the way we normally think. *Being* thinking focuses entirely on the present, on the here-and-now, and the current experience or person. It values the experience inherently for its own sake. The drive to produce

art or music has no expectation except to present the painting or the song. It is enough in itself. So also all of the other *being*-values— knowledge, meaning, excellence, equality, justice, contribution, etc. What *being* is, it is sufficient in itself, that is, autotelic.

2) Embrace Being for Itself.[1]

What all of us mostly know is how to do, how to feel, how to relate, even how to think. What we hardly know at all is *how to be.* How to be ourselves above and beyond all of the experiences and things around us. What does it mean to just *be*? Maslow wrote about his self-actualizing subjects:

> "They are not bowled over by their own emotions—by their fears, anger, love, jealousy, guilt, or worries. They can take life's disappointments in their stride. They have a tolerant, easy-going attitude toward themselves as well as others; they can laugh at themselves. They neither under-estimate nor over-estimate their abilities.   They can accept their shortcomings. They have self-respect. They feel able to deal with most situations that come their way. They get satisfaction from the simple every-day pleasures."

Maslow also spent nearly a lifetime identifying the attributes of the *being-realm.* He concluded that the attributes include such qualities as being curious and wondering, fascinated by nearly anything and everything, being absorbed, yet spontaneous and expressive, flexible and unique.   He identified vitality and joy at its heart, as also love, compassion, and caring. There is a sense of the mystery, the ability to perceive with an innocent eye, and an inner sense of freedom to explore and become.

He noted that people are "most themselves in peak experiences." These are not the moments of peak performance, but those moments of *being*-ness, then you have more of yourself available and you are more alive and aware of the moment. While it's true that the way you think shapes who you are, *being* cognition ultimately does that. After all, what are you about? What's meaningful to you? What values do you live for?[2]

3) *Give Sacred Value To All of Life.*

Being-cognition sees a person, event, or experience "under the aspect of eternity." This *being* thinking sees what is precious, sacred, special, highly significant, and of ultimate importance in the long run. You may elicit this thinking by imagining, "Today is the last day of your life..." Now, what will you do? What's important? Maslow wrote about *being*-cognition in

these words about responsibility:

> "Looking within oneself for many of the answers implies taking responsibility. That is, in itself, a great step toward actualization. ... This is one of the great steps. Each time one takes responsibility, this is an actualizing of the same, it is the most important way of helping a person move toward self-actualization." (1971, p. 45)

What would you like to endow with rich sacred meanings? *Being*-cognition takes whatever is ordinary, menial, trivial, etc. and by enriching it with meanings, you feel it as meaningful. You transform everything you touch so you experience it as meaningful, valuable, and significant. By using the B-cognition of sacrilizing, you transform your experiences—even what was previously trivial, a chore, burdensome, or tedious.

Maslow described *being*-cognition as a "godlike amusement and acceptance of the world and persons" as they are. Simultaneously he said it also involves "a healthy childishness" that sees things innocently.

4) *Attribute Multiple Meanings to Everything.*
As you can give positive meanings to anything, you can also give *multiple* meanings to any single thing. This enables you to build up the choices that you have regarding how to interpret something. Ask, "What does it mean to you?" "What else could it mean?" In this way, you can expand the possible meanings. "What positive meaning do others give to this?" "What is the range of possibilities?" Repeat this three to seven times.[3]

In addition to expanding meanings, you can layer meanings upon meanings. This creates a rich meaning hierarchy. Doing this, *semantically loads* an experience so that it becomes increasingly more meaningful. Because this can be extremely powerful, be careful what you load up with meaning. Do it with the wrong things and you can create addictions and/or neuroses.

5) *Opt For Empowering Meanings.*
Meaning can hold different *degrees of impact* regarding how impactful or powerful the meaning. Sometimes this occurs by semantically loading, sometimes by adding intentionality, or relevance, etc. "How much meaning would you like to give to this experience?" "What would be the most resourcefully impactful meaning you could give this?"

In *being*-cognition, you perceive and think from what you are. As Emerson

said, "What we are, that only can we see." Maslow took that and added, "What you are not, you cannot perceive or understand." (1971, p. 159). He then added that "knowledge of your essential being is mediated through reason." That is, knowing your core self and nature enables you to think grow, develop, and affirm yourself and others.

As *being*-cognition sharply contrasts with ordinary thinking. Maslow said it is holistic, integrative, perceives what is without judgment, self-transcending rather than need driven, etc. In this thinking, your innocent eye freshly sees, values, and appreciates what *is*, as if for the first time.

Maslow's List of B-Values

1) *Truth:* honesty, reality, simplicity, essentiality, oughtness, and unadulterated completeness.
2) *Goodness:* rightness, desirability, oughtness, justice, benevolence, honest.
3) *Beauty:* rightness, form, simplicity, wholeness, completion, uniqueness.
4) *Wholeness:* unity, integration, tendency to oneness, inter-connectedness, structure, order, synergy, and integrative.
4a) *Dichotomy-transcendence:* acceptance, resolution, integration of polarities, opposites, synergy.
5) *Aliveness*: spontaneity, self-regulation, full-functioning, changing and yet remaining the same.
6) *Uniqueness:* idiosyncrasy, individuality, non-comparability, novelty.
7) *Perfection*: nothing superfluous or lacking, everything in its right place, just-right, suitability, completeness.
7a) *Necessity*: inevitability, it must be *just* that way.
8) *Completion*: ending, finality, finished, no more changing, fulfilment, *finis* and *telos*, nothing missing or lacking, totality, fulfillment of destiny, cessation, climax.
9) *Justice:* fairness, oughtness, necessity, non-partiality.
10) *Simplicity:* essentiality, essential skeletal structure, the heart of the matter, bluntness.
11) *Richness:* differentiation, complexity, intricacy.
12) *Effortlessness*: ease, lack of strain, striving, or difficulty, grace, beautiful functioning.
13) *Playfulness*: fun, joy, amusement, gaiety, humor, exuberance, effortlessness.
14) *Self-sufficiency*: autonomy, independence, non-needing-any-thing-other-than-itself-in-order-to-be-itself. Self-determination.
15) *Meaningfulness:* significant, important, holding value.

[1971, pp. 128-129]

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6) *Quality Control Your Meanings.*

The quality of *being*-cognition is inherently good. It is innately of high

quality. So as a sub-skill of *being*-thinking, regularly check the ecology of your meanings to make sure that they serve you and do not hurt or contaminate anything. Ask the basic ecology questions: "Does this enhance your life? Does it empower you as a person? Does it bring out the best for you and the others in your life? Does it support your well-being in all dimensions? Is this your highest spiritual pathway?"

7) Set Being-Cognition as Your Mission.
We use the word "meaning" to refer to several different kinds of meaning.[4] First, there is the everyday meanings that we give to anything when we define what it is and how it works. Next, there is the meaning that we attribute to a thing that defines its significance—its value. This meaning defines how some thing, person, or experience is important.

Third, there is the meaning that we give to persons—that is, how we *esteem* them. Superficially this refers to a person's social value, one's worth in a given culture or context. More profoundly, this refers to seeing and treating a person as a sacred being—innately and unconditionally worthy.

Yet another use of the word *meaning* arises when we refer to the *Being-*values (see box, Maslow's List on previous page). When a person discovers and is moved by one of these higher values and makes it the meaning of her life, she becomes *a person on a mission.* Here B-cognition thinking embraces the B-values so that they become your reason for living—your purpose in life. It not only grabs your attention, it penetrates your mind, your focus, and your perceptions. Then in the B-values with your B-cognition, you reach out to actualize your full potential. In this, you *become* what you *are* potentially.[5]

8) Embrace and Develop Your Authenticity.
Living the self-actualizing life is all about becoming real, being authentic, being the best *you* that you can be. Maslow said, "Authenticity is the reduction of phoniness to the zero point." (1971, p. 183). In *B-cognition,* you experience a whole-heartedness as you strive to make yourself what you are. For Rollo May, this is the "courage to *be*"—the courage to affirm life in spite of whatever you're facing—problems, heartache, ambiguity, etc. It is the courage to live fully and creatively in your meanings.[6]

> "Speech is not what one should desire to understand. One should know the speaker. .. Mind is not what one should desire to understand. One should know the thinker." (Kanshitaki, *Upanishad,iii. 8*)

9) Embrace D-Realm with Your B-Cognitions.

From your *being-cognitive thinking,* you can now see the D-world as an essential and important realm. It is foundational to your energy, vitality, and meaningfulness. Your lower needs are not only legitimate, but an important part of who you are. Fulfilling them truly and adequately is the basis for a healthy development. With the unitive or holistic thinking of your B-cognition, you fuse the D- and B-realms.

Thinking about Thinking

In the self-actualization process, *being*-cognition represents the ultimate in thinking. It is the highest kind of thinking. It is the thinking of the most mature and highly developed persons. Having learned how to gratify the human needs truly and adequately, their thinking shifts to exploring how to *be* themselves most fully and completely. As they have achieved being "fully alive," they are ready to now focus on *becoming* "fully human."

When you engage in sacred thinking, you think about yourself, others, and life "under the aspect of eternity." That is, you engage in really long-term thinking! You thereby transcend the short-term thinking that creates tunnel-vision and that blinds us to what's truly important. In short-term thinking we usually sell our selves short as we lose the larger perspective.

Paradoxically, any and every B-value can be used instrumentally and as a means-to-an-end. Today there are professions which have grown up around every one of those B-values. If the B-value that resonates with you is justice, then go into law. If it is beauty, then art, design, painting, etc. If meaning, then philosophy, etc. Yet the B-values are autotelic in nature—inherently valuable in and of themselves.

End of the Chapter Notes

1. See *Self-Actualization Psychology* (2008) for a history of this psychology, how it developed and how it resulted in the early formations of NLP.
2. See the training (and the training manual), Unleashing Vitality. The third day of that training focuses entirely on peak experiences, how to elicit them and how to use them for personal development and for the unleashing of potentials.
3. See *Unleashed!* (2007) for a book that presents 19 processes for the unleashing of potentials.
4. As a multi-ordinal term, *meaning* has many meanings. See *Communication Magic* (2001) or *Science and Sanity* (1994).
5. See *Unleashing Leadership: Self-Actualizing Leaders and Companies* (2009).
6. See *Get Real: Unleashing Authenticity* (2016).

Chapter 20

MODELING THINKING

Because thinking lies at the heart of everything human,
thinking should become our core competency and expertise.

Knowing that "mind" is a verb changes everything.
Now developing your mind means developing the quality of your thinking.
And developing your thinking increases your intelligence.

For 19 chapters I have been modeling the most essential human experience of all—*thinking* or "mind." The approach that I have taken here has been to look at *how thinking functions,* that is, what we actually *do* when we think. The amazing thing is that we do so many things when we think. In *Executive Thinking* (2018) I listed a 100+ thinking terms, each one describing some aspect of thinking. I then tried to reduce that to a smaller number of categories, perhaps seven. Eventually I settled on the *14 categories* and to *three thinking stages.*

What have you learned about *thinking*? Many things I hope. For example: *Not all thinking is the same.* There are actually scores and scores of distinctions in "thinking." We can make distinctions in kinds of thinking, ways of thinking, levels of thinking, etc.[1]

Another learning: *Thinking develops.* Like everything organic, thinking develops, grows, and matures. We saw this in distinguishing the three categories of thinking—foundational, constructive, and executive. From the *essential* thinking skills arise the *constructive* thinking skills for *eureka* insights. Put all of those together and you have the more highly developed and complex thinking skills—the *executive* skills.

Thinking not only develops, it can also de-evolve. And no wonder, *thinking is not infallible.* It can go wrong and go seriously wrong. Thinking can become sick, dysfunctional, toxic, erroneous, etc.

First, the Essential Skills

The five essential thinking skills are *foundational and core* to good healthy, critical thinking. With them you can analyze your thinking and make sure that the information you are gathering and processing is accurate, useful, and precise. These essential thinking skills enable you to investigate and check out the quality of your data. These aspects of thinking comprise the critical thinking skills which enable you to not fall victim to cognitive distortions, biases, and/or fallacies. The cognitive distortions are diseases to accurate thinking, they undermine your ability to face reality and determine what's true.

Second, the Eureka Skills

The four constructive thinking skills enable you to use your thinking to construct new ideas and better ideas. As they evoke *eureka moments in thinking,* you can call into existence things that did not previously exist. By *organizing* your thinking, you create new ways of solving problems and figuring things out. You *create* beliefs and premises for a more robust way to live and thrive. You create hypotheses which you can test and expand human knowledge. These eureka thinking skills generate all sorts of fabulous eureka discoveries.

The Essence of Thinking
    1. Considering
    2. Questioning, Exploring
    3. Doubting
    4. Detailing, Indexing
    5. Distinguishing

The Eureka of Thinking
    6. Inferring
    7. Organizing
    8. Creating
    9. Synergizing

The Executive Development of Thinking
    10. Learning
    11. Deciding
    12. Discerning
    13. Reflecting
    14. Sacralizing

Third, the Executive Skills

The executive thinking skills enable your executive functions putting you in charge of yourself, your mind, your emotions, your life. Activated in the executive functions in the prefrontal cortex, these skills enable learning, deciding, discerning (wisely choosing), framing, gaining perspective, reflecting, and much more. These thinking powers develop your humanity—making you more human. These meta-
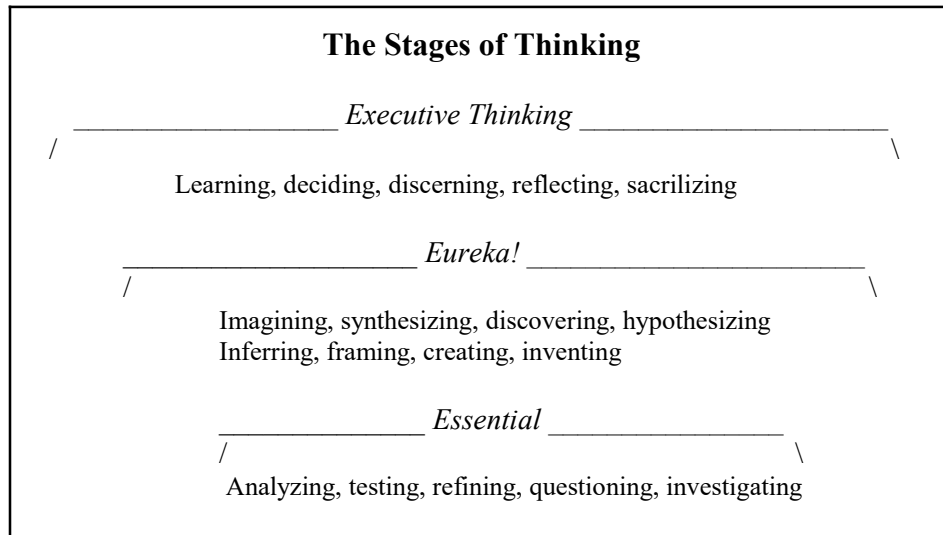
cognitive skills enable you to think about your thinking and then, using feedback, you keep correcting your thinking as you correct the errors that you discover.

Essential Thinking	**Eureka Thinking**	**Executive Thinking**
1. Considering	6. Inferring	10. Learning
2. Questioning, Exploring	7. Organizing	11. Deciding
3. Doubting	8. Creating	12. Discerning
4. Detailing, Indexing	9. Synergizing	13. Reflecting
5. Distinguishing ➜	↔	14. Sacrilizing

After I sorted out these three developmental dimensions of the thinking skills, I began asking myself several questions. "What kind of *thinking model* do these skills imply?" Minimally, we have three stages of development within the adventure of thinking. Thinking is simple when it begins, then it develops. This also means that you can now *take a thought and put it through the three stages and grow up that idea.* In this way, you can fully test the quality of an idea, and you can construct some great insights and illuminations that will impact you and/or that may change the world. You can use your executive thinking skills for making really smart decisions before you implement an idea. Moving from left to right, start with essential thinking, move to eureka thinking, then end with executive thinking.

Because ideas begin and grow in your mind or *Meta Place,* ideas go through developmental stages as they develop into more fully developed mental maps that encode your understandings and set the direction for your life. Ideas develop into beliefs, values, identities, permissions, premises, principles, etc. (the meta-levels). And as ideas develop, if you are not careful, they can become contaminated by cognitive distortions, biases, and fallacies.

When you use this thinking model, start with *essential* thinking to ground your idea. Then move to *eureka* thinking. If you find some old thinking there (distortions or biases), move back to the *essential* thinking skills to clean out the contamination. Use your critical thinking to analyze the quality of your information processing. Similarly, when you are in *executive* thinking, you may also need to move back to the *essential* thinking skills to extensionalize the idea into the real world. There you can do the critical

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The Stages of Thinking

_____ *Executive Thinking* _____

/ \

Learning, deciding, discerning, reflecting, sacrilizing

_____ *Eureka!* _____

/ \

Imagining, synthesizing, discovering, hypothesizing
Inferring, framing, creating, inventing

_____ *Essential* _____

/ \

Analyzing, testing, refining, questioning, investigating

---

thinking necessary to ensure that your thinking is accurate, precise, and not a fictional delusion.

The Thinking Model Questions

With this thinking model, you could start with an idea and *take that idea on a journey through the three dimensions.* Or, to use another metaphor, think of each as a playground: the *essence* playground, the *eureka* playground, and the *executive* playground. As you move into and through each dimension, the idea you are thinking will grow, develop, change, and transform. To do that you will need the questions of each dimension.

Essence Questions
     1. *Consider.* What are you considering? What do you need to consider? What do you not want to consider? How do you represent your idea?
     2. *Question.* How do you define X? What reference are you using in understanding X? What are the meanings that you attribute to X?
     3. *Doubt.* How confident are you about your understanding of X? If you were wrong, how would you know? Could X actually be something else? If so, what? What may be a mere appearance rather than reality?
     4. *Detail.* What are the variables of X? How do they relate to each other? What are the components of the meta-level frames?
     5. *Distinguish.* Could X be a part of a larger system? What other factor or component could X actually be a part of? To what extent could X and

Y be confused together? What are you not distinguishing that should be distinguished?

Eureka Questions

6. *Infer.* What does X imply? What else could X imply? Inferentially what else has to be accepted as true in order to understand X?

7. *Organize.* What is the structure of X? What is the strategy that enables X to function as it does? What other ways could X be organized? What would be a better way to frame things?

8. *Create.* What variables can you combine to create something new? What possibilities can you imagine from X? How do others deal with X? What do they create with X?

9. *Synergize.* What system does X occur inside of? What are the other systems that X lives within? How does the system of X work?

Executive Questions

10. *Learn.* What have you learned X? What were the experiences that led you to X? What conclusions did you draw that brought about X as your learning? How well have you learned this?

11. *Decide.* What were the pros and cons for making a decision for X? What standards and criteria did you use in choosing X? How thorough is your decision?
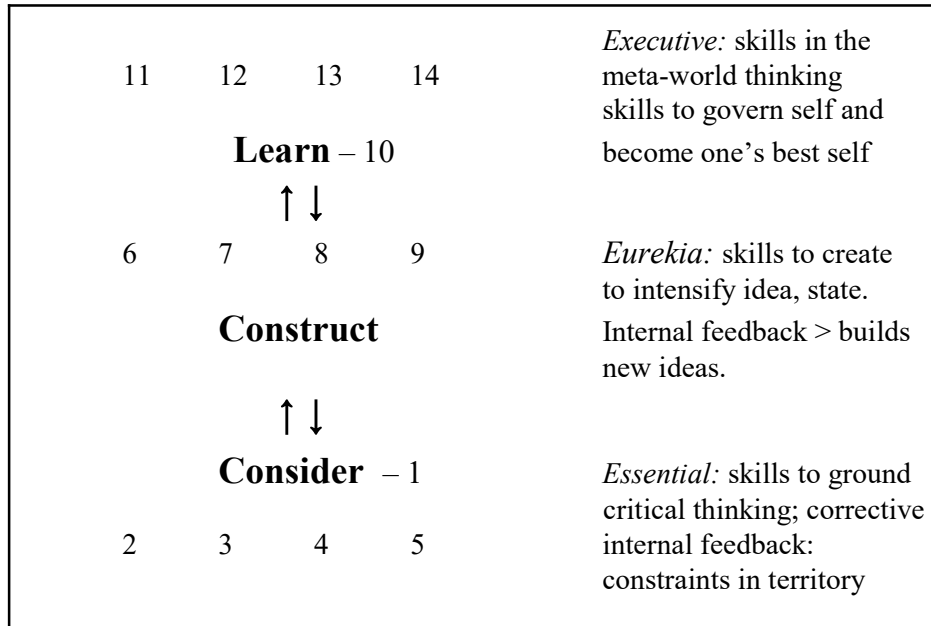
12. *Discern.* As you decided to opt for X, what were the special conditions that led to that discernment? What were the higher values that it served? What criteria are you using to make your evaluations?

13. *Reflect.* As you think about all of the thinking that led to X, what are you now aware of? As you step aside from that, how would you quality control your choice of X? What were the key frames that led you to that understanding and that choice?

14. *Sacrilize.* Is X a value in and of itself? Is it a non-instrumental choice? If not, what is the end-value that X serves? How will this idea enhance your sense of yourself as a human being?

Applying the Thinking Powers to an Idea

Thinking not only lies at the essence of being human, it lies at the center of science, creativity, philosophy, business, etc. To play with this model, start with an idea that you would like to consider, an idea that you do not currently believe, or are convinced about, but are interested in. Imagine that you hear the following NLP premise, *"The meaning of your communication is the response you get regardless of your intention."* If you never thought of things that way, it might strike you as a possibility. So let's put that idea through the *Thinking Model* and see what happens. What follows here are the *answers* to the thinking model *questions*.

11	12	13	14	*Executive:* skills in the meta-world thinking skills to govern self and
	Learn – 10			become one's best self
	↑ ↓			
6	7	8	9	*Eurekia:* skills to create to intensify idea, state.
	Construct			Internal feedback > builds new ideas.
	↑ ↓			
	Consider – 1			*Essential:* skills to ground critical thinking; corrective
2	3	4	5	internal feedback: constraints in territory

#1. *Consider.*   I'd like to consider that this idea, *"The meaning of your communication is the response you get regardless of your intention,"* is possibly true.   I represent it in the movie in my mind by imagining that I say words to convey my meaning, but someone takes them in a way that I did not intend. They give my words an alternative meaning or even a sinister meaning.

#2. *Question.* How do I define the key words here? I define "communication" as made up of language and non-linguistic variables and "meaning" as the significance I give to something. I define "response" as the words, gestures, and behaviors of the person receiving what I say and how I say it.   With these definitions, how can I understand this statement? I now think that my intentional meanings are not necessarily the same as or equal to the meanings that someone else gives to what I say.   I define "communication" as the co-union and co-communion with another person.

#3. *Doubt.* What else could my meanings be? I could be pretending or not telling the truth. The person's responses could be his way of manipulating me. Neither of us could be above-board and straight with the other. I could be wrong about my meanings, I could be self-deceived.

#4. *Detail.*   The words that I use and my tone or gestures could only be my "meaning" given the culture I was raised in and it lacks that meaning elsewhere or to those raised in a different environment. My accent, choice of vocabulary, and communication style may differ radically from those who hear me.

#5. *Distinguish.* Yes I could be confusing words and meanings and assuming that meanings are in words. I could be confusing my intention with my meanings.

#6. *Infer.* My old inference is that if I know what I mean and say it, others have to get it. My new inference is that there is not a direct causation between my words/gestures/tone and the listener's understanding.

#7. *Organize.* This new idea connects the meaning of my words/gestures with the listener's response. The response I get determines the meaning that the listener gives or attributes to my words. Structurally, after I "communicate," I need to wait to see the response I get and use that feedback as information for what the other must have heard, then adjust my communications.

#8. *Create.* To create effective communication, I need to align my meanings which I signal with the words and gestures that I use with what I can anticipate or learn from my listener's meanings. My meanings are always entering into the context of others and those contexts play a determinative role in defining the person's meanings.

#9. *Synergize.* The language and non-verbal factors that we use to "communicate" occur within our cultural system, family system, education system, legal system, religious system, national system, etc. There are a great many higher level frames-of-references that influence the meanings we create.
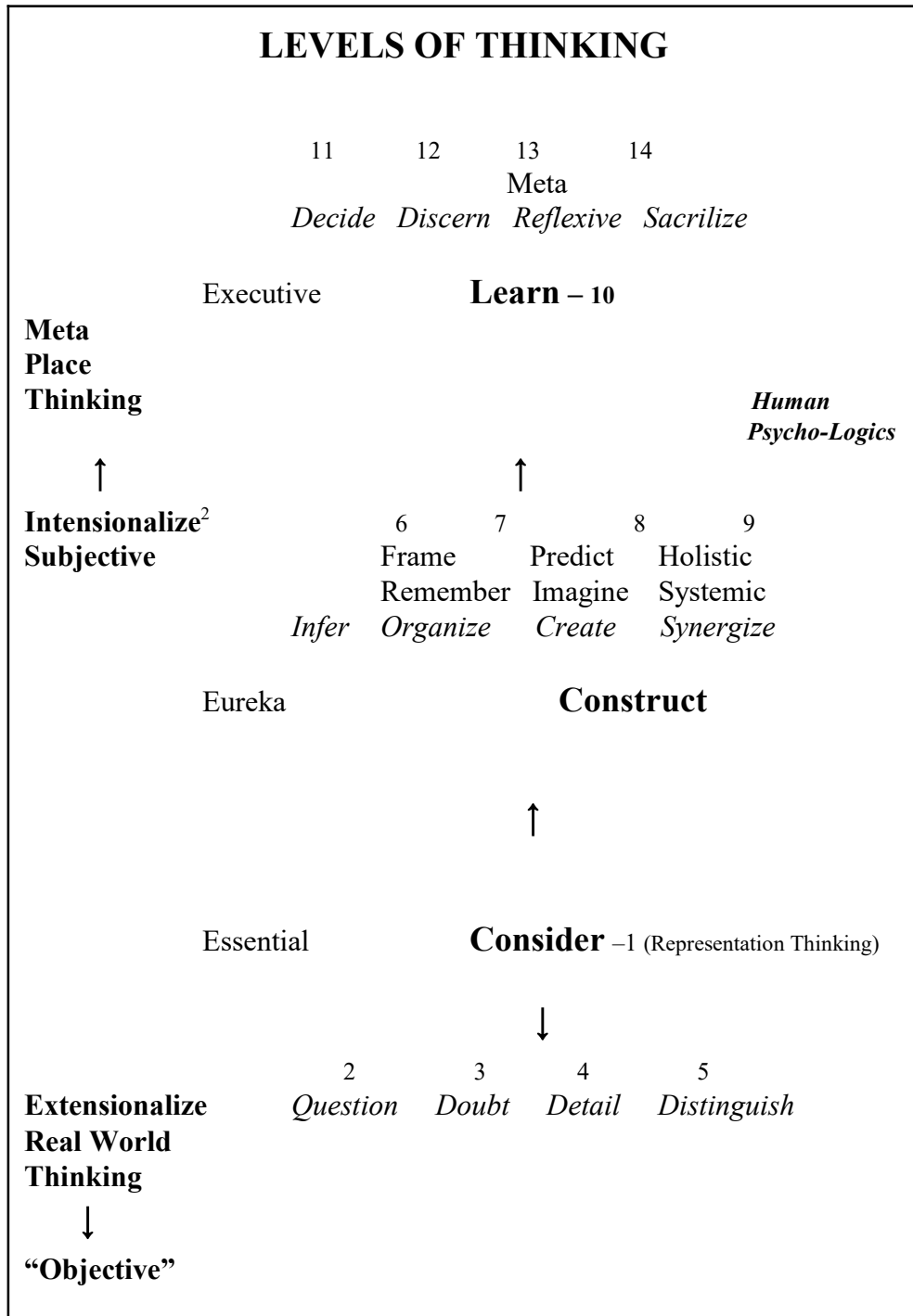
#10. *Learn.* I'm learning that communication has a great many variables, far more than I realized, and that "communication" can go awry due to the mis-matching of meanings between the one sending and the one receiving messages. The conclusion I'm drawing is that I ought to slow down and check the meanings the listeners are getting so I can adjust my words and gestures until I can be understood for what I'm trying to say. I'm learning that communication involves a dialogue rather than a monologue.

#11. *Decide.* I'm deciding that since communication is a dialogue, I will learn that it is about passing meanings back and forth until a state of understanding each other is created.

#12. *Discern.* I want to learn how to discern whether my listeners are, or are not, getting my meanings. I want to learn to calibrate differences in the responses that are made. It is a collaborative enterprise.

#13. *Reflexive.* Reflecting on the richness and depth of communication, makes me appreciate how easy it is to mis-understand each other and the work that needs to occur to create states of understanding. The old frame that "you say what you mean and you mean what you say" is too simplistic to be a guide for effective communicating.

#14. *Sacrilize.* While relationships and business and everything else human depends on communication to get our meanings across, there is also the value of sharing our deepest thoughts and emotions so that we can simply *be present* to each other. Beyond trying to get things done, we are *persons* and we grow best when we are loved and cared for as persons.

LEVELS OF THINKING

11	12	13	14
		Meta	
Decide	*Discern*	*Reflexive*	*Sacrilize*

Executive   **Learn – 10**

Meta
Place
Thinking   *Human*
                                                                             Psycho-Logics

↑   ↑

Intensionalize^2 6   7   8   9
Subjective   Frame   Predict   Holistic
                       Remember   Imagine   Systemic
              Infer   *Organize*   *Create*   *Synergize*

Eureka   **Construct**

↑

Essential   **Consider** –1 (Representation Thinking)

↓

                     2   3   4   5
Extensionalize   *Question*   *Doubt*   *Detail*   *Distinguish*
Real World
Thinking
   ↓
"Objective"

Thinking about Thinking

If thinking itself is the great adventure, then imagine having an explicit model for how to think, how to develop your thinking capacity, and how to get better at thinking—what an even greater adventure! You can use this model to think as you have never thought before! You can also now manage the incredible resources and potentials of your mind as never before! You now have 14 ways to think and enrich any idea.

While we have known for centuries the *centrality of thinking* as revealed in proverbs, "As you think, so you are." (Proverbs 23:7), and in philosophical truism, "I think, therefore I am." (Descartes)—thinking is still part of the great unknown. Yet, of all the things that we humans do—*thinking is the most fundamental and essential to our well-being, our energy, our vitality, and our humanity.*

End of the Chapter Notes

1. See *Executive Thinking* (2018). There I began mapping out the many, many different kinds of thinking and that led to *the Brain Camp series.*

2. In the Chart *Levels of Thinking,* Kenneth Johnson in his book, *Creatical* has described the relationship between intensionalizing and extensionalizing as "the yin and yang of the thinking process." One moves up into the Meta Place to construct inner maps and the others moves down into the real world to ground those maps.

Part V

WHEN THINKING

GOES WRONG

"The challenge we face is not producing thoughts,
it is producing **useful** *thoughts."*

"The biggest puzzle is not solving and fixing problems, per se,
it is fixing the thinking that causes problems."
Michael LeGault, *Th!nk*

Thinking can and does go wrong. In fact, because thinking is fallible, it often goes wrong. And without training in thinking itself, it easily goes wrong. Having a brain is not enough, to have a *good mind* you need to *learn how to think effectively* and that requires not only training, but lots of practice under supervision. As real thinking is actually quite effortful and demanding—to learn to think clearly, accurately, precisely, creatively, and critically requires a lot of personal development.

Chapter 21

THE ART OF
NON-THINKING

"It is our tendency as human beings to get into fixed habits so that we do not have to think about everything we do. ... People are mostly unconscious. Without awareness, there is no opportunity for change."
Rachel Hott, Steven Leeds, *NLP: A Changing Perspective*

"There is no expedient to which a man will not resort
to avoid the real labor of thinking."
Thomas Edison quoting Joshua Reynolds

"He was distinguished for ignorance;
for he had only one idea, and that was wrong."
Benjamin Disraeli

T here is thinking and there is non-thinking. At first, even the phrase, *non-thinking,* seems like an oxymoron (a self-contradictory phrase). Yet it is not. Rather it is a form of "pseudo-thinking"— non-thinking which masquerades as thinking. So yes, when engaged in the forms of non-thinking, it certainly seems like you are "thinking," but actually you are not. That's the deception. When you and I engage in the forms of non-thinking, we are nearly always convinced that we are thinking. After all, your mind is engaged in doing something, yet *that something is not thinking.* Your mind is engaged in other forms of cognition—typically in *one of the following seven forms of non-thinking.* Precisely because of this, your non-thinking, as well as mine, can be an area of self-deception. We can severely fool ourselves by thinking we are thinking when that is not what we are doing.

While there are many reasons for the presence of non-thinking, here is a

major one. As we move from childhood into adult life, *nearly all of our thinking skills need to be updated.* Why is that? Primarily because all of our earlier thinking essentially functioned as *training wheels for real thinking.* As we traveled through the childish thinking stages of cognitive development, those forms of thinking, the basic Cognitive Distortions, prepared us for real thinking.

For example, we thought in *either–or terms.* Good or bad; right or wrong, night or day, etc. We lived in a polarized world of extremes with nothing in the middle. There were no grays or degrees. No wonder we *over-generalized.* Thinking this way enabled us to learn how to create *our basic categories of life,* and especially the categories of our culture. The childish thinking patterns were like training wheels for the mind. They prepared us to understand the world we lived in, even if it was a dysfunctional world.

Non-thinking does not mean that your brain is not active, *your brain can be very active and yet not engaged in "thinking."* Whatever your brain is doing, it is simply not engaged in the genuine article of *thinking.* It is doing something else. Sometimes good things, even valuable things. But not "entertaining and working over an idea in your mind."

In non-thinking, you *cheat* real thinking! How do you do that? You may borrow an idea from others wholesale and simply repeat it as a bullet or talking point. In that way you save yourself the trouble of thinking. As you can learn to use your mind in *unthinking ways,* you can engage in reactive thinking, automatic thinking, passive thinking, agenda thinking, etc. In those instances, *you are not really thinking*—you are on automatic. This explains why *real thinking* is one of the most distinctive and empowering things you will ever do. When you do, you make yourself increasingly more effective, productive, and creative in life.

1) Reactive Thinking
Sometimes, rather than think, you are merely *reacting* to something that you don't like. Reactive thinking can take several different forms. Among them are emotional thinking, neurological thinking, associative thinking, and semantic reactive thinking. While they resemble physical reactions, they are *meaning reactions* or *semantic reactions.* Here, the meaning you previously thought and invented has become a neurological "program," saving you the time and trouble to figure out what's happening. You just *react* and let things fall as they will. This occurs when you are engaged in

polarity thinking. You jump reactively to the other pole as you act against something. You may react to a category that someone brings up using stereotypical thinking. Having prejudged a person or situation, your prejudices save you the trouble of the effort of thinking. Now you react quickly, much quicker than if you took the time to think. You answer from a well trained conditioning or programming. Gilbert says that you are answering the question, "What should I do?" before you answer what should be the first question, "What is it?" Why do we do this? That's because survival comes before contemplation (Gilbert, p. 62).

Martin Luther King, Jr. insightfully noted that *"racism is the absence of thinking."* The opposite of prejudice is to think anew and to not judge before you know the facts or a person. Stating that "Nothing pains some people more than having to think," King knew that thinking leads to being more tolerant of ideas and at least making an attempt to understand them.

> "... King's legacy is that a big, empowering lagcy of courage, hope, and brotherhood can outlast the meanest and most hateful dullards and scoundrels." (Reiman, 1998, p. 32)

Another form of reactive thinking is *emotional thinking*. This kind of thinking is primitive, superstitious, and illogical; it is the thinking of a child, not an adult. Further, it sets you up for misunderstandings, errors, being ineffective, not having control of yourself, personalizing, awfulizing, etc. Emotional thinking relies exclusively on what you feel emotionally and ignores whatever cognitive content is informing and driving it.

There is also *unfocused thinking*. Here thinking is tangential thinking as you jump randomly from one thought to another. Here a person is easily distracted and triggered by things both from the external environment as well as the internal environment. An insidious use of the mind involves chasing the "thought balls" which bounce in and out of consciousness. Now you are "chasing rabbits" in your mind and in conversations. While you can, by focusing your mind, transform a good idea into a great idea, unfocused thinking leaves you constantly distracted and unable to pull your thoughts together.

Daniel Kahneman's "fast thinking" is a form of reactive thinking. It is not actual thinking at all, it is neurological reacting from what you have incorporated in your body or unconscious mind. Now it is "intuitive." If it is accurate, and has been well trained, then it is very useful—it could be the

intuition of an expert.

Think of all of these forms of non-thinking as "programs," patterned and automatic ways of thinking. They arise from having integrated ideas, understandings, beliefs, decisions, etc. that now run without your conscious awareness. And while all this is good, it is simultaneously dangerous, or at least can be.

2) Automatic Thinking

Automatic thinking is also reactive and yet it is more. Further it can offer a better way of responding. Having learned, and then over-learned something, your thinking becomes automatic which gives you a much quicker response. The structure of "intuitive" thinking is that it is fast, available, and vivid. There's no checking of accuracy or ecology. In *fast thinking* a person responds without thinking. Robert Cialdini in *Persuasion* describes this as a "click-whirl phenomenon."

Automatic thinking shows up when you have learned a contextual *script* so well, and so thoroughly, that now you can respond *without thinking* about how something works, what it is, and what you should do. Examples of this: going to a restaurant, going to church, going to a doctor's office, etc. You already know how to respond. You know what's proper behavior, how the ritual works. It is as if you have a "program"—a patterned way of thinking and acting, a way you learned that is now *automatic*. You have integrated ideas, understandings, beliefs, decisions, etc. which now run without conscious awareness. This is good and simultaneously dangerous.

This reveals a fascinating and alarming thing about *thinking*. Thinking, in and of itself, does not make a thought real or accurate. Because you have a fallible brain, the human condition of *fallibility* ("liable to error") is built into your mind-body system. As a great mechanism, *fallibility* is the capacity to be wrong and *reflexivity* is the ability to be conscious of being wrong. Now you can make the adjustments to make things right. Otherwise you would simply operate by automatic programs without any real choice. Being "wrong" is about facts, information, and reasoning, not your person. Wisdom informs us to automate thinking only after you have checked it out and made sure that it is accurate and useful.

When thinking becomes *automatic,* you no longer exert effort to understand or apply your thinking. It gets triggered immediately and effortlessly. And

if what you have automated is accurate, correct, useful, effective, etc., you now have a really valuable program as it frees you up to focus on other things. If the automated program, is not accurate or useful, you now have a problem.

It's your automatic thinking that allows you to read quickly. You don't have to look at every word or sound out the letters. When you see the word "dog" you immediately know the referent. You may have a quick glance in your inner movie of a dog or your thinking may be so fast that you don't even see or hear the referent. Now you may even hear or read a whole sentence and not even know the words of that sentence. You automatically and immediately got the idea and you are already reading the next sentence. And because of your automatic thinking, now *you cannot not read a word or sentence.* As soon as the word appears, you *know* it. Incredible![1]

3) Borrowed Thinking

When you emerge from childhood and enter adult life, *almost all of your thinking is borrowed.* Actually you have done very little original thinking. You went to school and learned to think about dozens of subjects that others created. As you took that information on, you lived on borrowed information. You learned to think from what others have thought, discovered, and written.[2] Further, much of it is age-specific, relevant at the time given your maturity level. Yet it was time-dated information. It's now time to develop your own mind and voice. Here you may be repeating what you already know, parroting what you have heard, quoting "talking points" mindlessly, automatically babbling, etc. Today you are asked, "What do *you* think about X?" "What conclusions have *you* drawn?"

At this point, however, many people have a problem. They have become so used to thinking-the-thoughts-of-other, they may not even know *how to do their own thinking.* Schools contribute to this problem. Schools are designed mostly to teach children *what* to think, not *how to think.* It is primarily content-focused rather than process focused. So the process for *how to do original thinking* has not been learned. In fact, children may have learned the opposite, "It is dangerous to do your own thinking." "You'll get a low grade if you deviate from what the teacher says."

Now to *not* know how to think on your own and/or to be afraid to think on your own thinking leaves you to *introjecting* the thoughts and ideas of others. That is, you swallow whole the ideas of others. In "thinking their

thoughts" you are not actually *thinking* for yourself, you are just repeating what you've heard. Now certainly this is very good for learning from others when you are first encountering a new subject and you want to begin by learning what have already discovered from the best minds. Yet if that's all you do, then you are only at the beginning stage of learning. You are *introjecting* an idea, rule, understanding, etc. and swallowing it whole. That means you are not actually digesting the thoughts and making them yours. It may leave you thinking-dependent.

In his Gestalt approach, Fritz Perls introduced this metaphor of swallowing something whole. If we take the metaphor of masticating food, chewing it up, pulling it apart, and digesting it, we get a picture of what we need to do with information to transform it into our knowledge. Here is a metaphor for *thinking for yourself*—making an idea your own. Now when you repeat an idea, you have also *thought* that idea.

Sadly today with the media, with social media, with television and cable news, far too many people are living on borrowed thinking. They live off of the bullet points of a political party, a religious dogma, an ideology, etc. Now they engage in politically correct thinking by quoting platitudes, stale and worn-out statements, and so-called facts that they have not challenged, or tested. They have bowed to whatever ideology is blowing in the wind. *Yet where there is ideology, thinking falls asleep and goes into a coma.*

How much thinking today is actually borrowed thinking? It's hard to say, but I would guess that *most thinking is borrowed.* As cultures arise, there is a need to keep original thinking to a minimum so that things are not challenged or changed too quickly. Further, the stronger the cultural norm, the less we have to think. Culture provides the rules, norms, precedents, beliefs, metaphors, proverbs, etc. for our *cultural thinking.* How has your culture taught you to think? Do you know when and where your culture borrowed its ideas, rules, guidelines, procedures, etc.? How current or relevant is that thinking? What is it biased for?[3]

Ideally, once you borrow the thinking of a bright mind, and try on those ideas (considering), now is the time to begin questioning them, even doubting. If the ideas are still worth thinking, you detail them, create distinctions, and then re-organize them into new and different formats. This is how knowledge grows and develops.

Borrowed thinking today is what the media, and those in charge, consider to be "politically correct" (PC) in ideology and speech. If something is PC approved, then many automatically default to it. Questioning nothing saves them from the effort of thinking.

4) Superficial Thinking
Thinking can be deep or superficial. It can penetrate to the underlying principles or it can ride along the surface just touching on what is obvious. Superficial thinking occurs when a person uses sloppy and vague language. It is primitive, illusory, and uneducated for adult life. If you are not careful, this can lead to undesirable consequences—to being a victim of scams, deceptions, and tricks by unscrupulous people; to being unable to protect yourself from cognitive errors and to being easily duped by presentations.

Superficial thinking is typically *passive thinking.* You passively receive information without engaging your mind. You simply receive and let ideas pass through your mind without inquiring about them, testing them, challenging them, etc. That's what makes it superficial. And while this may save a lot of cognitive reserve and cognitive effort, in the end, it leaves one deficit in terms of quality understanding. It's deceptive. You may know just enough to think you understand ... when you actually do not. This activates the "understanding bias," the bias that tricks you into falsely assuming you know more than you actually do.

What drives superficial thinking is typically an attempt to *escape from the effort of thinking* especially when thinking is dangerous, threatening, and/or tabooed. Because of the fears of knowing, it takes courage to step up to expend the effort in seeking to understand something. In thinking superficially a person seeks to escape from the work and effort of thinking. By not engaging in *real thinking,* you *escape* thinking. As a result you may generate numerous substitutes for real thinking such as cliché thinking, irrational thinking, politically correct thinking, etc.

To detect superficial thinking, listen to a person's speech. *As they think, so they speak.* No wonder their conversations are disorderly, disorganized, inconsistent, unclear, irrelevant, and incomplete. No wonder so many people are unproductive or even counter-productive in their lives. As you listen, ask yourself, "Is this thinking due to the use of vague language?" "Am I hearing any deceptions, distortions, and/or fallacies?" "Is this due to the person refusing the effort of thinking?"

5) Agenda Thinking

Carl Jung noted, "Thinking is difficult, that's why most people *judge*." Another form of non-thinking occurs *when a person has a pre-set agenda to achieve.* Then in conversations, or in reading and research, the person is not really looking to *think,* the person is looking to prove a point, to confirm an ideology, to give evidence, etc. With an agenda in mind, you do not have to think. Instead of thinking, you have an agenda— something you want to accomplish. When that happens, instead of thinking, you are using your mind to find ideas to prove your agenda. Because you are seeking to achieve a goal—*you are actually manipulating your thinking* for an ulterior motive. In this pseudo-thinking you are doing something other than thinking. You've drawn a conclusion and stopped thinking. Steven Wright noted, "A conclusion is the place where you got tired of thinking."

Now as an agenda, an intention, you may be doing a wide variety of things. What are you attempting to do? Here is a conmon list of possibilities:

- Perhaps you are seeking to get agreement with what is politically correct.
- Perhaps you are looking to appease someone to get what you want from them—approval, a job, a recommendation, etc.
- Perhaps you are defending yourself against the horror of being wrong.
- Perhaps you are protecting your ego from facing facts you don't like.
- Perhaps you are securing the world you know against the new and strange facts of a world you don't know.
- Perhaps you are seeking to prove the other person is wrong.
- Perhaps you want to put another person down and humiliate him.
- Perhaps you are jealous and want to prove that person inadequate.

When it comes to agenda thinking, this kind of thinking is *ego-invested thinking.* "I need to be right," "I can't make a mistake," "I need to win this argument." "I need to solve this problem." "I need to succeed with my client." Agenda thinking occurs regularly and is the basis for most of the "drama" we see on TV, in the movies, and on the news.

With an agenda, your open and unbiased thinking gives way to highly biased and contaminated thinking. Now you have blinders on. You filter out everything that contradicts your agenda (e.g., belief, intention). When you consider your agendas in thinking, how well do you know your own agendas? Are these agendas due to cognitive fallacies and/or cognitive biases? If so, which ones? To what degree do you wish to get others, even force others, to adopt your opinions?

Agenda thinking can also occur very subtly. In fact, it can occur so subtly that you might never notice it. For example, you may have studied a subject and come to a conclusion—a conclusion that you truly believe. Perhaps you did so in a university class with a professor who had the same orientation. You are now biased for it. As your bias, it colors your perceptions, and even your willingness to consider opposing ideas. At this point, if you decide to do research on what you are sure about, your research will almost inevitably "prove" the conclusion you start with.   As a hidden and unconscious agenda, it governs what you can and cannot see. A lot of research suffers from, and is contaminated, by this kind of thinking.

6) Closed-minded Confident Thinking

This form of non-thinking involves a style of thinking that definitely does not seem like *non*-thinking, yet it is. It is also seductive. That's because most of us want to reach the point where we *know* what we know and know that we know. When we reach that point, we are rewarded by feelings of confidence. *We now feel sure.* What great feelings! Yet this is non-thinking and these emotions make it especially difficult to change one's mind.

There's a reason for that. Namely, when you reach the point where you "know," and you are "sure," and/or "certain," *you have closed your mind.* You have stopped thinking! You are no longer searching and questioning. You are assuming that the words and ideas you're using are absolutely true and real.   You are so sure that you are right, you no longer have any questions. You have no doubts. You're sure! Yet in the process you are probably over-estimating what you know—over-simplifying the world via language, generalizations, nominalizations, confirmation bias.

There's a problem: *We do not know what we don't know.* You know only what you know, and the things you do not know, well, you are not aware of those things. Nassim Taleb in *Black Swan* calls this *epistemic arrogance.* You are assuming that all of the things that you do not know cannot possibly have any influence or effect on what you do know.   What arrogance! It's a comforting illusion from the understanding bias, but an illusion none-the-less.

Herein is the seduction of an "explanation." The problem is that when you feel that you can "explain" something, you can stop thinking. You close off the thinking process. "I can explain that!" Here the "understanding bias" raises its head. This is the bias that you are certain that you know. In this

way, *explanations endanger real thinking.* Your "explanation" implies that there is a logical structure and that logic validates the thoughts as real.[4]

The strange thing about this: *Being "confident" describes the end of thinking.* To be "sure" and to "know" whatever you think you know, is pseudo-confidence. What do you need at that point? You need to wake up to realize that you have *stopped thinking.* You are now not only resting in your knowledge (lazy thinking), you are using it for a personal agenda, namely to feel safe and "confident." It is a false confidence based on dogmatism or cognitive distortions. Sometimes the false confidence is due to a dogmatism that you adopted. At other times, it is based on cognitive fallacies and/or biases. It's worth finding out what is seducing you into this unwarranted confidence.

We have all encountered someone who has closed his mind. It probably happened a lot to you in childhood. The sign on that person's mind says, "Closed." It is not open to consider things. The person has "made up his mind." His shop for considering and questioning is closed. Sometimes a person even announces it. "My mind is made up." "The subject is not open for discussion." The person is now defensive and unresponsive. The cure? Get the person to go back to the first thinking skill—*considering.* How do you do that? Some of the best ways involve using surprise, paradox, shock, challenge, humor, or the unexpected.

7. Expectations.
Your brain is an "anticipation machine" as well as a "pattern detector." You are primed to anticipate things. You do so because you see patterns in yourself, others, life, etc. "This is how X works, so I can expect..." Because your brain inevitably and naturally moves you to expect certain things, your brain can see patterns even where there are no patterns. This happens to us all. We have a bias to see patterns because if we can detect a pattern, we will be more prepared for what might happen. And because of this non-thinking processing, to take charge of your mind, you have to ask about assumptions and especially assmptions of patterns.

In assumptive thinking you entertain ideas *implicitly.* You make assumptions without even knowing that you are doing so. This kind of cognition is outside-of-conscious awareness. As you have become familiar with your world, in that very familiarity you have made or are making numerous assumptions. You are assuming things about what it is and what

you can expect. You are accepting various presuppositions about yourself, your family, your culture, your skills, your future, etc.

A revealing question at that moment is, "What are you or were you expecting?" When a person will take time to reflect, she will often realize that she was not thinking, but merely assuming various things for which there really was no reason to assume *that.* "Given that uncle Bob gets drunk every night, were you expecting that he would not get drunk at the wedding?" "What led you to that expectation?"

"What can you expect of your boss? How does he generally operate (e.g., talk, decide, behave, treat people, etc.)?" "If what he does today is something that is characteristic of him, then you could have easily anticipated that, so why feel upset or surprised?"

Expectation, as an unconscious form of non-thinking, typically carries within it a punch. That's because when you *expect*, you use your predictive thinking and assumptive thinking *in a demanding way.* You not only expect, *you demand the expectation.* You consider it required. So with expectations comes demands, and with demandingness, you set yourself up for disappointment. Far better is making a guess and giving it an estimate or percentage (e.g., 20%, 50%, etc.). Then later when the facts are in, learn from it so you can adjust your guessing powers.[5]

Thinking about Thinking
Amazingly and paradoxically, *an active brain does not necessarily indicate real thinking.* Amazingly, the brain can learn to non-think and get used to it. You could also use it to avoid thinking altogether. True thinking is not inevitable or automatic. It's possible to cheat the process, take short-cuts, rely on old thinking, default to automatic thinking, and thereby fail to actually think. Now true enough, some non-thinking can actually be helpful, even empowering. You can commission your nervous systems and unconscious minds to run a "program" so you don't have to be consciously aware of it. In Neuro-Semantics we use the Mind-to-Muscle pattern to do this.[6]

While non-thinking can have its advantages, it also poses great dangers. Rely too much on any one of these forms of non-thinking, and you can weaken your very ability to authentically think with precision and accuracy.

Reflective Thinking Exercise
This is a reflective exercise for thinking about the non-thinking stages in your life.
> *1) Where are you most on automatic in your everyday life?*
> Where are you most reactive?
> Where do you use borrowed thinking when you need to do fresh thinking?
> Where are you passive, shallow, superficial in your thinking?
> Where and when do you do agenda thinking?
> Where do you claim certainty and dismiss new or different ideas?
> *2) Valuable.*
> How is any one of these valuable to you?
> In what way and to what degree? How are you using it in a positive manner?
> 3) *Harmful.*
> How can this thinking habit be harmful, unresourceful, problematic, or even dysfunctional?
> 4) *Temptations.*
> What factors (internal/ external) induce you into this non-thinking state?
> 5) What can you or will you do about these factors?

Exercise — Catching Yourself *Not* Thinking
If we are more likely to *not* be thinking, and yet are not aware of this—the first step is to *begin catching ourselves when engaged in non-thinking.* To do this will activate your prefrontal cortex by developing a reflective mindfulness and exercise your higher executive functions. In this exercise you are not to *do* anything, just ask questions as an interviewer. The overall purpose is to raise awareness of non-thinking states. Here we will be exploring three different decisions, then debrief.
> *1) **Tough Decision:** Identify a tough decision that you recently made.* What did you decide? How did you come to that decision? What pros and cons did you consider? What criteria did you use? How easy or how difficult was the decision? How long did it take? If you had to do it over, what would you do differently?
> Where and when were you reacting? On automatic? Used borrowed thinking? Used passive thinking? Agenda thinking? Were sure and certain?
> *2) **Regretful Decision:** Identify a decision that you once made that you now regret.* Use same questions plus these: What did you regret about that decision? How did you become aware of that regret?
> Where and when were you reacting? On automatic? Used borrowed thinking? Used passive thinking? Agenda thinking? Were sure and certain?
> *3) **Great Decision:** Identify a decision that you once made that turned out great.* Choose one that turned out great because of your thinking,

evaluating, and deciding, not due to luck or circumstances.

Where and when were you reacting? On automatic? Used borrowed thinking? Used passive thinking? Agenda thinking? Were sure and certain?

End of the Chapter Notes
1. For the lists and explanations of the cognitive biases, see Appendices B, C, and D. Also see *Executive Thinking* (2018) and/or the manual for Brain Camp I.
2. Korzybski called this process *time-binding* and distinguished humans as time-binders in contrast to animals who are space-binders and plants who are chemical-binders.
3. See the manual for *Cultural Modeling* (2001); on the Shop, www.neurosemantics.com.
4. When you hear someone say, "And that explains it," immediately confirm the statement by saying, "Yes, that's certainly one explanation" and then add, "and yet it is not the only one." In that way you open up the conversation for some more *thinking.*
5. See *Predictive Thinking: Unleashing a Bright Future* (2022).
6. For the Mind-to-Muscle pattern, see the APG manual, also the book, *Achieving Peak Performance* (2009).

Chapter 22

HELLISH THINKING

*"The human race can't afford to live stupid anymore.
It's up to us collectively to find ways to reward,
nurture, and encourage creative thought."*
Joey Reiman, *Thinking for a Living*

*"If you just think, you can think yourself into problems.
It's really easy."*
Richard Bandler (2019, p. 30)

T*hinking can induce a state of heaven* within your consciousness. And thinking can just as equally put you into *a mental and emotional hell!* Think wrong and you can experience life as hellish, nightmarish, neurotic, or destructive. Nor is this uncommon. Actually this describes the source of the great majority of human suffering—anxiety, stress, fear, guilt, envy, loneliness, victimhood, aggressiveness, depression, paranoia, etc. Most people in therapy are there because they suffer from wrong thinking.

What causes most human suffering? It may amaze you to know that most suffering does not refer to physical pain and discomfort. The worst suffering is *mental* and *emotional.* The most devastating suffering arises from distortions, fallacies, and biases that disorient us so that we don't know what we're dealing with or how to deal with it effectively. The most hellish and torturous human experiences arise from false understandings and beliefs. And when your mental map is wrong, your lived experiences in the world cannot be right.

The symptomatic suffering that shows up in debilitating anxiety, enervating depression, self-contempt, rage, revenge, hatefulness, etc. springs from false

thinking and understanding. Thinking systemically about the human condition, we realize that the problem goes to *how* we make sense out things. We then realize that the worst suffering arises from within before it shows up in the symptomatic behaviors. Cognitive mis-understandings, irrationality, and false beliefs generate the negative and neurotic emotions and behaviors. It's our inner thinking—both conscious and unconscious—that governs our experiences and personality.

When you think systemically you also take into consideration many other factors—the tendencies and predispositions of your genes, your physical well-being and/or ill-being over the years, your socio-cultural environment, your habits of eating, exercising, sleeping, etc. All of these play a role in your overall health and well-being. All of these provide either challenges or resources. Some are toxic influences; others are nurturing and build up your cognitive reserve for coping with life.

Psychologically all of these offer conditions, constraints, and contexts for how each of us respond. They set the environment. Yet deeper and more determining are your *thoughts—your thinking*. Why is that? That's because *how you interpret* any given condition, constraint, or context *determines what and how you will experience it.* The meanings you attribute determine how you will feel and respond. Whether heavenly or hellish, thinking is the governor.

Now hellish thinking can take a great many forms. Some are common to just about everyone; others are much more rare and only by those suffering from the most intense and destructive personality disorders.[1]

The Hell of Rigid Thinking
As already noted, when children begin to think, they think in polarized either/or categories and they over-generalize. And as every parent knows, this can turn them into little tyrants! This thinking leads them to be so definite, so sure, so rigid, and so dogmatic. Now in children that can be cute and adorable. However, it's not so cute in adults. Rigid thinking shows up as a dogmatism of "having to be right" all the time and an absolute fear of being wrong. Consequently this kind of thinking leads to conflicts and the breakdown of relationships. It is also the thinking of dictators and "command and control" leaders.

Rigid thinking puts you into a prison—*a prison of your mind.* It creates a prison of inhibitions and prohibitions. That's because rigid thinking allows no or very little flexibility. This leaves one with hardly any choice.

> "Ultimately, dichotomizing pathologizes, and pathology dichotomizes."
> (Maslow, 1968, p. 175)

Edward DeBono said that once a packet of information acquires a *name*— it tends to become frozen and immutable. It becomes rigid. It loses its fluidity so that it becomes solid and unchangeable. This inevitable linguistic factor lies at the heart of rigid thinking, people assume that a word or phrase is real, and what they say a thing is, that is what it *is*. Of course, this is the problem with all of the "to be" verbs (e.g., is, am, are, be, being, becoming, was, were). Using them we tend to *identify* two things *as if* they were the same. "I am a manager," "I am a mother," "I am a runner." *Yet whatever you say you are, you are more than that.* Identify with that and you create a rigid identity and set yourself up for an identity crisis.[2]

This is also true for all *nominalizations.* When you turn a process word like a verb into a "thing" word, you create a false reality. Then "pressing down" (depress) becomes a noun, we suddenly have an abstract concept— "depression." Yet there is no such "thing" as depression. The word does not refer to a thing, but a process—the way a person is thinking and feeling at a given time. This is also true of "nothing but" thinking ("X is *nothing but* Y"). "He is nothing but an idiot." "That is nothing but a failure." What we have here is a pre-emptive construct, a construct that doesn't allow an experience to be re-classified in any other way.

The Hell of Distracted Thinking
Just as children are easily distracted, so also are some adults. We often think that they are suffering ADD—attention deficient disorder. But no. The problem is not actually *attention,* it is *intention.* In spite of the *intentions* that they may set, their attention is in control, with the result that anything, or anyone, who can "grab" their attention controls them. Actually these people are suffering from *tangential thinking.* They constantly get off subject and "chase rabbits," and jump from one subject to another, and eventually find themselves in a place with no idea how they got there.

When there's distracted thinking, it is as if you have no ability to govern your thinking, no higher *intentional power to focus your attention.* And because you are unfocused, anything big, bright, loud, sensational, dramatic,

emotional, etc. can capture your attention. This makes you susceptible to ingesting psycho-pathological ideas, which, in turn, undermine your well-being.

The problem is actually an intentional deficit, not attention deficit. You have not set a strong and compelling intention and have learned how to use that to align your attentions to it. No wonder your attention wanders all over. You are living as if you were a small child or animal—*attentionally.* What you need to learn is how to set your intentions so that you can live on purpose. Distracted thinking involves jumping from one subject to the next. What then happens to your emotions? Your thinking becomes a roller-coaster and the emotions shortly follow suit.[3]

The Hell of Over-Thinking
There are several kinds of thinking patterns that we call over-thinking. One is *obsessive thinking.* Sometimes a child becomes obsessive about one or more things which captures her attention. One child might want to have the same story read to him every single night. Another child might become obsessed by ants or bugs or birds, or some other animal. Such obsessions are usually part of the learning process, and once well learned, the obsession vanishes and the child moves on.

But some people never move on. Usually a strong irrational fear drives the obsession. This leads to obsessive–compulsive disorders and the range of obsessions are as wide as human interests. One can be obsessed with fears, dangers, what others think about them, being right, being safe, etc. This kind of obsessing is sometimes called *"over-thinking"*—going over and over a thought and never finishing it, never getting closure on it. Here a person may go in circles so that he thinks the same thing over and over.

Another form of over-thinking involves *re-thinking.* A person thinks in a haphazard manner never getting to a closure and so comes back to re-think it again and again. He continually attempts to bring closure on a position or decision, but never completes it. Consequently, she never really gets clear about her thoughts and so feels the need to keep re-processing things. If you use the same references over and over again trying to come to a different conclusion, you will never bring the thinking to an end. To break out of that kind of looping requires using different references, resources, and perspectives.[4]

Then there is the over-thinking that arises when you use *an intensional orientation* (as mentioned earlier in chapter seven). [This is *intensional* with a **s,** not with a **t**.]   Unlike extensional thinking by which you get out of your head and *extend* things out into the real world, intensional

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___  Marriage ___
 /           \
 ___ Husband ___
 /           \
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thinking keeps you *going round and round a self-invented definition in your head* unrelated to the outside. This becomes especially vicious if one intensional level is embedded inside of another intensional level. As you try to figure out the meaning of one level, you loop into the other level. Round and round you go. While you think you are simply trying to figure something out, you are looping between meta-levels.
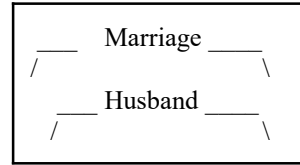
Finally, there's the over-thinking involved in a *double-bind looping*. You get caught into a loop that goes round and round because a higher frame (a belief, decision, prohibition, etc.) keeps you from stepping back to see the bind (the statement that binds).

> First bind or command: "Try not to make a mistake." Second bind: "Don't be aware of making a mistake." Third bind: "Don't be aware of the second bind." Now if you could "go meta" to your thinking and experiencing, you would recognize that you are doomed to stay in the experience of making a mistake. As a fallible human being, you will make mistakes. But if you do *and* you are forbidden to be aware of it, you will spin around in that experience. *It is an experience with no exit.* If you could see that you have been forbidden to *go meta,* then that awareness would expose the double-bind nature of these injunctions and you'd would be free.[5]

The Hell of Delusional Thinking

All children go through a stage of *magical thinking.* They come to the idea that there could be a "magic wand," a secret handshake, a mysterious ring, a secret closet, etc. Whatever it is, they think it is *the answer to life and the solution for everything* (over-generalizing, all-or-nothing, absolutism). Most outgrow that stage. Adults can put this drive to good use by writing novels, enjoying sci-fi movies, playing video-games, etc.

Others however, turn it into a darker side. They may develop grandiose delusions of who they are, or what they can or will do. At the extreme, this can show up in paranoia delusions and delusions of grandeur. In everyday life, it can lead to unrealistic expectations, constant frustration, inability to be productive, etc. Thinking that you will win the lottery is delusional, as

is the idea that you are destined to become a rock star.

The Hell of Egotism Thinking

Children think ego-centrically and cannot think otherwise. That's because they have not yet developed the ability to use their conceptual thinking to "step into another person's shoes." Because they can't take second-perceptual position until they are seven or eight, they are stuck in first-perceptual position. That's why true empathy will not arise until after puberty for them.

When a person elevates the self or ego treating it *as if it is the only reality,* a hellish kind of thinking emerges—narcissistic thinking. Others are now seen as less, as different, and as inferior. Others are viewed as objects and instruments to get what one wants, not as persons to respect. This is the thinking of the psychopath whose emotions are blunted and reduced. Thinking only about self, and over-valuing self above all else, leaves no empathy for others, no concern for their pain or suffering. While a sociopath may be able to mimic the behaviors that can get others to do what they want, he will lack the emotional connection and experience. He will not know, understand, or care about the suffering he causes.

The Hell of Nightmarish Thinking

Living through any traumatic experience is almost always disturbing and semantically damaging. But to live through it again and again—so that the nightmare never ends—that is the very structure of ongoing torment. Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) describes a pathology wherein one is constantly reminded and re-triggered into the traumatic experience. It then repeats. And with every repetition, one is re-traumatized.

Anyone who has a such a memory, if you can't *turn it off* or *turn it down* or take control of it, then at any given time something could re-trigger it and the trauma begins all over again. In NLP, the Movie Rewind pattern was developed to enable a person to take the emotional charge out of that kind of nightmare thinking.[6]

The Hell of Judgmental Thinking

To think is to judge and to evaluate. With every thought you are deciding that something is good for you or bad for you. It increases your pleasures or decreases them. You make judgments to cross a street, to drive a car, to go to the grocery store to buy food for the week. There's nothing inherently

bad or wrong in making a "judgment"—these are everyday *evaluations* that help us to make good choices and increase our well-being.

But there's another kind of judgment that is destructive and pathological. This occurs when judgment becomes *judgmental.* This kind of thinking negatively evaluates others as bad, evil, sick, etc. Here you make an absolute judgment, usually about yourself or others. You judge them as evil, inhuman, unworthy of your time, inferior, the cause of all your problems, not deserving to live, etc.

Judgmental thinking leads to prejudicial thinking as you make up your mind against something or someone before you even consider the facts. It was judgmental thinking that led Hitler to *judge* the Jews as the source of all problems in Germany. He therefore used them as the scapegoats to direct hate and disgust for them thereby creating a disaster for the world known as World War II.

Thinking about Thinking

Anything powerful can be powerfully misused. And since thinking is perhaps the ultimate power within the human mind, *thinking can be powerfully misused.* Thinking can become so pathological that it leaves destruction and suffering in its path. Every form of neurotic thinking also culminates in hellish experiences that undermine well-being and sanity.

Now once thinking reaches a pathological stage of development, it is easy to recognize. What's not so easy to recognize are the early stages of thinking going wrong in very small ways. Subtly it begins with a misunderstanding, a misperception, a minor error, an idea that is not contextualized. Then it slowly grows to become a full fledged and serious error—a cognitive distortion, bias, or fallacy.

Then, to make things worse, we keep *confirming* what we already believe. We only make *available* information that fits with what we believe and eventually we come to "know" something and feel "sure" that it is right. It is no longer a thought or a belief, it is truth, it is reality. Now we "know" that we know it. Now the mind closes and is no longer open for correction. In this way, we build up a mental map about things that is completely off-target and unhelpful in navigating the challenges of life.

Ultimately, the problem is *the kind of thinking.* And the paradigm shifting power for change, for transformation, for renewal—is the ability *to think about your thinking.* Then, with meta-thinking, you can change the kind and quality of your thinking. Then you can shed old thinking like an old skin.

End of the Chapter Notes

1. For an indepth development of the personality disorders, see *The Structure of Personality: Personality Ordering and Disordering with NLP and Neuro-Semantics* (2001).

2. All of the "to be" verbs are passive verbs implying that they are not *actually doing* anything. Then there are the unspecified verbs which falsely imply activity when they are actually classifications. David Bourland, Jr. invented a solution to this, *E-Prime.* This refers to English primed of all "to be" verbs, see *To Be or Not: An E-Prime Anthology, Volumes I, II, and III.*

3. To set your intention and develop the power to focus your concentration, see the *Intentionality Pattern.* You can find it in APG manual, in *Secrets f Personal Mastery* (1999).

4. The completion meta-program (#14) speaks to the ability to close what can be closed and embrace non-closure. See *Figuring Out People* (2005).

5. For the double-bind, see Gregory Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972).

6. For *The Movie Rewind* pattern, see *Movie Mind* (2002). In NLP it is sometimes referred to as the Phobia Cure or the Visual-Kinesthetic Dissociation pattern. Also, see *Meta-Therapy* (2023).

PART VI

THINKING SOLUTIONS

As thinking itself can go wrong and become problematic, so by *thinking about thinking,* by your *meta-thinking,* you can correct what goes astray and make it go right. That's amazing! This solves the Catch-22 problem of consciousness, the problem that you have to use your consciousness to solve problems of your consciousness. Catch-22 refers to a "damned if you do; damned if you don't" scenario. From the movie of that title, a pilot refuses to fly a combat mission into enemy territory and is sent to a mental ward for not being sane. But he says that he's sane because he doesn't want to die by flying into a combat zone where he could be killed.

Yes, we do live in "the house of language" built by thinking, yet that house is not a prison. That's because the house we live is also a house *created by thinking.* Because it's created by reflexive thinking, we have the power to think about our thinking, and thereby to update it, retire it, enhance it, transform it, clean it out, expand it, etc.
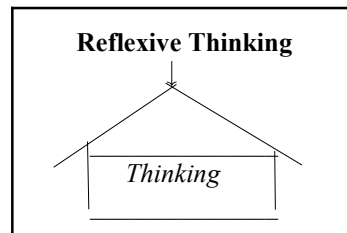
The solution to the problems of thinking, and to the many ways that thinking can go wrong, goes back to a special kind of thinking. It goes to the higher quality of real thinking by which you can upgrade your entire thinking system. Upgrading the system begins by tapping into, and using, all of the thinking skills— the *essential, eureka, and executive thinking* skills. In this way you can think anew, unlearn, and correct semantic reactions.

Chapter 23

UNLEARNING

"You must unlearn what you have learned."
Yoda

"A little unlearning goes a long way."
Richard Kehl

"The chief object of education is not to learn things, but to unlearn things."
G.K. Chesteron

"The neurotic is not emotionally sick— *he is cognitively wrong!* If health and neurosis are, respectively, correct and incorrect perceptions of reality, propositions of fact and propositions of value merge in this area..." (Maslow, 1970, p. 153)

If you have *learned* something that is no longer accurate, or learned something that is false and erroneous, then the solution is *to unlearn.* Now as a skill, *un-learning describes the process for updating what you know.* You can also use it to bridge the gap between non-thinking (what you automatically know or know reactively) and the fresh thinking that is required for staying current with today's world and your own personal growth and development.

Unlearning may require mentally releasing and/or suspending, or it could require replacing previous learnings that have become irrelevant, redundant, and/or wrong. As you engage in unlearning, you are now able to clear out interferences which block new learning. In the field of learning, these blocks are known as *proactive inhibitions.* This refers to the amazing fact that old learnings can actually prohibit a new learning. Sometimes an old learning is simply in the way. This may be what's at work when you try and try to learn something new, and somehow it just "does not go in" or "does

not stick." Humorist Mark Twain spoke to this issue of unlearning:

> "It's not what we think that's so that causes us problems. It's what we think that simply is not so that causes us problems."
>
> "The trouble with the world is not that people know too little, but that they know so many things that aren't so."

There's an interesting distinction between learning and unlearning. While learning is natural, unlearning is mostly not. *Conscious unlearning requires a special kind of learning!* Due to the effect of previously learning materials and information on new learnings—the proactive inhibition—the prior knowledge inhibits the new learning. Why is that? John Maynard Keynes explains the cause:

> "The difficulty lies not so much in developing new ideas as in escaping from the old ones."

From the old learning, frames have been set which establish the thinking that is acceptable and inhibiting all other thinking. This proactive inhibition is why *you have to intentionally escape the old frames* by unlearning what you have learned. What you previously learned is no longer valid or relevant. As a result, it is now getting in your way preventing you from updating your learnings. In describing the need to unlearn, Alfred Korzybski described unlearning in terms of automatic semantic habits. He applied this idea of unlearning to the old Aristotelian linguistics, the central problem he designed General Semantics to solve.

> "A bad habit cannot be easily eliminated except by forming a new semantic counter-reaction. All of us have some undesirable but thoroughly established linguistic habits and s.r. [semantic reactions] which have become almost automatic, overloaded with unconscious 'emotional' evaluation. This is the reason why new 'non-systems' are, in the beginning, so extremely difficult to acquire." ... "we must unlearn a great deal and train to new habits involving the non-Aristotelian standards of evaluation." "...to unlearn the older s.r., the new reactions need a persistent training..." (*Science and Sanity,* 1933, pp. 379, 275, 456)
>
> "The key problem is to eliminate, first, the semantic disturbance called identification or the confusion of orders of abstractions, and similar disturbances of evaluation. This elimination is attained physiologically through the development of the consciousness of abstracting..." (p. 304).
>
> "If the translation is made into the language of lower centres— namely into 'intuitions,' 'feelings,' 'visualizations' etc., the higher abstractions gain the character of experience, and so creative activity begins." (Ibid., p. 307).

Different chemistries are also involved in learning and in unlearning. In learning, neuro-scientist Donald Webb famously said, "Neurons that fire together wire together." According to Hebb's Law, neurotransmitters are released in the synapses that either excite or inhibit. Neuromodulators enhance or diminish overall effectiveness of the synaptic connections. Among them, oxytocin, has been described as an amnestic hormone because it seems to be involved in wiping out learned behavior.

> "Expose an irrational belief, keep a person rational for a day. Expose irrational thinking, keep a person rational for a lifetime." *Logically Fallacious* (2015)

To default to emotional thinking is inadequate for clear, creative, and critical thinking. It is a throw-back to childish thinking. "Emotional-thinking" uses feelings to inform thinking—this describes how *children* think. A child *senses* the world (see-hear-feel), then uses that information to draw conclusions (over-generalize, personalize, etc.). *In this way they feel their way to thoughts.* This describes their level of development prior to the maturing of the brain during puberty. When their emotions are too strong, they then become overwhelmed thereby preventing clear thinking. This is the thing: fear, threat, anxiety, stress, and other strong negative emotions interfere with the best thinking. When you are afraid, stressed, emotional—you basically cannot think—at least not clearly and accurately.

Skills for Unlearning

The unlearning skills are for *automatic thinking*—a well-developed habit of thinking which no longer serves you. What would you like to unlearn? How about being *defensive?* Would you want to unlearn needing to be right? Or perhaps, fearing mistakes? Some need to unlearn the limiting belief, "I can't learn." What is getting in your way for unleashing your highest values and meanings into your best performances? What old learning is blocking you in learning something new and/or different?

1) Identify the Old Learning.

To identify what you need to unlearn, ask yourself a series of questions:

> What do you want to learn, or have tried to learn, but sense that something is in the way? What is in your way from learning what you want to learn? How much is it in the way? How much does it interfere? How much do you know it is an old learning that is unuseful? What is *outdated* about that learning? What do you need to unlearn to become a great thinker? What do you know that's just not so and yet it feels real?

Given that you can't change what you're unaware of, gaining awareness is the first step. As you recognize and simply observe an idea, as *an old learning,* sometimes "awareness *per se* is curative." That is, just being aware of it as "old" changes it thereby enabling you to move beyond it. What is the old learning? As you set it aside and observe it, what happens?

2) Give permission to unlearn.

If awareness alone is not enough to create an openness to a new learning, check your permission level. Do you have inner permission to unlearn something? To let an old learning go? To find out, go inside and say these words to yourself, "I give myself permission to unlearn X, it is old and no longer relevant." As you say these words, notice what happens in you. Where does your mind go? What emotions may arise? Any sensations in your body? These may be objections. If so, ask yourself, what meaning is opposing the unlearning?

If it is an objection, what is the objection? What is the fear? Once you know that then you can integrate the opposite of the objection into your permission or as a needed resource. If the idea and feeling emerges, "But my teacher or father said this and I'd be disrespecting them to let it go." Reframe the new permission with the implied resource.

> "I give myself permission to let X go, respecting Y for teaching me what he considered important. And now, knowing that it is no longer relevant, and he would want me to be still learning and improving." "As he was a truth seeker, I give myself permission to seek the truth and do him proud."

3) Identify the New Learning.

What do you want to learn? What have you begun learning? To what extent have you learned something new? As you now make the old learning redundant by introducing a new idea, an idea that's much better, and well expressed, what happens? How much does the new understanding make the old learning redundant? If you are now free from the old learning that previously inhibited you, establish as many new connections with the new learning as you can.

4) Release it.

Once you know that the old learning is "old" and no longer helpful, you may find it useful to intentionally let it go. Say "Goodbye" to it. Or, imagine vetoing it. Or, identify some metaphor of releasing and use that

metaphor in letting it go. Other possibilities: You could erase it. You could let it fade away. How do you best release something? Use it to release the old learning. Breathe in the old and then breathe it out.[1]

5) *Make an Executive Decision.*
Another choice would be to step back from the old learning and make a declaration. Declare, "It no longer fits." Declare, "I will discard what is not essential." Are you ready and would you like to make an executive decision? Ultimately, *what* you think and *how* you think is your choice. You and only you can influence your thinking so that you turn the central core of yourself toward your values and visions.

6) *Alter the Semantic Space.*
Check within yourself about how you have been coding the old learning. Begin by asking, "Where is it? Is it close or far to me? Is it on my left or right? Is it big or small? Is it coded in words, pictures, sounds, or sensations? How do you know that you know X?" Once you identify where it is, and how it is pictured, or how it sounds, ask yourself, "What would be a better arrangement of this old information?" Perhaps you could put it behind yourself or in a storage unit. You could also experiment with the coding to see how you could edit the information and de-energize it.[2]

7) *Explore the Meta-Level Frames.*
The old learning is not only represented in your mind, you have more than likely framed it with certain beliefs, decisions, understandings, even an identity. In your Meta Place you may have built hierarchies of meanings, values, intentions, etc. To discover these, repeatedly use the counter-intuitive question:
> "If this is true for you, what do you believe that holds it in place?"
> "Let's say this is true, what comes to mind that validates it?"

While you now know it is not true, assume it is and look to *discover the framework that holds it in place.* If you use these questions repeatedly, you can map out the meta-level frames that hold the old learning in place. And if you do it repeatedly for every answer you receive, you will be able to discover the meaning hierarchy that holds it in place.

Eventually you will reach the top of the hierarchy of frames. You can now quality control the old learning. "Does it enhance you or empower you?" "Do you like it or want it?" If the answer is no, then blow-out the old

learning by saying, "No it no longer serves me."

8) Test in Real Time.
The final step is to intentionally integrate the new learning into your mind-body system. Do that by using your neuro-linguistic variables to bring it inside. Start with the new learning by stating it as *an understanding or a principle* that you *know*. Once you state it clearly and succinctly, turn it into a *belief*. "Would you like to believe it?" If yes, then state it as a belief. Next, turn it into a *decision*. "Are you willing to make this your choice?" If yes, then state it as a decision or choice that you will live.

The next step is to identify the *emotions* that the belief and the decision statements evoke within you. "What are you feeling?" State these as your feelings. And with these emotional energies blossoming inside you, turn that energy into *action*. "The one thing I will do to make this real in my life is...." and state some simple, easy to do action that you will do today.

This is the *Mind-to-Muscle pattern* in Neuro-Semantics.[3] By identifying what you "know," you can commission your neurology to take it on experientially. At the end, you have a task to do. So go out to engage in that experience, then check back to see how it went. Did the new learning go in? Is it beginning to become integrated into your actions? Does the new learning show up in your speech and behavior? If so, you have completed the learning process.

Thinking about Thinking
The way unlearning naturally occurs is through the process of new information *updating* old information. That, in turn, thereby makes it redundant. But sometimes a learning has become so automatic, and so much a part of your unconscious programming, you have to intentionally and consciously *unlearn*. And you can unlearn; you can re-train your neurology to develop new wiring.

End of the Chapter Notes
1. This is the "Releasing Judgment" pattern which you can find in the ACMC manual, the NSTT manual.
2. For more about how to do this, see *Movie Mind* (2002), also see *Sub-Modalities Going Meta* (2005).
3. The Mind-to-Muscle pattern is used in almost every manual. The book, *Achieving Peak Performance* (2009) is devoted entirely to that pattern.

Chapter 24

CORRECTING

SEMANTIC REACTIVITY

"I never let my schooling interfere with my education." Mark Twain

"Critical thinking is always difficult,
but it's almost impossible when we are scared."
Hans Fosling, *Factfulness*

S ometimes when we ask questions, especially questions that raise a doubt about something, people become reactive. They behave as if the question is an attack, rather than just an exploration. That vividly shows up *when a person is reactive.* When you are reactive, there's more to do than simply unlearn and relearn. First you have to *interrupt* the reaction and then *delay* your semantic reactions. And sometimes, you have to spend time *unplugging* your reactions. Otherwise it is easy to become negatively activated. The reason is because whenever you are in a reactive state, *you are not truly thinking.* Your mind is involved in one or more of the non-thinking activities (chapter 21).

We often speak about these morbid semantic reactions operating as if they were "buttons" which automatically set off a pre-programmed response. The trigger could be a word, a gesture, tone, etc. which sets a person off. Then he goes into some negative state—anger, upset, frustrations, irritation, stress, etc. It could be a particular word, a tone, or a gesture like someone holding up the middle finger, etc.

A "semantic reaction" is therefore the strong emotional state that you experience based on your meanings (semantics) about the trigger. Your response is based on *what's inside you*—you're thinking about something in a particular way. Ultimately, the problem is not the word, the name, the sight or the sound, it is *the meaning that you attribute to the trigger.* What then results are semantic disturbances, waste of nervous energy, semantic over-stimulation, labile affectivity of being easily upset and irritable, lack of insight, rigid fixity preventing flexibility (*Science and Sanity,* p. 547).

The problem in reactivity also involves *the hasty judgment* that occurs in less than a second. That's because the old learning is so deeply embedded, it is now unconscious. It is now an automatized reaction. The neurons fired together so often, they have become wired together as an unthinking reaction to the trigger. The trigger is now semantically loaded with some strong or intense meanings.

Now even though a word is just a word or symbol, and in itself means nothing, however once wired in, it becomes an unconscious "program." The person saying it gives it a meaning, and the person hearing it either accepts that meaning or gives it another. While the name or label is just a symbol, and not real, your response and its effect are real. What's unsane is the intense reaction to some word or event. What's needed in this unthinking situation is *conscious thinking to reframe things.* What's needed is to slow down and consider, "What you are responding to?" "What means are you imposing?"

There's several ways to respond to a semantic reaction and reduce it. For reducing a semantic reaction, Abraham Maslow recommended reducing attention and involvement.

> "If you know who you are, where you are going, and what you want, then it is not hard to deal with inane bureaucratic details, trivialities, and constraints. You can simply *disarm* them and make them *disappear* by a simple *shrug* of your shoulders. I know that I am apt to become impatient with young people today who attribute so much power to social pressures and forces. I point out that all we need to do is *pay those influences no attention* and then they vanish. ..." (*Future Visions*, Unpublished Papers, p. 177)

Another helpful response is to break the automatic pattern with *silence.* Use a moment for silence to interrupt the old semantic reaction. When you do

you are delaying an immediate reaction to give "consciousness of abstracting" a chance. In the delay you are giving your cortex a chance to perform and/or delaying to just observe without evaluating.[1]

The Art of Unplugging Your Buttons
Where there are semantically loaded words, language, and ideas—these can actually function to prevent understanding and learning. Semantically loaded "communication" shuts down *thinking* because too much is at stake for the person. Emotionally-laden terms and ideas induce states that prejudice people so they assume they are under attack. No wonder they cannot calmly think! Instead the person goes into a reactive stance. To detect this, listen for semantically loaded words and ideas. Calibrate the words that seem to provoke the person, then invite a calmness to explore the layers of meanings behind the offending trigger.

Where there's reactivity, *thinking has gone wrong.* Count on this: You are not thinking accurately or sanely. Almost always you have reverted to using the cognitive distortions in your thinking which is why you cannot see things clearly. When this happens, you create and experience lots of *self-limitations.* Because the content of thinking are *the ideas* that you entertain and hold in mind—when you get a wrong idea about something, that error becomes a *thought virus*. As a meme it spreads mental dis-ease. It is *a thought virus—an error in your thinking system* (a limiting belief, erroneous understanding, misunderstanding, etc.).

Unplugging Your Buttons Exercise
The design of this pattern is to *release semantic reactivity* and become less semantically reactive. By suspending the over-loaded meanings, you give yourself a chance to think before you speak or act.

1) Identify a Semantically Reactive Trigger.
Is there some word, action, event, or thing which you've given too much meaning to and now interferes with your best responses? What pushes your buttons? What rattles you and gets you into an upset state? What creates an interference or sabotage to unleashing some aspect of your potential? Identify the trigger and then identify your reaction. How do you react? What emotion, action, or experience do you generate in response?

2) Identify the Meaning Structure.
What are you thinking? Given that your thinking creates and animates your

reaction, "What does it mean to you? What else does it mean to you? What else are you thinking or remembering or referring to?" Elicit all of the meanings that you can.

3) Climb the Levels of Meanings.

Take each one of the meanings and ask, "What do you (or I) believe about this?" Ask this question repeatedly as you move upward in the meta-stating funnel. Here you can use meta-questions—believing, valuing, deciding, understanding, identifying, permitting, remembering, imagining, expecting, etc. to explore the structures in your Meta Place. "If that is true, what does that mean? What do you believe about it?"
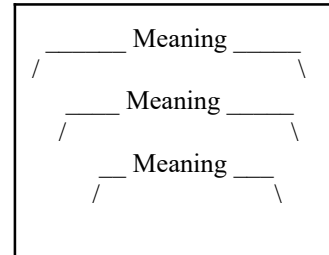
4) Step to the Side for Meta-Awareness.

Once you complete the hierarchy of meanings, step back from the meta-stating funnel to observe the levels of your thinking. Do you now realize how your thinking and meaning-making sets you up to react as you do? With this awareness, what are you now aware of?

5) Neutralize the Meanings

To neuralize the semantic loading, take time to consider and answer the question: "Do you know that the old meanings are *just meanings*?" This rhetorical question aims to solidify the realization. Once you have the answer, ask, "How well do you know this? Or, do you fully know that the old meanings were *just a way of thinking*?" Now ask, "Now knowing that, what do you realize? Do those old meanings enrich your life, empower you, make things better, enhance your relationships, etc.?" "How much does this reduce your reactivity?"

6) Expand the Meanings.

Ask, "What else could this trigger mean? What do others think about this trigger? What meanings does the most highly resourceful person you know give to it? What resources do you need?" As a menu list of possibilities, it could mean interruption, distance, responsibility to/for, compassion, pity, "his problem, not mine," etc. Describe as fully as possible that new resource, and way of thinking, and how it changes things for you. Now with this new understanding, use your self-talk to create a cognitive over-

ride to program your new meanings.

7) Associate Your New Meanings with the Trigger.
Ask, "What happens when you apply the new meaning to the old trigger? How much does it de-energize the previous reactivity? How many times do you need to apply and re-apply the new meaning?"

Afterwards: Run this pattern as many times as is needed to reduce, or completely eliminate, your reactivity. Reactivity will almost never serve you well. Conversely, when you live your life *mindfully responding* from your chosen values, you will feel in charge of yourself and unable to become a victim of some trigger.

De-Bugging Your Thinking System of Limitations
Earlier, I alluded to the metaphor of a thought virus. It is as if a thinking virus has infected your mind, creating havoc. Now that you've been infected by a thought virus, let's clean out your thinking system of thought viruses and bugs, and system errors. Use the following pattern to run a systems analysis to find systemic errors in your thinking. This requires that you *recognize and accept* that all of your thinking is fallible (liable to error). Are you ready to *question your inner logic?* To find out where your thinking went wrong and to correct it? Where did you mis-perceive something, or mis-calculate, or mis-understand? Where did a possible bias create an illusion or deception?

1) Choose a Limitation.
Where in life do you feel a limitation? Where do you feel a limitation in doing something that is important for you? Where do you see that others can do something, but you sense that you can't? A menu list for this includes: Sell, negotiate, ask for a date, negotiate a price, speak in public, delegate, distinguish responsibility to/for, make a request, forgive, release the need for revenge, experiencing healing from a trauma, etc.

2) Explore the Limitation.
Detail the specifics of the limitation: where, when, how, etc. What is the behavior that you struggle with? Identify the specific **E**xternal **B**ehavior (EB). When you do that behavior, attempt to do it, or imagine doing it, what happens inside you in your thinking and feeling? Whatever happens, that describes your **I**nternal Experience or **S**tate (I.S.).

3) Diagram the Experience.

Having distinguished the two factors: what's outside (EB) and what's inside (IS), you can now sort out and discern the structure of your experience. Diagram the E.B. — > I.S. and write it out in full: "This EB makes me angry, fearful, sad, etc." "When I try to handle criticism (external behavior), I think it is unfair and I feel like running away" (internal state). Or, "I (IS: an Internal State) can't do EB..." "I'm not the kind of person who can sell..." "I fear taking risks (EB)." "I feel stuck in speaking up (EB)." This gives you both a visual and a verbal representation of the way you have coded a relationship between something external to something internal within you.

4) Diagram the Levels of Meaning.

Now let's go meta to discern the vertical structure of meanings. Diagram the levels of thinking to see how you have classified the EB or the IS. Ask, "What do you believe about this external behavior?" "What do you understand about this internal state?" Use any of the meta-questions as you identify the frames that you have created about each of these. *Climb the ladder of meaning* by moving up the meta levels. As you elicit the hierarcy of levels, examine the conclusions that you drew, and the kind of thinking that you used as you drew those conclusions. "Help me to understand how you came to that conclusion. What are you selecting to focus on? How are you thinking about that? What are you assuming to be true to reason in that way?"

5) Check Ecology.

Once you have a basic picture of your internal world of meaning, step aside from it and ask the series of ecology questions: "Does this serve you? Bring out your best? Enhance you as a person? Do you now know where the error is in your system? Do you know what to do to correct that error?"

6) Use an Unlearning Mechanism

Pick one or more of the seven ways to *unlearn* something, and use it to unlearn the thought virus that you have identified (chapter 23).

> 1) *Make the program redundant.* Assert repeatedly, "My old thinking no longer fits this case."
> 2) *Simply observe the old program.* Witness it dispassionately, "That's an interesting limitation or self-limitation."
> 3) *Release the feelings of reactivity.* Take the fear, or whatever the feeling is, and use one of the releasing metaphors to communicate

to yourself, "I am letting it go."

4) *Make an executive decision.* Whenever you hear yourself use the words "can't..." "It's impossible," exchange those words for "I choose" or "I will."

5) *Find and alter the code.* Experiment in editing your inner movie changing around the image, sound, or sensation.

6) *Give yourself permission.* Reset the prohibition frame with permission to allow it.

7) *Climb the ladder of meaning.* Once you are at the top, blow out the whole network of meta-levels and meanings using the ecology questions.

Thinking about Thinking

If you start with some strong negative meaning about some trigger, and perpetuate that thinking for months or years, you create an unconscious automatic "program" within yourself. That's how you create semantic reactions and install thought viruses. In that way you can now unthinkingly react even though a situation no longer calls for that reaction. Now you can become reactive in many ways that are detrimental to your best interests. When you realize this, you can change the old automatic and unconscious programs. You can *correct the old semantic reactions.* Do that by *thinking anew and afresh* as you establish a new semantic response that's more appropriate, relevant, and empowering for your life.

End of the Chapter Notes

1. This is a major theme in Alfred Korzybski's *Science and Sanity.* See pages 357, 404, 424.

Chapter 25

THINKING
IN THE META PLACE

*"We don't just passively perceive the world, we actively generate it.
The world we experience comes as much, if not more,
from the inside-out as from the outside-in."*
Anil Seth, Neuro-scientist

"The longest journey is the journey inward."
Dag Hammarskjöld

W e have traditionally described *the place where you think* as your "mind." And the synonyms we use for "mind"—"consciousness," "awareness," and even "cognition." We use these noun-like words (actually nominalizations) to describe *where* we think. *Thinking* obviously occurs, somewhere and somehow, *inside* ourselves—mostly in the brain, but also throughout the whole body. It occurs in our mind-body system.

Thinking clearly is not an external thing, it does *not* occur *outside* of our nervous systems/ brain functioning. Instead it occurs within ourselves at a *higher level* to the data that we bring in from the outside. Because of that I have used the phrase *the Meta Place* to describe mind or consciousness. The book by that title describes this place where thinking occurs and provides a way to actually visualize the thinking (or mind) that creates it.[1]

Your Perceptual World
Now if *thinking* occurs *inside,* then we are mostly conscious, not of

thinking, but of perceiving. When we wake up in the morning we perceive all of the things outside of ourselves which are around us—the bedroom, our clothes, the walls and doors of our house or apartment. As we go to the kitchen, we perceive the refrigerator, stove, table, food, etc. We may perceive other people in the house, we may perceive the clock and how much time we have, we may turn on the television to catch up on the news, traffic, weather, etc.

Our thinking about all of that is actually *perceiving.* It is our *perceptual world,* not our thinking world. It is a mixture of what is "out there" in terms of sensory information and what and how you are perceiving that data. Precisely because you cannot perceive it all—there is just far, far too much data out there to process, you selectively focus on some things and ignore other things. And yes, your perceptions are also highly influenced by your thinking—what you think is important (what you value), what you have learned to focus on (your thinking habits, now automatic programs), what you are aware of about yourself at any given moment (your health, job, relationships, money, etc.).

Your *perceptual world* is your link between the inside and outside worlds. As a mixture of both, it is conditional and dependent on many things—your learning history, your meanings, your values, your relationships, etc. Your perceptual world is comprised of the ways that you have *learned to think* over the years of your life. The NLP model that details the many ways that we have, or can, learn to think is the Meta-Programs Model. This model describes your mental, emotional, volitional, and semantic filters.[2]

Yet that's not all there is about your *perceptual world*. You also perceive from various positions—self, other, meta, and system. As you develop over the years of your life, you learn the first perceptual position of *self.* You see, hear, feel, and sense the world from out of your own eyes, ears, and skin. Around seven years of age, you can begin to take the second perceptual position of *others* as your thinking brain develops enough so that you can begin to imagine what things must look like from another person's perceptive. This does not create true empathy, but it is a step in that direction.

Third perceptual position doesn't occur until after puberty, and sometimes much later, as you learn to use your self-reflexivity to step back from a relationship and see it from a pure observational point-of-view, a *meta*

perspective.   Systems thinking (synergizing) comes later as a highly conceptual way to perceive things—to perceive layers of contexts and systems of interactive variables at play.

Nor are we done yet! In terms of *points-of-view* that you can take in your perceiving, we can perceive things from a great many imaginary positions: from the past, the future, from your dog or cat, from historical figures, etc. In fact, the range of perceptual positions that you can conceptualize is infinite. And because it is a function of your creativity, you can create all sorts of perceptual filters.

Beyond the Perceptual World— The Meta World
Perceptual thinking is the process by which you gather information from the world "out there" and bring it inside. At the same time, perceptual thinking is mostly learned and is greatly influenced by your previous internal thinking. As noted in the introductory chapters on what thinking is, and how it develops, true *thinking* begins with your representations—how you *code* the outside data and *hold it in mind.* From there your thinking graduates to *drawing conclusions* as you develop ideas—"beliefs" about things. You *conceive* ideas that give you new ways to think about things. In fact, you build up a whole conceptual world within your mind. In that way, you populate your Meta Place with your own unique content.

As noted through the chapters on the constructive and executive thinking powers, you build up hierarchies of thoughts—layers of beliefs about beliefs (belief systems), values about values (value systems), meanings about meanings, etc. This is what is in your Meta Place—it is a world. It is *your world* that results from your *meaning-making.* You create your own semantic world as you try to make sense of yourself, others, and life. And as you create that semantic world in your Meta Place, it is your *neuro-semantic world of meanings* which, in turn, generates your emotions, your responses, your habits of patterns, in a world, your programs for functioning.

A Visit to the Meta Place
The Meta Place is first of all *where* your thinking takes place. And as it takes place there, because you "hold in mind" what you're thinking (the content), the Meta Place is where you build up your mental maps about things. And then, whatever you map as your understanding about things, becomes your programs for functioning.

All of that is pretty obvious and fairly easy to understand. What makes all of this tremendously complicated are all of the intervening variables that enter into the fray. First, *the variable of fallibility.* Yes, you perceive and think, and whatever you perceive and think you pretty much assume is true and real. Eventually you learn that *your thinking is fallible.* You not only can, but you do make many mistakes as you grow up and learn to think clearly, accurately, properly, and critically.

Shockingly, this means that *thinking clearly is **not** an automatic process built into the system.* You can think wrong and not realize it! We all do. The solution is to learn *how to think about your thinking* (one of the central purposes of this book).

A second variable that complicates thinking is emotions. Throughout this book and especially in the chapter on "Emotions for Thinking," I have quoted the proverb, "As you think, so you feel." That basic theme is also the heart of Cognitive Psychology. One of the first implications of this is that emotions make sense. To discover how an emotion makes sense, simply track it back to the thinking from which it came. Emotions also make sense given the neurology from which they come. That's why *your emotional state strongly influences how you think.* If you are not in the right state for handling certain information, or relating with someone, you will not be doing your best thinking.

That suggests *a third key variable: your health and well-being.* After all, what your nervous systems and brain do in *thinking* comes out of, and is powerfully influenced by, your bodily health, energy, vitality, and well-being. We all know that. Come down with a cold or get the flu and notice what happens to the quality of your thinking! It is significantly reduced.

Your Meta Place is not merely or solely a *mental* place, it is simultaneously and inevitably a full *mind-body-emotion-neurological place.* And there are many more influential variables that affect the quality of your thinking. There is the state of your relationships, your finances, your career, your friends, your spiritual life, your hobbies, and on and on. Thinking is influenced by a great many factors, and *how you think* about each of these factors, the meanings you attribute to them—those meanings set up the highest programs in your Meta Place either supporting you to do quality thinking or undermining your ability.

The Ultimate Test for Your Meta Place
Now given that fallibility is built in and inevitable, and that there are many other variables that can undermine good quality thinking, how can you know or test that your thinking and meaning-making is good, accurate, true, and effective?   Given that all of your thinking is your unique mental *mapping of the territory,* and "the map is not the territory," then the only test is that of practicality.   Does it work?   Is it effective?

Whatever you have mapped about getting along with people, making money, surviving, finding your passion, showing love and compassion, figuring out how to create a company, etc., *does it work*?   When you follow your map, does it take you where you want to go?   Does your map lead you so that you can effectively navigate the part of the world that you have modeled and want to succeed in?

This is the ultimate test of thinking, of your Meta Place, of your ideas and beliefs—do they help you to succeed in reaching your goals in life?   Do they help you manage the developmental stages of life?   Do they enable you to learn effectively, cope with life's challenges, find meaningful and productive work, make a decent living, keep yourself healthy and fit, give you a peace of mind and serenity, enable you to love yourself and others?

From Fritz Perls, Virginia Satir, and Gregory Bateson, the NLP founders discovered what we call *the ecology questions.*
> "Is the map that you've created, and the responses that it generates in you, ecological?" "Does it bring out your best as a person?" "Does it enhance your well-being and sanity in the world?"

The ultimate test shows up in *what is produced outside* in the real world—that's the *outer game.*   Those games come from what is inside—the *inner game.*   This means that the key to success, to productivity, to effectiveness, to health and well-being is an *inside–out process.*   To win the outer game, you first have to win the inner game.   That's why we have to reverse the life orientation that we were all born with, and which most people still use.   We have to shift from an *outside–in* orientation to an *inside–out* orientation.   This explains why you have to first win the inner game, the thinking and meaning-making game, then the outer game is a cinch.[3]

Thinking in the Meta Place

For years Henry had been a corporate researcher, then prior to the pandemic, he moved from Thailand to Australia and went into business for himself as an entrepreneur. Afterwards as the pandemic shut down so many economies, his frustrations began to mount. First because of covid, then due to adjusting to a different culture, the uncertainty in the hospitality industry, having regrets about having left the home he knew, etc. As a result, Henry was in a state of high stress although that didn't really register with him. Instead his focus was on not sleeping well, waking up with a stiff neck and tight jaws, and his indecisiveness. His mind constantly spinning around about what to do. I began our conversation by asking, "So what do you want to achieve in this conversation?"

"I want some clarity so I can make-up my mind."

Like what?

"I'm asking myself, 'Do I move back? Do I stay here? About my future, my career, my kids, and other things happening in my life.'"

Is this in character with you? Are you typically indecisive?

"No, not at all. Most of the time I'm very decisive. People tell me that I always seem to make good decisions. It's just that now I can't concentrate, I'm not as motivated as before, I don't have any fire left. I don't think it's about age, but will I be at peace in 10 or 15 years?"

I want to interrupt you now ... before getting more information on the table. I've heard you ask yourself several questions, what is your answer?

"Well I feel that I'm just going back and forth on the pros and cons, and then I wonder, 'Can I deliver?' 'Can I start from ground zero again?'"

Ah, more questions! Yet I'm not hearing any answers.

"Hmmm. I guess you are right; I never noticed that before."

Henry, if we take money off the table, could you answer the question? ["Yes."] In that case, what would you decide?

"I'd go back home." [His voice was determined, unwavering, very definitive.]

You're sure?

"Absolutely!"

So what stops you?

"In corporates there is this mindset and the frame that anyone who passed 50 is basically out, it's hard to get another opportunity. I'm over 50, so am I able to do this again?"

And you're returning to corporate? ["No."] So while age may be a factor there, is it a factor as an entrepreneur? ["No, not really."] If that's the frame in the back of your mind which is causing your stress and tension, and all of this self-questioning and self-doubting, what are you now aware of."

"I think it's a bit of self-doubting and not being confident. It's like being a singer or a performer or artist who has been on the stage and then suddenly after five years wants to go back to the stage.

You made a similar move five years ago when you moved to Australia and built a successful business, and you now question yourself, 'Can I do it now?' And how do you relate to time?

> "I always want things to go fast, quick."

And if we expanded your time line, what if we doubled it?

> "Actually, we're not in a hurry to leave the country."

You just said, "We're *not* are actually in a hurry to leave..."

> "Yeah [pause], I thought I was, but now that I think about it, I'm not."

Great! Another question: How do you relate to money? How much dependency do you feel regarding money? Are you highly dependent on it or what?

> "Just moderate."

And how skilled are you in making money, how much trust do you have in yourself for making money?

> "No problem about that!"

So then, how long can you live forward without income at all?

> [Long silence as he was processing] "We could probably do that for up to a year."

You actually want to move back and you're resolutely confident about your ability to generate income. The problem seems to me to be your self-doubting. [Pause] What do you think? What if I give you a task to take away: every time you hear yourself ask yourself a question, 'What's wrong with me? Why am I doing this? Why am I rushing? Could this happen? Am I ready?' you take a moment to answer the question before you shoot more questions at yourself?

> "That's very true because when the question starts coming to my head, it just keep coming and coming and then it goes into spinning. I call it spinning because then your head starts to become more confused and you don't know what's the best option. ... The question keeps bouncing back and I don't answer it."

So now we know the structure of how you create so much of your stress and tension—*you ask self-doubting questions which you never answer!* So the questions just keep spinning around in your mind.

> "That's right. That's what I do and what I need to do is answer the question so that they don't spin or come bouncing back."

That he was asking himself self-doubting questions and that by not answering them, they sat there looped round and round in his head—that was the big insight for him. He didn't know that about himself. In his Meta Place, he had built up a self-doubting, self-questioning program that became a self-perpetuating program with no end, no exit. But once he knew it, he discovered a new freedom and power. He could change it!

Thinking about Thinking

The bottom line about thinking is that *thinking is everything in human experience.* What and how you think determines who you are, the quality of your life, and even the health of your neurology. It is that important in spite of the fact that it's common to hardly give any thought or time of day to our thinking. So while we take it for granted, it plays the most determining role in our lives— much more determining than almost anyone suspects. The time has come to realize that we all *think for a living,* and to live with more vitality and passion, we have to renew our ability to *think* truly and accurately, and able to think-about-our-thinking to keep it well adjusted in the face of changes in the real world.

End of the Chapter Notes

1. See the book, *The Meta Place: Exploring Your Mind's Inner Landscape* (2023).
2. See *Figuring Out People* (1997/ 2012). Also *New Meta-Programs* (2022) on the Shop.
3. See *Inside–Out: Empowered from Within* (2022). Also see *Inspiring the Heart* (2022); and *Winning the Inner Game* (2007).

Chapter 26

THINKING FOR A LIVING

"What lies behind us and what lies before us
are tiny matters compared to what lies within us"
Oliver Wendell Holmes

What does it mean to *think for a living*? The most obvious answer is that it refers to "knowledge workers" who literally think for a living. Increasingly more and more people are engaged in knowledge work and this trend will only continue. *Knowledge workers think for a living.* They get paid for their ideas, their ability to define and solve problems, for their thinking which brings more humanity, creativity, and vitality into organizations. For these reasons, we should make *thinking* our core competency—the most important expertise we can develop—since success in life in every area is contingent on effectively using one's mind. Do that and you will become a force to be reckoned with.

If we go a little deeper, *thinking for a living* refers to how every aspect of *living* a human life is governed by how we think. Because to be human is to think—what your brain is most fundamentally designed to do is to think, in that way you both survive and thrive. Via your brain, the thoughts you think become *the ideas* that govern your life, your sense of self, your quality of life, your successes and failures, in fact, everything human. No wonder for thousands of years, the ancient wisdom has been repeated, "As you think in your heart, so are you."

You think so that you can truly and fully *live*—that is, thrive with energy and vitality and feel fully alive in your mind and body. Yet, as you have discovered, good quality and accurate thinking does not occur automatically. You can, as many millions do, default on thinking and

escape from thinking. You can go on automatic to avoid the effort and responsibility of thinking. You can use your mind for the non-thinking substitutes of the real thing (the non-thinking activities, chapter 21).

Conversely, you can *volitionally choose* to truly think for a living. You can choose to put your brain to its full use and learn how to think effectively—with precision, accuracy, creativity, and energy. When you do this, *thinking becomes a great human adventure for you*. The proverb that says thinking determines *what and who you are* indicates that *how you think shapes your personality.* It shapes and influences your emotions, your speech, your behaviors, your skills and competencies. It is the determining influence regarding your success in business, in relationships, in your health and fitness, your longevity, your sanity, your mental well-being, and on and on. All of your creations and performances are expressions of your thinking. No wonder we say that *thinking is your most valuable asset.*

Conceptualizing the "heart" as the thinking center in ancient Hebrew scriptures, an old Proverb speaks to this. The "heart" was not the feeling center, certainly not the way we use the term, it was the cognitive center.[1]
> "Keep your heart with all vigilance; for from it flow the springs of life."
> (Proverbs 4:23)

Translation: Pay full and intense attention to your thoughts/ your mind. Epistemologically it is your life-spring. The full range of thinking skills— the essential, eureka, and executive thinking skills—enable you to become a *quality thinker, a critical thinker, and a creative thinker.* You can become *a great thinker.* You can, literally, think for a living in multiple ways.

When you make a commitment to *think for a living*, you can then embrace, acknowledge, and accept any thought as "just a thought." This does something powerful; it counteracts the power of repression which does tremendous psychological damage. That's because when you repress, you become your own worst enemy. You create a standing order, as it were, forbidding you to face and deal with certain things.

The big misunderstanding about *repression* is the idea that what we repress are emotions. Actually, when a person represses, it is not primarily the emotion that's repressed, but the *thinking* which creates the emotion. As energy activated and going out, we *feel* and *express* the emotion in some

form or way. In that way the emotion is felt, the energy "goes out" (ex-motion, motion going out).

> "It is not emotions as such that are repressed. An emotion as such cannot be repressed; if it is not *felt,* it is not an emotion. Repression is always directed at thoughts. What is blocked or repressed, in the case of emotions, is either evaluations that would lead to emotions or identifications of the nature of one's emotions." (Nathaniel Branden, 1969, p. 79)

If what we ultimately repress are *thoughts,* then what we block and inhibit are certain ideas that we forbid, reject, hate, etc. In repressing, we establish a standing order to inhibit ourselves from *knowing* and being *aware* of certain memories, feelings, and ideas. We institute a mental blockade against forbidden subjects, to *not-think.* The result is that we subvert our very ability to think about ourselves, the world, etc., and what's going on in our Meta Place.

Thinking for Living an Unleashed Life
How much of your brainpower is still largely untapped? We have all heard the saying that "we only use 10% of our potentials." While there's no scientific evidence for that statistic, we intuitively know that we have much more potential than we have activated. You have more thinking potential than you can unleash. How ready are you to tap into it, develop it, and unleash it? If you are tired of living in a mindless way and ready for mindfulness, critical thinking, and effective problem-solving, you now have the tools for doing that—namely, the *essential, the eureka, and the executive thinking skills.*

Thinking for a living brings up what may sound like a silly question. I'll ask it anyway, "Why do you have a brain?" The obvious answer is to *think thoughts.* More specifically, it is to think *your* thoughts, to construe the events of your life in a way that inspires you, supports your potentials, and gives you a lease on life. No wonder then that using your brain for your most effective thinking is an incredibly important activity. The quality of your life ultimately comes down to *the quality of your thinking.*

Thinking for Collaborative Living
In thinking, the first stage of development is learning how to use your own brain for your own original thinking. That's where we all start. As children we first used our brain to learn from others. We began learning by hearing

and trying on the thoughts of parents and teachers. Because children, being innocently naive, and have no previous knowledge, they easily and inevitably *try on the thoughts* they are given. Later they learn to question those thoughts, doubt them, and put them to the test. That enables them to decide for themselves what to think.

In that way, we "make up our own minds" about things. In that way, you learn how to think *your* own thoughts. Now you can resist the temptation to go along with the crowd and submit to what is politically correct to think. Yet all of that isn't the end, it's just the beginning.

The next step is to learn to *use* the thoughts of others as more than just a beginning place for your own thoughts, it is to use the thinking of others *to scaffold* your own thinking. This is *collaborative thinking* at its best. When a group of people can do this, that group can become more intelligent and creative than the most intelligent and creative person in the group. As a group, we can develop insights that are more than the sum of everyone's thoughts. We can, together, become much better thinkers together than alone or apart.

Because we all know different things and have had different experiences, as adults we can scaffold each other's thinking. In this way we help others learn what we have learned and we learn what they have learned. By engaging in dialogue (*dia-* through; *logos-* meaning), we take on each other's thoughts, play with them, add to them. Then as *meaning* flows out from each person, back to each person and *through* each person, everyone's thinking becomes richer and fuller.

If you think for a living, aim to develop several *thinking partners.* Find people who are your equal in terms of your ability to actually *think*—to consider, question, doubt, detail, distinguish, organize, create, learn, etc. Then with them, as you take on a subject together to explore, you can do the *thinking dance*. You can dance from the essential to the eureka and to the executive thinking skills.

Next, develop one or more thinking partners—people with whom you can think aloud as you use two or more brains to work over an idea. If each thinking partner has developed the thinking skills, even if their education is completely in different areas, they will be able to support and enrich each other's thinking. Because it is easy to get stuck in one's own thinking due

to blind-spots and biases, thinking partners will often have the keys to release each other from such thought prisons.

Thinking as a Profession — Coaching
In the 1990s, a new profession arose. Unlike the other helping professions (e.g., consulting, teaching, training, therapy, etc.), coaching started from the most surprising of premises. It started from the idea that *people are their own best experts.* And by scaffolding their thinking with the thinking and communication skills of a professional coach, a client can find his own answers—her own expertise. To that end, a coach resists giving advice, telling, informing, controlling, etc. Instead, the coach focuses on empowering the client to find her own answers—to think for himself.

To do this, *a coach thinks with a client.* A coach enables a client to think in new and unexpected ways by the questions she asks, the processes he uses, the challenges, frames, tasking, etc. In coaching, clients *learn to think out-loud*, explore unexpected areas, turn the light on to expose blind spots, answer unthinkable questions. While there's certainly a healing and therapeutic aspect in coaching, what mostly creates transformation in coaching is the discovery of new insights which revise one's thinking. It is *the experiential discoveries* that clients "take away" from the coaching sessions—discoveries that they integrate into their everyday life.[2]

When you *think for a living,* you can do quality thinking, you can "think long and hard" about something. You can take a thought and hold it in mind, follow it where it takes you, turn it upside down to explore it, look at it from multiple perspectives, reverse it, turn it inside-out, combine it with diverse ideas, develop a formula for it, run an experiment, change the words, and on and on.

The bottom line of coaching: *An effective coach helps you think.* She enables you to develop your own thinking capacities. He will show you the way to think-through an understanding and/or decision. The coaching process is itself an adventure in thinking-and-emoting as you access your most enhancing states. The coach not only thinks for a living, but empowers others to think, enabling them to fully live. Tim Gallaway, the grandfather of the field of Coaching, in *The Inner Game of Work* (2000) wrote:
> "In sports, performance seemed to be best when the thinking mind was still. But at work, most of us need to think. Not only do we need to think about *what* we are doing, we need to think about *why*." (p. 119)

Thinking for Living a Change
The art of thinking enables you to now *orient your thinking* in truly productive and creative ways. Your thinking can now begin to unleash your potentials and empower you to live a full and meaningful life. By claiming your full powers of thinking, you now have a new *orientation* by which you can make changes in your perspective, emotions, behaviors, language, ways of relating and keep the change.

In unleashing your thinking powers, your thinking will become more and more authentic. Then with more integrity and congruency, *your thinking* will have an authenticity enabling you to be true to yourself and your values. Your fresh thinking will keep nurturing and supporting you to stay open and alive to the ever-changing world.[3]

I began this book by quoting Peter Drucker's statement, *"Thinking is very hard work. And management fashions are a wonderful substitute for thinking."* What I did not mentioned was the context for that. He said that when asked why managers in organizations fall for bad advice so often. Why so many bad decisions, failed mergers (70%), etc.? The answer: *Poor thinking.* It comes from deferring thinking in favor of depending on this month's management fashions!

Thinking about Thinking
Think about all of the things that will happen when *your thinking is right.* When your thinking is right —you will live right which makes for well-being. You will avoid deceptions. You will be able to plot a pathway to success in the area you choose. You will be able to manage your emotions and your health. You will develop loving relationships. You will communicate with grace and power. You will create all sorts of wealth as you add value to whatever you touch.

When you think for a living, you will not live by reacting. Having unplugged your buttons and cleaned out thought viruses, you will be your own person and not controlled by the media, by what is politically correct, or the old myths of your culture. You will be truly free to live a self-actualizing life.

In this way we can together *change the world—one thinker at a time.* To change the world, we begin with ourselves as we learn the art of clear and critical thinking. Then we invite others into the thinking adventure.

Together, with top quality thinking, we will then focus on solving the problems that have challenged humanity for centuries. The *art of thinking* is our *ultimate power* for changing the world for the better.

End of the Chapter Notes

1. For a full description of the psychological language that was used in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament as well as the Greek text of the New Testament, see *Emotions: Sometimes I Have Them/ Sometimes They Have Me* (1985). It is on the Shop.

2. See *The Meta-Coaching System* (2015). There are now 16 books that cover the entire range of Meta-Coaching skills.

3. See *Coaching Change* (2004/2015).

APPENDICES

THE META-MODEL QUESTIONS

Deletions:

    1) When specifically? Where specifically? About what?   Simple Deletion
      How do you know?

    2) Compared to who or what? [Greater] than what?   Comparative Deletion

    3) Specifically how does that process [verb] work?   Unspecified Verb

    4) Specifically who are you talking about? About whom?   Unspecified Noun

Generalizations:

    5) Does X always happen? For everyone? Never?   Universal Quantifier
      Is there ever an exception?

    6) If you must, should, have to, what determines that?   Modal Operator
      If you could, can, may, what determines that?

    7) If you can't, what stops you from Y?
      What would happen if you did? What would happen if you did not?

    8) What is the verb hidden inside that term?   Nominalization
      X sounds like a noun, but is not tangible, so what is the verb?

    9) Says who, when, and under what circumstances?   Lost Performatives

    10) Is the situation an either/or situation? What if it were both/and? Either-Or

    11) What does X mean extensionally? What is the VAK?
                                      Over/Under Defined Terms
      As you think about X, what do you see extending out in the person's actions?

Distortions:

    12) How does X lead to Y?   Cause-Effect
      How does X [actions] cause Y [responses]?

    13) How specifically do you know that person-X is thinking/feeling Y?
      How do you know that she feels X?   Mind-Reading
      How do you know that he has Y intentions?

    14) How is it that X is equal to, the same as, Y?   Complex Equivalence
      What does X mean to you? What do you think X is?

    15) What are you assuming in saying that?   Presupposition
      What has to be true for you to say X? What is X based on?

    16) Is X and Y part of the same system?   Delusional Verbal Splits
      Are you treating X and Y as if separate and unconnected?

    17) What does X actually refer to?   Pseudo-Words

    18) How is it that you are X? Are you over-identifying with X?   Identification

    19) At what level are you using X-term? [1st, 2nd, 3rd ?]   Multi-Ordinality

    20) How does X-metaphor relate to Y?   Metaphor
      What are you comparing as you say X is like Y?

    21) When you say his criticism is infinite, what does infinite mean?
                                         Static Words

HOW TO TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOUR BRAIN

1) Breathe! Your brain needs lots of oxygen; 20% of oxygen goes to the brain. Do what you can to get blood delivered to every cell in your brain.

2) Exercise: aim for "healthy mind in a healthy body."

3) Sleep: your brain transfers short-term memory to long-term memory during sleep as it engages in working through problems. Aim for 7 to 9 hours.

4) Detox: eliminate toxins inside and outside which can damage the brain.

5) Think/ Learn: engage brain in stimulating activities. Read, reflect, debate, solve puzzles. "Nurture your mind with great thoughts, for you will never go higher than you think." Benjamin Disraeli.

6) Play: children are ferocious learners because they play; play with ideas.

7) Reflect: use solitude to reflect, read, write, etc. Reading makes you full, speaking makes you articulate, and writing makes you precise.

8) Reduce stress: stress reduces brain functioning; can't think well under stress, stress hormones have toxic effect, leads to death of neurons. Control your blood pressure.

9) Love: be compassionate, caring, engage in collaborative communications. Love your work.

10) Eat well: avoid junk food, sugar, flour, etc.

Exercise Your Brain

Read: reading perks up the brain, increases cerebral blood and metabolism. Get your daily cognitive stimulation!

Learn: learning turns on the hippocampus, activates neurons, modifies synapses, and deliberate learning and exploring develop mental vigor.

Generating: turns on synapses formed in the past, sends signals like bolts of lightning and strengthens the connections.

Teaching: sends synapses into over-drive because you are making distinctions, rising up to a mental challenge **Everything we have been doing has been creating the foundation for critical thinking.** By definition critical thinking: The ability to think clearly and rationally, to reflect, to identify, construct, and evaluate arguments, to detect inconsistencies and mistakes in reasoning, to solve problems systemically, to identify the relevance of ideas, to create alternatives, to challenge premises and conclusions. "Disciplined thinking that's clear, rational, open-minded, and informed by evidence and reflective."

WHAT IS CRITICAL THINKING?

"The unexamined life is not worth living." Socrates

1) "Informed by evidence"

Thinking starts with the empirical, the sensory-based. Base it upon what you can see, hear, sense, smell, taste. Test it to demonstrate that something exists and can be identified, influenced, changed, monitored, etc. Make it fact-based. What are the facts? What is the evidence? How do you know that? Where did you get that information from? Do intelligence gathering or "due diligence" to make sure that you are not missing critical information. Learn to use the Meta-Model to question any statement to move it from being ill-formed to being well-formed.

2) "Open-minded"

First *consider* and then make up your mind *after* you explore and examine the evidence. Stay open to possibilities. Question, explore, give other possible interpretations a chance to make their case. Do not pre-judge the case or have an agenda to prove. Instead, be skeptical about easy answers. Use the know-nothing state to use your innocent eye.

3) "Rational"

Use reasoning to figure things out, not rationalize. Reason from X to Y and see if you can find the reasons, explanations, causation factors, etc. that will make clear what is happening and why. Reasoning is one of your central faculties for thinking. "Agreeable to reason; reasonable; sensible; using reason or logic in thinking out a problem, in accordance with the principles of logic or reason; having or exercising reason, sound judgment, or good sense; being in or characterized by full possession of one's reason; sane; lucid."

> **Reason** launched the age of science, took us out of the jungle, and the dark ages, and into the advances of medicine, architecture, technology, etc. "... Reason as the ability to think and make inferences in an orderly, logical manner; rationality as the quality of thought and behavior that comes from adapting reason to a personal and social context" (Antonio R. Damasio, 1994, p. 269).

4) "Clear"

Clarify the factors, elements, and component variables of an experience. Thinking that does not generate clarity is confusing, convoluted thinking, confuses factors and contains erroneous ideas that do not produce results. You are clear when you know what to do, what steps to take, how to reach your objective, make critical distinctions.

5) "Disciplined"

Structure your thinking so you can move out step-by-step sequentially as you achieve and understanding. Be strategic and orderly. An undisciplined approach will prevent you from achieving an outcome. Exercise your thinking skills so your thinking does not become flabby or fuzzy thinking.

6) "Reflective"

As you go meta to think about your thinking, you reflect on your thinking. "Critical thinking is thinking about your thinking with the intent to improve it." Dr. Richard Paul. Step back to gain the distance you need to examine the content and context, and validity of claims and explanations of your thinking.

"Thinking critically involves thinking logically and having at one's disposal the capacity for analyzing the validity and soundness (or strength and cogency) of arguments and explanations." (Galen Foresman, et. al., 2017, p. 308)

Thinking Criteria

This understanding of critical thinking enables us to specify good thinking criteria.

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1) Clarity — rather than confusion.
Is the information clear? Can I represent it in sensory-based terms (empirically) in the theater of my mind? Is it clear visually, auditorially, and kinesthetically?

2) Accurately Precise — rather than Vague.
Is the information accurate? What is the source of the facts? How well established are the facts? What level of precision do the facts have? How do you measure or quantify the information?

3) Reliability and Trustworthy — rather than Unreliable.
Is the information reliable? Is the source of the information reliable? How much trust can you put into the information?

__ Clarity
__ Accurate
__ Precise
__ Relevant
__ Thorough
__ Rational
__ Pragmatic
__ Significant
__ Fair

4) Relevance — rather than Irrelevant.
Is this information relevant? How does this fact or data relate to my objective? When you ask these questions, you are doing a "relevancy challenge."

5) Thoroughness — rather than Superficial.
Is this information thorough? Is it rich and full? Is it simplistic? Is it reductionistic? Is it systemic and takes in the whole system?

6) Logically Reasonable (Rational) — rather than Irrational.
Does this information make sense? Does it seem reasonable? What kind of reasons and reasoning make it rational? How well does the information fit together? Is it well-integrated and of a whole? Does the person reason linearly, in circles, systemically, etc.?

7) Practical and Pragmatic — rather than Impractical.
Is this information useful? If so, then useful for what? In what way is it useful? How practical is it?

8) Meaningfully Significant — rather than Meaninglessness.
Is the information meaningful to you? What is the meaning? How much meaning does it provide? Is it semantically loaded in a negative way?

9) Ethically Fair and Equitable — rather than Unethical.
Is the information ethical? Is it fair and just for all? Does it represent a vested interest? Does someone have a vested interest in promoting it, or hiding it? Does it promote equality and fairness?

Cognitive Distortions

"The problem with thinking is that it causes you to develop illusions." Taleb (2004, p. 185)

In the development of *thinking,* we go through *stages of development.* When we are children, we think as children. Such thinking is appropriate *for children.* When used by adults, they are mostly *distortions.* With them we map reality in ways that are distorted and which therefore create emotional misery for adults.

Childish Thinking Patterns *First ways of Thinking*	**Adult Thinking Patterns** *Potential Upgrades for Thinking*
1. Over-generalizing Jumping to conclusions	Contextual thinking
2. All-or-nothing thinking (E/O)	Both-and thinking; in-between thinking
3. Labeling (Epithets)	Reality-testing thinking
4. Blaming	Responsibility thinking
5. Mind-reading	Current sensory information
6. Prophesying	Tentative predictive thinking
7. Emotionalizing	Witness thinking or non-emotionalizing
8. Personalizing	Objective thinking, 2nd 3rd perceptual T.
9. Awfulizing	Meta-cognitive thinking, Pseudo-word T.
10. Demandingness; Should-ing	Choice thinking
11. Filtering	Perspective thinking
12. Impossibility thinking (Can't)	Possibility thinking
13. Discounting	Appreciative thinking
14. Identifying	Dis-identify

Solution: *Identify* the cognitive distortion and *replace* it with a more adult (mature) way of thinking. To do this requires that you are *aware of* your cognitive fallibility, *accepting* that you can and do make mistakes, and *open and capable* of adjusting.

> "When I was a child, I thought like a child;
> When I became an adult, I put away childish thinking." (I Cor. 13)

The Cognitive Biases in 7 Categories— 7 Things to Distrust!

We *think* using these biases and while this often works, none are ever absolutely true or useful, always check each. Never absolutely trust, but always doubt! Be skeptical.

1) Understanding Bias

    Pattern Bias
    Hindsight Bias
    Over-Simplifying Bias

Distrust Your Understandings
They are extremely limited and flawed.

2) Availability Bias

    Short-term thinking bias
    Anchoring Bias
    Attribution Bias
    Attention Blindness Bias
    Survivorship Bias
    Spectacular Bias

Distrust Available Information
Too circumstantial, unreliable, existing by accidents of time and space.

3) Confirmation Bias

    Expectation Bias
    Ownership Bias
    Selection Bias

Distrust Your Beliefs
They are beliefs, not facts and you can be easily fooled by them.

4) Consistency Bias (Coherence)

    Narrative Bias
    Causation Bias
    Status Quo Bias
    Past-Based Prediction Bias
    Substitution Bias

Distrust Consistency
It presupposes that there is no change or updates to knowledge.

5) Experiential Bias

    Self-Justification Bias
    Ego-Centric Bias
    Ease Bias
    Options Bias
    Results Bias
    Experiential Bias via Association

Distrust Your Experiences
They are far too subjective, personal, individual — and untrustworthy. Experiences are self-reinforcing.

6) Social Bias

    Authority Bias
    Groupthink Bias
    Not-Invented Here Bias
    Liking Bias

Distrust Your Groups
Every society and culture perpetuates itself, trying to reduce change.

7) Context Bias

    Ownership Bias
    Sunk-Cost Bias
    Contrast Effect Bias
    Scarcity Effect Bias
    Money Counting Bias

Distrust Contextual Content
The content of any given context, economics for example, depends on that context and are not universally true.

COGNITIVE FALLACIES

These are the thinking patterns which lead to false arguments, ways of reasoning based on false premises.

Emotional Reasoning

    1) Appeal to feelings (*arumentum ad passiones*): appeal to pity, sympathy, passion, concern, etc.

    2) Appeal to Fear (*Ad baculum*): or force, threat, danger, catastrophe, etc.

    3) Appeal to Ease. If X is easy, it must be right or true." "If it is hard, it must be wrong."

Personalizing

    1) Appeal to Character (*Ad Hominem*) attack the person, character, history, family, ethnic culture, etc.

    2) Appeal to Memory. If you remember something, it happened that way, memory cannot be mistaken.

Illogical Reasoning

    2) Appeal to Ill Logic (*Non Sequitur*), it does not follow, premise does not follow.

    5) Appeal to Ignorance: argue that since we don't know X, or have no knowledge of X, it must be true. "No proof against aliens, so they must exist." If can't disprove = proof!

    10) Appeal by Distracting, Red Herring. When unable to provide evidence or an answer, try to distract the speaker by focusing on other things.

    11) Appeal via Over-Simplification, Strawman Argument. Take weakest point of an argument or attribute some ridiculous point and then fight against it.

    12) Appeal to Whole/Part, Composition/Division. Argue from part to whole or whole to part. "Everyone has a mother, therefore humanity has a mother."

    13) Addition Fallacy. Link things via linear thinking. "If the way one person relates to another makes communication richer, adding another adds another third.

    14) Either/Or fallacy (Undistributed middle): Argument based on polar opposites, "Are you a success or a failure?"

    15) Consequence fallacy (*Post Hoc*) ("After this, therefore because of this"). "Because Y happened after X, therefore X causes Y."

    16) Base Rate Fallacy. Forgetting to take the base-rate of X into account and only using the immediate available information.

Social Reasoning Fallacies

    1) Bandwagon: Appeal to Popularity. "If a million people believe X, they can't be wrong."

    2) Appeal to Authority. Assuming a person in authority knows more things, are more right, are less often wrong.

    3) Tradition: Appeal to the Past or Precedence (*A priori*): Argument based on status quo— "It has always been this way."

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L. Michael Hall, Ph.D.

L. Michael Hall is a visionary leader in the field of NLP and Neuro-Semantics having been a modeler of human excellence since 1991. Searching out areas of human expertise, he continues to model the structure of that experience and then turn that information into models, patterns, training manuals, and books. With his several businesses, Michael is also an entrepreneur and an international trainer.

His doctorate is in the Cognitive-Behavioral sciences from Union Institute University. For two decades he worked as a psychotherapist in Colorado. When he found NLP in 1986, he studied and worked with Richard Bandler. Later when studying and modeling resilience, he developed the Meta-States Model (1994) that launched the field of Neuro-Semantics. He co-created the *International Society of Neuro-Semantics* (ISNS) with Dr. Bob Bodenhamer. Learning the structure of writing, he began writing and has written more than 60 books, many best sellers in the field of NLP.

Applying NLP to coaching, he created the Meta-Coach System. This was co-developed with Michelle Duval (2003-2007). He co-founded the Meta-Coach Foundation (2003), created the Self-Actualization Quadrants (2004) and launched the new Human Potential Movement (2005) which is now one of the Professional Tracks of Neuro-Semantics.

Regarding creativity, Dr. Hall has created a dozen major models in the field of NLP and Neuro-Semantics, hundreds of patterns, and including the serial books, a total of 107. He created a board game for learning Meta-Programs. He co-created the Neuro-Semantic and Meta-Coach communities and the NLP Leadership Summit.

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Books by L. Michael Hall, Ph.D.

NLP and Neuro-Semantics:
1) *Meta-States: Mastering the Higher Levels of Mind* (1995/ 2012).
2) *Dragon Slaying: Dragons to Princes* (1996 / 2000).
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Serial Books
Books written in weekly installments to the Neuro-Semantic community (Neurons), to the Meta-Coaches egroup (Morpheus), to the Neuro-Semantic

Trainers egroup (Framers). These are now PDF books on the Neuro-Semantic website. At the end of 2021, 39 volumes.

> **Neurons** began as the Meta-Reflections in 2008 and each year consists of another book. As of 2022 — 15 volumes.
> **Morpheus** began as the Meta-Coach Reflections in 2009. As of 2022, 14 volumes.
> **Framers** is the Trainers' Reflections which began in 2010. As of 2022 13 volumes.

Other books:

1) *Emotions: Sometimes I Have Them/ Sometimes They have Me* (1985)
2) *Motivation: How to be a Positive Influence in a Negative World* (1987)
3) *Speak Up, Speak Clear, Speak Kind* (1987)
4) *Millennial Madness* (1992), now *Apocalypse Then, Not Now* (1996).
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Communication Magic:

Neuro-Semantics as an Association

In 1996 Hall and Bodenhamer registered "Neuro-Semantics" and founded *The International Society of Neuro-Semantics* (ISNS) as a new approach to teaching, training, and using NLP. The objective was to take NLP, as a model and field, to a higher level in terms of professional ethics and quality. Today Neuro-Semantics is one of the leading disciplines and movements within NLP as it is pioneering many new developments and demonstrating a fresh creativity similar to what characterized NLP when it was new.

Dr. Hall is known as a prolific writer, having authored 60 books in the field of NLP, many of them best sellers through *Crown House Publications* (Wales, UK) and many of them translated into numerous languages: German, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, Russian, Japanese, Chinese, Arabic, Norwegian, Portuguese, etc.
www.neurosemantics.com

The Meta-Coaching System

As a complete and comprehensive coaching system, the *Meta-Coaching System* began in 2001 when L. Michael Hall, Ph.D. modeled four expert coaches. He then applied the Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) and Neuro-Semantic models to the burgeoning field of Coaching. As a systemic model, the Meta-Coaching System enables a professional Coach to answer the question: *How do you know what to do, when to do it, with whom to do it, how to do what you're doing, and why?*

When you can think strategically as a Coach, you will be able to recognize where you are with a client and what to do. Having a theoretical model that answers the *why are you doing that?* question saves your coaching from being a grab-bag of tricks so you don't have to coach-by-the-seat-of-your-pants.

To meet this rigorous criteria, the Meta-Coaching System is based on eight models—models which are based in Cognitive-Behavioral, Developmental, and Self-Actualization psychologies. The design is to give Meta-Coaching a credible scientific basis. Then as a coach you will not fall back on what you "feel like" on a certain day, your "intuitions" (which may be your own unresolved issues), or some trick that you have picked up on a weekend training.

Today Meta-Coaching standards are the highest in the field of Coaching as it offers specific behavioral benchmarks for every one of the 50 coaching skills. It also has developed a Benchmarking Intangibles Model for how to generate rigorous benchmarks for any value or skill. The Meta-Coaching System also has an accountability structure to the ethics and standards which governs every licenced Meta-Coach. There are now 16 books detailing the curriculum of Meta-Coaching, and several more in the works. The Meta-Coaching System is inclusive of other systems as Meta-Coaches around the world in 70 countries are often on the board of ICF and many other Coach training programs. Trainings in Meta-Coaching occur every year dozens of times in every continent.

Meta-Coaching Series

In the field of Coaching, *the Meta-Coaching System* is a leading model in framing the process of effective coaching in a highly systematic way. The design is to provide a Professional Coach with the ability to know *what* to do, *when* to do it, *how* to do it, with whom to do it, and *why* to do it. The design also is to establish the field of coaching in the unique psychology for psychologically healthy people who want to change and develop, namely, *Self-Actualization Psychology*. To achieve that Dr. Hall has committed to writing the models and processes in a series of books that comprise the curriculum of Meta-Coaching.

Meta-Coaching Series

Volume	Title	Model
I:	Coaching Change	Axes of Change Model
II:	Coaching Conversations	Facilitation Model
III:	Unleashed: Self-Actualization	Self-Actualization Quadrants
IV:	Self-Actualization Psychology	Self-Actualization Volcano
V:	Achieving Peak Performance	Meaning–Performance Axes
VI:	Unleashing Leadership: Self-Actualizing Leaders & Companies	Axes of Leadership
VII:	The Crucible	The Crucible Model
VIII:	Benchmarking Intangibles	Benchmarking Model
IX:	Systemic Meta-Coaching	The Matrix Model
X:	Group & Team Meta-Coaching	Group Trust Spiral
XI:	Executive Coaching	
XII:	Political Coaching	
XIII:	The Meta-Coaching System	
XIV:	Get Real: Unleashing Authenticity	
XV:	Inside-Out Persuasion	
XVI:	Creative Solutions	The Neuro-Semantic Precision Funnel

Meta-Coaching also based on the following Books:

Figuring Out People (2006)	The Meta-Programs Model
Secrets of Personal Mastery (1997)	The Meta-States Model
Winning the Inner Game (2007)	The Meta-States Model
The Matrix Model (2003)	Neuro-Semantic Systems Model
Communication Magic (1999)	The Meta-Model of Language

THINKING FOR HUMANS
The Art of Mindful Awareness

Above and beyond the world that you live in and deal with, there is another world that you carry in your head—a mental model of the world. Because it is *above and beyond* the outside world, it is your *mind* or *Meta Place.* Actually this world in your head is the only world that you know and ever will know. It is in this world that *you think.* But how well do you think? Is your thinking creating a life of love, joy, and productivity for you?

Thinking is the most human thing that you do. It is the lifeblood of everything human: communication, sense of self, sanity, understanding, belief, hope, and love, creativity, innovations, well-being, etc. While some people think clearly, precisely, accurately, creatively, most people are poor thinkers. They constantly think themselves into painful states of stress, fear, guilt, anger, being a victim, etc. They think themselves into unproductive habits (over-eating, drugging, gambling, etc.) or into destructive social habits (criticizing, blaming, gossiping, competing, etc.).

Thinking for Humans focuses on the thinking skills or powers that transform your thinking making it clear and precise, critical and creative, productive and inspirational. As you learn to *think about your thinking*, you will unleash your potentials for your best performances. With meta-thinking skills, you will solve problems, banish pseudo-problems, create inspirational meanings for yourself and others, become a leader of minds and hearts, and much more. If *the quality of your thinking* determines the quality of your life, what is the level of quality does your thinking habits reveal?

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