

Thinking For a Change

By: John C. Maxwell

This study guide was developed for AffordableCeus.Com for use with the textbook; Thinking For A Change. The content, concepts, and ideas presented in this guide are those of the author(s) and are credited as such. Material Reproduction is not allowed and is a Federal crime.

Understanding the Value of Good Thinking

What one thing do all successful people have in common? What one thing separates those who go to the top from those who never seem to get there? The answer: Good Thinking! Those who embrace good thinking as a lifestyle understand the relationship between their level of thinking and their level of progress. They also realize that to change their lives, they must change their thinking.

Changing from negative to positive thinking isn't always easy, especially if you have a difficult time with change. For some, it's a life-long struggle. Do you know what most people's number one challenge is when it comes to making positive personal changes? It's their feelings! They want to change, but they don't know how to get past their emotions. But there is a way to do it. If you are willing to change your thinking, you can change your feelings, you can change your actions, and changing your actions---based on good thinking---can change your life.

Most people in our culture look to educational systems to teach them and their children to think. Many educators would have us believe that good grades lead to a better life, and that the more formal education you have, the more successful you will be. Yet education often can't deliver on such promises. I'm sure you know highly educated people who are highly unsuccessful? Haven't you met college professors with Ph.D.s who cannot manage their lives effectively? And conversely, don't you know of dropouts who have become very successful? I can think of some: Bill gates, Thomas Edison, Federico Fellini, and Steve Jobs. The problem with most educational institutions is that they try to teach people what to think, not how to think.

Knowledge alone is not power. Knowledge has value only in the hands of someone who has the ability to think well.

Take a look at just a few reasons why good thinking is so important:

1. Good thinking creates the foundation for good results. It may seem obvious that the quality of people's thinking leads to the quality of their results; I believe most people would agree that, "poor thinking produces negative progress, average thinking produces no progress, good thinking produces some progress, and great thinking produces great progress.
2. Good thinking increases your potential. Leadership ability determines a person's level of effectiveness. In other words, in any endeavor with people, your leadership is the "Lid". If you're a poor leader, your lid is low. If you are a great leader, your lid is high. I believe that your thinking has a similar impact on your life. Your thinking is the "Lid" of your potential. If you're an excellent thinker, then you have excellent potential.
3. Good thinking produces more good thinking; IF you make it a habit. The good news is that no matter how complicated life gets or how difficult problems may seem, good thinking can make a difference---if you make it a consistent part of your life. The more you engage in good thinking, the more good thoughts will come to you. Success comes to those who habitually do things that unsuccessful people don't do. Achievement comes from the habit of good thinking.

Realize the Impact of Changed Thinking

It's easy to believe that unsuccessful people need to change their thinking; but how about people who have achieved some degree of success? Can individuals go to the next level without changing the way they think?

It's hard to overstate the value of changing your thinking. Good thinking can do many things for you: generate revenue, solve problems, and create opportunities. It can take you to a whole new level---personally and professionally. It really can change your life. Things to consider are: changed thinking is not automatic, changed thinking is difficult, changed thinking is worth the investment, and changed thinking is the best gift you can give others. Learning to think better is a great investment in

yourself---but it's also the greatest present you can give someone else, because it represents the gift of unlimited potential.

Master the Process of Intentional Thinking

Good thinkers are always in demand. A person who knows "*how*" may always have a job, but the person who knows "*why*" will always be his boss. Good thinkers solve problems, they never lack ideas that can build an organization, and they always have hope for a better future. Those who develop the process of good thinking can rule themselves---even while under an oppressive ruler or in other difficult circumstances.

Becoming a good thinker isn't overly complicated. It's a discipline. And like most disciplines, it can be cultivated and refined. That's why I want to teach you the process that I've used to discover and develop good thoughts:

Step number one: Find a place to think your thoughts. When I found a place to think my thoughts, my thoughts found a place in me.

Step number two: Find a place to shape your thoughts. As you shape your thoughts, you find out whether an idea has potential. You learn what you have and you also learn some things about yourself.

Step number three: Find a place to stretch your thoughts. If you come upon great thoughts and spend time mentally shaping them, don't think you're done and can stop there. If you do you will miss some of the most valuable aspects of the thinking process.

Step number four: Find a place to land your thoughts. Any idea that remains only an idea doesn't make a great impact. The real power of an idea comes when it goes from abstraction to application. If you want your thoughts to make an impact, you need to land them with others so that they can someday be implemented.

Step number five: Find a place to fly your thoughts. If you can develop the discipline of good thinking and turn it into a lifetime habit, then you will be

productive all of your life. Once you've created, shaped, stretched and landed your thoughts, then flying them can be fun and easy.

Here are six steps to becoming a good thinker.

1. Expose yourself to good input.
2. Expose yourself to good thinkers. (be around sharp thinkers)
3. Choose to think good thoughts.
4. Act on your good thoughts.
5. Allow your emotions to create another good thought.
6. Repeat the process

Acquire the Wisdom of Big-Picture Thinking

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

You don't have to be a scientist or mathematician to embrace big-picture thinking, or to benefit from it. It can help any person in any profession. When somebody like Jack Welch tells a GE employee that the ongoing relationship with the customer is more important than the sale of an individual product, he's reminding them of the big-picture.

Real estate developer Donald Trump quipped, “You have to think anyway, so why not think big?” Big-picture thinking brings wholeness and maturity to a person's thinking. It brings perspective. It's like making a frame of a picture bigger, in the process expanding not only what you can see, but what you are able to do. Spend time with big-picture thinkers, and you will find that they, learn continually, listen intentionally, look expansively, and live completely. (The truth is that you can spend your life any way you want, but you can spend it only once; Michel Eyquem de Montaigne)

People who see the big picture expand their experience because they expand their world. As a result, they accomplish more than narrow minded people, and they experience fewer unwanted surprises because they are more likely to see the many components involved in any given situation,

issues, people, relationships, timing, and values. They are usually more tolerant of other people and their thinking.

Intuitively, you probably recognize big-picture thinking as beneficial. Few people want to be closed minded; no one sets out to be that way. But just in case you're not completely convinced, consider several specific reasons why you should make the effort to become a better big-thinker.

1. Big-picture thinking allows you to lead: size up the situations, taking into account many variables. Sketch a picture of where the team is going. Show how the future connects with the past to make the journey more meaningful and seize the moment when the timing is right.
2. Big-picture thinking keeps you on target: you've got to think about "big things" while you are doing small things, so that all the small things go in the right direction.
3. Big-picture thinking allows you to see what others see. One of the most important skills you can develop in human relations is the ability to see things from the other person's point of view.
4. Big-picture thinking promotes team work. The better the grasp team members have of the big-picture, the greater their potential to work together as a team.
5. Big-picture thinking keeps you from being caught up in the mundane. Some aspects of everyday life are absolutely necessary but thoroughly uninteresting. Big-picture thinkers don't let the grind get to them, because they don't lose sight of the all important overview.
6. Big-picture thinking helps you to chart uncharted territory. The only way to break new ground or move into uncharted territory is to look beyond the immediate and see the big-picture.

Learn from every experience. Big-picture thinkers broaden their outlook by striving to learn from every experience. They don't rest on their successes, they learn from them. Most importantly, they learn from their failures; they can do that because they remain teachable. Teach-ability

is an attitude, a mind-set that says, “no matter how much I know or think I know” I can learn from this situation. That kind of thinking can help turn adversity into advantage. It can make you a winner even during the most difficult circumstances. Varied experiences---both positive and negative---help you see the big-picture.

Unleash the Potential of Focused Thinking

Focus is just as important in developing ideas for an individual as it is in developing products for a company. Focused thinking can do several things for you:

1. Focused thinking harnesses energy toward a desired goal.
2. Focused thinking gives ideas time to develop. A good idea can become a great idea when it is given focus time.
3. Focused thinking brings clarity to the target.
4. Focused thinking will take you to the next level. The immature mind hops from one thing to another; the mature mind seeks to follow through.

Be selective, not exhaustive, in your focused thinking. For me, that means dedicating in-depth thinking time to four areas: leadership, creativity, communication, and intentional net-working.

Discover the Joy of Creative Thinking

A survey was done to discover the creativity level of individuals at various ages. After all the testing, the statistics indicated that 2% of the men and women who were in their 40's were highly creative. As they looked at younger people, the results emerged that 2% of the 35 year olds were highly creative; 2% of the 30 year olds were highly creative. This went on down to each age group until they reached the 7 year old children. 10% of them were highly creative. However, further study showed that 90% of the 5 year olds were highly creative. Between ages 5 and 7, 80% of us who are highly creative develop an image, a picture, an attitude that we are not creative, and we begin to deny that particular part of our God-given equipment.

I don't know why so many people lose their creativity, but I do know that the change doesn't have to be permanent. If you are not as creative as

you would like to be, you can change your way of thinking. Creative thinking isn't necessarily original thinking. In fact, I think people mythologize original thought. Here are some characteristics of creative thinkers.

1. Creative thinkers value idea
2. Creative thinkers explore options
3. Creative thinkers embrace ambiguity
4. Creative thinkers celebrate the offbeat
5. Creative thinkers connect the unconnected
6. Creative thinkers don't fear failure

Overcoming failure is a key to success in life. Creativity demands the ability to be unafraid of failure. Edwin Pond says, "An essential aspect of creativity is not being afraid to fail. Why is that so crucial? It's because creativity equals failure. You may be surprised to hear such a statement, but it's true. Creativity requires a willingness to look stupid. It means getting out on a limb---knowing that the limb often breaks! Creative people know these things and still keep searching for new ideas. They just don't let the ideas that *don't* work prevent them from coming up with more ideas that *do* work. You can't use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have. The uncreative mind can spot wrong answers, but it takes a creative mind to spot wrong questions.

Recognize the importance of Realistic Thinking

If you are a naturally optimistic person, as I am, you may not possess great desire to become a more realistic thinker. But cultivating the ability to be realistic in your thinking will not undermine your faith in people, nor will it lessen your ability to see and seize opportunities. Instead, it will add value to you in other ways. Realistic thinking is:

1. Realistic thinking minimizes downside risk. Actions always have consequences; realistic thinking helps you to determine what those consequences could be. And that's crucial, because only by

recognizing and considering consequences can you plan for them. If you plan for the worst case scenario, you can minimize the downside risk.

2. Realistic thinking gives you a target and game plan. Realistic thinking leads to excellence in leadership and management because it requires people to face reality. They begin to define their target and develop a game plan to hit it.
3. Realistic thinking is a catalyst for change. Change alone doesn't bring growth but you cannot have growth without change.
4. Realistic thinking provides security. Any time you have thought through the worst that can happen and you have developed contingency plans to meet it, you become more confident and secure.
5. Realistic thinking gives you credibility. Leaders continually surprised by the unexpected soon lose credibility with their followers.
6. Realistic thinking provides a foundation to build on. You can't build a house in midair; it needs a solid foundation. Ideas and plans are the same. They need something concrete on which to build.
7. Realistic thinking is a friend to those in trouble. Realistic thinking gives you something concrete to fall back on during times of trouble, which can be very reassuring. Certainty in the midst of uncertainty brings stability.
8. Realistic thinking brings the dream to fruition. If you don't take a realistic look at your dream---and what it will take to accomplish it---you will never achieve it. Realistic thinking helps to pave the way for bringing any dream to fruition.

Release the Power of Strategic Thinking

When you hear the words, "strategic thinking" what comes to mind? Do visions of business plans dance in your head? Do you conjure up marketing plans?

The formal definition of strategy has a strong military bent. Dictionary definition: the science of planning and directing large-scale military operations, specifically of maneuvering forces into the most advantageous position prior to actual engagement with the enemy.

Even the most basic definition uses a military reference and distinguishes tactics from strategic thinking. Tactics are actions taken in battle, while strategies are plans prior to it. When failure isn't an option, nothing serves a person better than strategic thinking. Strategic thinking simplifies the difficult. Strategic thinking is really nothing more than planning on steroids.

Strategic thinking takes complex issues and long-term objectives, which can be very difficult to address, and breaks them down into manageable sizes. Anything becomes simpler when it has a plan! Strategic thinking prompts you to ask the right questions. Strategic thinking prompts customization and prepares you today for an uncertain tomorrow. It is the bridge that links where you are to where you want to be.

Strategic thinking reduces the margin of error and gives you influence with others. To become a better strategic thinker able to formulate and implement plans that will achieve the desired objective, take the following guidelines to heart: break down the issue, ask why before how, identify the real issues and objectives, review your resources, (a strategy that doesn't take into account resources is doomed to failure), develop your plan, put the right people in the right place, and keep repeating the process.

Strategic thinking is like showering, you have to keep doing it.

Feel the Energy of Possibility Thinking

People who embrace possibility thinking are capable of accomplishing tasks that seem impossible because they believe in solutions. Possibility thinking increases your possibilities. If you open yourself up to possibility thinking you open yourself up to many other possibilities. Possibility thinking draws opportunities and people to you, increases others' possibilities, allows you to dream big, and makes it possible to rise above

average. Possibility thinking gives you energy, you invest yourself in what you believe can succeed. Also possibility thinking keeps you from giving up. One of the best ways to cultivate a possibility mind-set is to prompt yourself to dream one size bigger than you normally do.

Embrace the Lessons of Reflective Thinking

I like to think of my desk as a stove---it's always got a lot of things cooking on it. I might take a "pot" from a back burner, where it has been simmering for days, weeks, or even months, and move it to the front burner so that I can actively work in it or even finish it off. Reflective thinking is a major part of my life and has been for decades. I'm constantly reflecting and reviewing my life so that I can both keep growing and keep celebrating victories. I got into the habit of reflecting and reviewing the previous week, reflecting on the effectiveness of the week's activities and evaluating everything in order to prepare for the coming week. As I saw the value of that kind of reflection, I began to spend at least a few minutes every day reflecting. By mentally visiting the past situations, you can think with greater understanding. Reflecting thinking is like the crock-pot of the mind. It encourages your thoughts to simmer until they're done.

Reflective thinking gives you true perspective, emotional integrity to your thought life, increases your confidence in decision making, clarifies the big-picture and takes a good experience and makes it a valuable experience. Reflective thinking enables you to distance yourself from the intense emotions of particularly good or bad experiences and see them with fresh eyes.

Question the Acceptance of Popular Thinking

Popular thinking is too average to understand the value of good thinking. It's too inflexible to realize the impact of changed thinking; too lazy to master the process of intentional thing; too small to see the wisdom of Big-picture thinking; too satisfied to unleash the potential of focused thinking; too traditional to discover the joy of creative thinking; too naïve to

recognize the importance of realistic thinking; too undisciplined to release the power of strategic thinking; too limiting to feel the energy of possibility thinking; too trendy to embrace the lessons of reflective thinking; too shallow to question the acceptance of popular thinking; and too proud to encourage the participation of shared thinking; too self-absorbed to experience the satisfaction of unselfish thinking; and too uncommitted to enjoy the return of bottom-line thinking.

I've given some broad reasons for questioning the acceptance of popular thinking; now allow me to be more specific.

Popular thinking sometimes means not thinking. Unfortunately many people try to live life the easy way. They don't want to do the hard work of thinking or pay the price of success.

Popular thinking offers false hope. Many people look for safety and security in popular thinking; they figure that if a lot of people are doing something, then it must be right. It must be a good idea. If most people accept it, then it probably represents fairness, equality, and compassion, and sensitivity, right? Not necessarily. Many promises of popular thinking ring hollow; don't be fooled.

Popular thinking is slow to embrace change. Popular thinking loves status quo. It puts its confidence in the idea of the moment, and holds on to it with all its might. As a result, it resists change and dampens innovation.

Popular thinking brings only average results. The bottom line is popular thinking brings mediocre results. It's the least of the best and the best of the least. We limit our success when we adopt popular thinking. It represents putting in the least energy to just get by. You must reject common thinking if you want to accomplish uncommon results.

Encourage the Participation of Shared Thinking

Good thinkers, especially those who are also good leaders, understand the power of shared thinking. They know that when they value the thoughts

and ideas of others, they receive the compounding results of shared thinking and accomplish more than they ever could on their own. Those who participate in shared thinking understand the following:

1. Shared thinking is faster than solo thinking
2. Shared thinking is more innovative than solo thinking
3. Shared thinking brings more maturity than solo thinking
4. Shared thinking is stronger than solo thinking
5. Shared thinking returns greater value than solo thinking
6. Shared thinking is the only way to have great thinking

We tend to think of great thinkers and innovators as soloists, but the truth is that the greatest innovative thinking doesn't occur in a vacuum. If you combine the thoughts you have and the thoughts that others have, you will come up with thoughts you've never had! Remember, no matter what you're trying to accomplish, you can do it better with shared thinking. As you recruit and hire, look for good thinkers who value others, have experience with the collaborative process, and are emotionally secure. Pay them well and challenge them to use their thinking skills and share their ideas often. Nothing adds value like a lot of good thinkers putting their minds together.

Experience the Satisfaction of Unselfish Thinking

So far we have discussed many kinds of thinking that can help you achieve more. Each of them has the potential to make you more successful. Now I want to acquaint you with a kind of thinking with the potential to change your life in another way. It might even redefine how you view success. Unselfish thinking can often deliver a return greater than any other kind of thinking. Take a look at some of its benefits:

1. Unselfish thinking brings personal fulfillment. Few things in life bring greater personal rewards than helping others. Alan Loy McGinnis said, "There is no more noble occupation in the world than to assist another human being---to help someone succeed." Helping people

brings great satisfaction. When you spend your day unselfishly serving others, you will have no regrets. Even if you have spent much of your life pursuing selfish gain, it's never too late to have a change of heart.

2. Unselfish thinking adds value to others
3. Unselfish thinking encourages other virtues
4. Unselfish thinking increases quality of life
5. Unselfish thinking makes you part of something greater than yourself

There is no life as empty as the self-centered life. There is no life as centered as the self-empty life. If you want to improve your world, then focus your attention on helping others. Ken Blanchard said, "People with humility don't think less of themselves; they just think of themselves less".

Enjoy the Return of Bottom-Line Thinking

If you are accustomed to thinking of the bottom line only as it relates to financial matters, then you may be missing some things crucial to you and your organization. Instead, think of the bottom line as the end, the take away; the desired result. Every activity has its own unique bottom line. If you have a job, your work has a bottom-line.

Bottom-line thinking provides great clarity. What's the difference between bowling and work? Bowling only takes 3 seconds to know how you've done. That's one reason why people love sports so much; there's no waiting and no guessing about the outcome. Bottom-line thinking makes it possible for you to measure outcomes more quickly and easily. It gives you a benchmark by which to measure activity. It can be used as a focused way of ensuring that all your little activities are purposeful and line up to achieve a larger goal.

Bottom-line thinking helps you assess every situation. When you know the bottom-line, it becomes much easier to know how you are doing in any given area.

Bottom-line thinking helps you make the best decisions. Decisions become much easier when you know the bottom-line. It helps you pursue your goals with focus and fervency. Bottom-line thinking achieves results.

Bottom-line thinking generates high morale. When you know the bottom-line and you go after it, you greatly increase your odds of winning. Nothing generates high morale like winning. Hitting the target feels exhilarating; and you can hit it only if you know what it is.

Bottom-line thinking ensures your future. If you want to be successful tomorrow, you need to think bottom-line today. Look at any successful, lasting company, and you will find leaders who know their bottom-line. They make their decisions, allocate their resources, hire their people, and structure their organization to achieve that bottom-line.