

7 STEPS TO CLEAR THINKING BY EDWARD de BONO*

1. **PMI** PLUS, MINUS, INTERESTING. The crucial first step in better thinking is to see things without limiting your vision. Try this experiment: look around the room for red objects. (Don't read on until you've done so.) Now close your eyes and ask yourself how many green objects there are. Look again. Surprised? It was your focused attention on red that kept you from noticing things of another color. It's the same with an idea. When most of us first hear a new idea or a new solution to a problem, we react instinctively by either liking it or disliking it. Then we use our intelligence to defend that viewpoint. An easy way to escape this trap is to do a PMI. De Bono illustrates the technique with this example: in a discussion about the design of public buses, someone suggests taking out all the seats. What's your reaction? Why? Whatever you said, now take another look at the matter, this time using PMI. Spend three minutes writing down every good point you can make about this idea, every bad point, and every point that is neither good nor bad but simply Interesting. The aim of doing a PMI is to achieve broadmindedness in our thinking, rather than remaining the obedient servant of our own prejudices. To put it another way: the PMI is an attention-expander; it prevents us from seeing only red.

2. **CAF** CONSIDERING ALL FACTORS. This tool is a conscious effort to make sure you've thought of everything that might be relevant in making a decision. Suppose you're thinking about buying a new house. Do a CAF to be sure you ask all the right questions. While obvious issues such as size, cost and layout are bound to come to mind, without a deliberate effort to list every relevant factor you might overlook others. How good is TV reception? is there a local leash law? Can the pipes be drained quickly in case of a power failure in freezing weather? A couple I know were about to buy a house during the summer. Then a friend asked how the area would look when the leaves were down. It turned out that without the leaves, they'd have a view of a pile of wrecked cars.

3. **C&S** CONSEQUENCES & SEQUEL. While PMI and CAF open all sorts of possibilities, C&S helps us to judge which are the best. One of the traits that makes us different from animals is our ability to imagine the outcome of our actions. But we can greatly improve this ability by learning to use it in a systematic way. The de Bono technique is to imagine the probable outcome of a decision at four distances in the future: immediate, short term (1 to 5 years), medium term (5 to 25 years) and long term (over 25 years). In his courses de Bono asks such questions as, "What if the world runs out of oil?" or "What if a new electronic robot replaces human labor in factories? Imagine the consequences." Students are astonished to see how their predictions of immediate and short-term effects lead them on to perceive longer-term possibilities. Soon they acquire enough skill to apply the method to decisions in their own lives.

4. **AGO** AIMS, GOALS, OBJECTIVES. An often unused tool of better thinking is the practice of making a list of all your reasons for doing a particular thing. Most of us assume we know what our goals are, but often we have hidden or unconsidered goals that get in our way. A man I play tennis with usually loses because he tries to go for "kill" shots—which generally wind up in the net. Although he thinks winning is his goal, he is in fact led astray by another goal—the desire to look terrific. The pursuit of one of his goals is keeping him from reaching the other. Defining our goals can lead to creative solutions to problems. De Bono tells of a grandmother trying to knit while her yarn was being tangled by the family toddler. Exasperated, she put him in his playpen, but he howled so loudly that she had to take him out. Then she realized that her goal wasn't to pen the child, but to separate him from her yarn. So she solved the problem by leaving him out—and climbing into the playpen herself.

5. **FIP** FIRST IMPORTANT PRIORITIES. This step helps you to evaluate and to choose among the many possibilities you thought up by means of the other tools. De Bono and his colleague, Michael de Saint-Arnaud, give this example: Suppose someone wants to borrow money from you. Consider all factors and then choose the three most important. The top priority might be, "When will it be repaid?" followed by "Can you trust the borrower?" In the case of a parent lending money to a daughter, the top priority might be, "What does she want it for?" Too many of us make our decisions on a gut-level basis; we do what feels most important — **BUT FEELING IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR THINKING.**

6. **APC** ALTERNATIVES, POSSIBILITIES, CHOICES. Even after using the preceding tools of thought, you may not have found a satisfactory solution to your problem. The key to finding alternatives is to look for possibilities outside your usual thinking patterns. Edison, in searching for a light-bulb filament, tried thousands of unlikely materials, including cork, fishing line and tar, before succeeding with a strip of carbonized cardboard. Learn to "think wild." Let yourself imagine all kinds of possibilities, including those you would ordinarily consider impractical or ridiculous. Permit your mind to float free and to take what it offers. Use good sense and judgment only later to weed out what's impossible. There are a number of ways to search for creative alternatives. One is to think about the exact opposite of what normally comes to mind. Another is to check your assumptions; maybe you haven't found a good alternative because you've unnecessarily limited your search. The classic six-match problem is a case in point. Lay six matches on a table. Arrange them to make four equal-sided triangles. If you don't know the answer, you'll probably decide there's no way to make more than two triangles with six matches. But who said you had to solve the problem in two dimensions? If you ask yourself that question, the solution suddenly becomes obvious: you can make a tetrahedron (a four-sided pyramid), each face of which is an equal-sided triangle. (Iq - similar to conditioned thinking lock of 4 line and 9 dot problem)

7. **OPV** OTHER POINT of VIEW. Often problems involve a conflict with someone such as your spouse, boss or neighbor. You will be better able to find a solution if you try to see the situation from the other person's viewpoint. To see how OPV can help your thinking, write down whatever views the other person is likely to have about your disagreement. Not only are you sure to produce thoughts that surprise you, but you may well see solutions to the problem.

Excerpted from Reader's Digest April 1983

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**OPINIONS AND FEELINGS ARE FREQUENTLY A PERSONAL TRIUMPH OVER GOOD THINKING
YOU DEFINE REALITY BY WHAT YOU KNOW, WHAT YOU BELIEVE, AND WHAT YOU DO ABOUT IT.**