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# Learn to think for yourself

So many of us stumble through life without really taking the time to think. I'm not talking about "should I eat steak or chicken tonight." I'm talking about looking closely at issues and beliefs, reviewing the facts, possibly using a decision making tool (pro/con list, decision matrix, decision tree, etc), and thinking about *all* consequences (both good and bad). I'm also talking about events in life. Do you seriously think through the situation or do you just wing it?

In fact, a lot of us live our lives on autopilot. Our beliefs were given to us by parents, teachers, preachers, gurus, etc....How often do we take the time to examine those beliefs.

I'm not saying we throw out our beliefs. Many are good, like coping strategies for dealing with difficult people. Others are limiting or self-destructive.

The problem is that many of those beliefs and responses have never been examined. You see it all the time in politic - on both sides of the issue - where people get worked up into a fervor but can't truly explain why they feel that way. If you ask a few basic questions their case falls to pieces.

This also happens with religious beliefs. When you try to discuss someones beliefs to better understand them, often they don't have a reason why. In fact, they often haven't even completely read the bible.

## Key areas to question

- **Political:** No, I'm not going to tell you that your beliefs are wrong. I'm suggesting that you take a few minutes and truly think out your political beliefs. Look at the opposing view and understand it. Think your views through and try to see the unintended consequences. ***Then develop your own political belief system.***
- **Religious:** Don't worry, I'm not trying to convert you. What I want is for you to understand your religion. Read your bible (or other holy book) cover to cover. Learn about other religions. Learn how the religions are different.
- **Habits:** Why do you do things the way you do? Sometimes it makes sense. For example, I sing (in my head) *happy birthday* twice when I wash my hands. Why? Because it makes sure I clean them enough to kill any bacteria. Other habits don't make as much sense (ie...late night binge eating, smoking, etc...). As you find habits that don't support the life you want to lead examine them, discover the base reason you do it that way, look at the consequences, and develop good habits to replace them.
- **Business:** Ahh, there are so many things to examine in your business. It doesn't matter if you are the employee or the employer. Examining your business is always a good idea. One place to start is to look at your daily tasks. How much do they contribute to your results? Who do they benefit? Can they be done more efficiently? Should I eliminate or delegate them? What *should* I be doing? How do you deal with and treat your coworkers / employees? How do you treat your customers?
- **Relationships:** Sometimes this can be as simple as asking the questions "am I being a true friend?" Sometimes it can be as painful as "can we make this work?" Look at your family, friends, and acquaintances. How do you interact? What your your beliefs about the person? How do you treat them? How do they treat you? What can you do to better deal with them?

## Where do I start

1. Question authority. I'm not talking about revolution. I'm talking about thinking about what you are told to do and ask questions. Ask "why" often and persistently (and politely) expect a real answer. So if a politician says we need to \_\_\_\_\_, ask them "why" and keep asking until you get a real answer. If your boss asks you to stay late ask "why?" If you spouse wants a new car ask "why?" Notice a trend here?
2. The key questions are usually who, what, when, where, and why!
3. Don't just automatically do things. Take a moment and say "why do I do this?" Often it makes sense (brushing your teeth is a good example). Other times it doesn't (reaching for that bowl of ice cream at 10pm).
4. Start learning better thinking skills. This can be as simple as a pro/con list. It can be a book or a class on strategic thinking or game theory. You can watch people who do think and emulate them.
5. Keep thinking, learning, and practicing.

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