

Web-Based Radio Show

Ways We Think:

The different ways we think and what the implications are for the ways we think in our daily lives which affects decisions we make, the choices we make, who we choose to be our friends, our spouses, and how we choose to prevent illness or treat illness


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Good morning and thank you for joining us. Today's show is going to open up a new series where we're going to focus on thinking, and "thinking" is a very important subject because we all have as our goal – all of us, adults, as well as children –to become better thinkers. In fact, when we think about intelligence we can think about it as our ability to think or our ability simply to perform a series of tasks. I think most thinking people's definition of intelligence would be a thinking approach to intelligence. So we want to be able to understand thinking a little more fully.

One of the least recognized facts is that we all think differently. There are many different ways of thinking. We also make an assumption that we all think in the same ways – people speak or use ideas or use words that we're all thinking, and if we don't think properly it's because we're misguided or we have the wrong values or we have the wrong beliefs. So if somebody, for example a teenager, takes undue risks with drinking and driving, we don't say he's not thinking as much as that he's thinking in the wrong way. If somebody keeps making poor choices in terms of boyfriends or girlfriends or best friends or spouses we tend to believe they're misguided or they have problems, but we don't attribute it to their thinking skills or the ways they think. We may attribute it to the thoughts they have – the content, the values. If somebody is mean-spirited or takes extreme positions on things we may, again, think of them as misguided, as having been brainwashed, but not as a challenge in the ways they think or to change the ways they think or to improve the ways they think.


We basically make an assumption that we all, more or less, have the same capacity to think – maybe some a little more abstractly, some a little better at math and physics, some a little better with novels and literature, some a little better with TV or



movies, some a little better with computers – and, if anything, the appreciation we’ve had for different ways of thinking has been with different skill areas like more science- and technology-based thinking or mathematical thinking versus other ways of thinking. What I will try to share with you today and over the next few sessions is that we have quite different ways of thinking and, in fact, unless we appreciate that we won’t know why we’re not communicating, often, or why we’re thinking past each other – why we’re on different wave lengths, completely, in the way we think.


What I’d like to do is start off with reviewing or presenting the different ways we think; from there we can go into a fuller discussion of what the implications are for the ways we think in our daily lives because our thinking affects decisions we make, affects choices we make, can affect who we choose to be our friends, our spouses, and how we choose to prevent illness or treat illness. The way we think can have to do with how we take care of ourselves and how we nurture our children. As children, it will have to do with how we do in school, how we do with friends, the values we develop – all of this has to do as much with the way we think as with the content or ideas. In fact, I’ll try to show you that the content or ideas we choose often is second to the way we think. For example, if we tend to be an all-or-nothing thinker who thinks in extremes, we’ll select ideas that lend themselves to extreme thinking, believing in philosophies or religions or ways of life that are extreme in their nature, whereas if we tend to be more of what we call a gray-area thinker we will tend to look for shades of gray or subtlety. We may embrace a different religion or a different facet of the same religion, interpreting passages differently. We may embrace different types of political philosophies or different styles of governance, as well as different choices in our spouses or best friends. So, all of this is quite relevant to our daily lives.

Next I’d like to review for you the different ways in which we think. For each type of thinking I’m going to present some positives and some negatives, so we’re not here presenting a value system such that one way of thinking is necessarily better than another way. Each one has its assets and its liabilities and many of us, as you’ll see, are combinations of these different ways of thinking. Certainly in our children we’ll often see combinations, particularly as they go through their development and develop in different ways. Children, often, as they develop, go through the different ways we think as part of their development and then kind of land on one or a few that become part of their character or part of their personality. So, we need to understand each person’s




profile of thinking, as well as our own profile of thinking, in order to understand how the world works.

Let's cover some of these, recognizing they're often a combination, and look at some of the pluses and minuses. The first type we'll consider is the action-oriented thinker. This is an individual, whether a child or adult, who puts their intentions – their inclinations – into actions. They do, rather than say, or do, rather than draw or dance or put into music. These are all different ways, I should add parenthetically, of expressing ways we think. So these are doers. Now one type of doer acts out impulsively and can be a risk-taker or be a daredevil; they'll drive fast cars or get into fights in bars or even do violent acts that are unprovoked. In a more constructive way, they might take up sports that are very action oriented, like jumping out of airplanes with parachutes. They like to "live on the edge," so to speak. Such a person is often on the go, putting their intentions into actions. There's not a lot of forethought, not a lot of anticipation, not a lot of reviewing of what will happen if I do this or if I do that. Sometimes such individuals, on the negative side, can get into hot water because they're acting without anticipating, so they may try a new drug without looking at all the possible consequences and become addicted, or they may get into a fight because they don't think of other ways settling a dispute and they get hurt or get arrested. They may have a hard time succeeding in school because they give into the impulse of the moment. These action-oriented thinkers can have lots of negatives. On the other hand, an action-oriented thinker may be a great entrepreneur, a person who follows his instinct and puts all his money into the market just when it's going up and does very well in stocks. Or he may have a notion of a new Internet company with a new form of information sharing and immediately put it into action by getting some other people and getting the computer program designed and boom-boom-boom, pretty soon there's a successful company. The person may be a leader because of his ability to take action. In the military or the police force, such a person may be a risk-taker in a positive sense, leading others into battle; as a fireman he can go into a burning house and save people because he doesn't think twice about his own safety and so action-oriented thinkers can be heroes and they do a great deal of good. So, we have many pluses with the action-oriented thinker. In general, however, the action-oriented thinker – whether a child or an adult – puts his intentions or ideas into action as a predominant mode, even though there may be a little bit of pondering.




Another type of thinker might be called the intuitive- or fantasy-based thinker. This is the person who has lots of ideas and, on the positive side, is very creative and full of rich fantasies and uses his imagination a great deal and tends to spend lots of time in imaginary worlds. These imaginary worlds may be like Einstein's, the way he was taking travels into outer space and the universe and picturing what it was like to be riding a bolt of light as a fantasy because he was gifted in his spatial relations. It may be Kurt Vonnegut just letting his mind go, exploring the content of a new novel. It might be a child, creating in his imagination new characters for what will be the children's books of the future. It can also be, however, somebody who's hiding out from reality, who's escaping and living in his own dream world. They're not only creating castles in the sky, they're living in the castles so they have unrealistic expectations of the real world instead of living in it. It could be a young man looking for his dream girl, thinking she'll fall into his path, or a young lady looking for her Prince Charming, but living in a world of unreality. It could involve inventing a new product that will be the basis of a company. It could be creating great works of art, like Picasso – new shapes, new forms. It could be having feelings about people and the world and the environment and getting sensations and tuning into those sensations and just having a great deal of awareness of people and things in the world, and these can be through all the senses that are heightened in this intuitive, imaginative, creative, sensitive individual. So there are many pluses for being an intuitive, creative, imaginative thinker.

On the other hand, such an individual may have a difficult time being logical and getting involved in what we call cause and effect thinking where A leads to B or B leads to C; where if I do A, it'll have a logical consequence – B; or where they test ideas against the reality of other people. Such an individual may have a hard time, for example, always connecting their ideas to other people's ideas. Somebody may ask them, "Why are you sitting in that chair, twirling your hair and looking upward?" and rather than saying, "Oh, that's because I'm fantasizing or picturing what you would look like if you were a kangaroo," the person may just ignore the question, not tie their thoughts to the other person's thoughts – not build those bridges from them to others. Since others represent external reality, when we're just lost in our own thoughts we're in a kind of internal world, but unless we tie that internal world to some externals – the ideas of others – we don't have that comparison from our internal world to some external reality. There's no logical bridge. So the negative side is such a person may, at times, be illogical, may confuse his internal fantasy-based, intuitive, imaginative world with the world of reality. If this goes to an extreme the person may not be able to take




care of himself or make judgments or deal with the real world. In less extreme forms it may just be a creative person who gets lost periodically and who's not the most logical person, but who muddles through the day and gets through things. Such a person, for example, again on the negative side, may make a poor investment decision simply because he has an intuitive feel about it without really analyzing the company logically in terms of its profits and risks. Such a person may join a relationship with someone or join a group of people because it "feels right" at the moment or it fits into one of their fantasies, but a poor choice in reality gets them into hot water, either real hot water or into drugs or misbehavior, etc. Such an individual might not be able to care for himself properly because he can't anticipate, or doesn't anticipate, consequences well and so he looks for a magical solution to a medical problem. So we can have many pluses and negatives if we go to the extreme version. Obviously, in all these ways of thinking there are moderate balances versus the extreme versions, but the imaginative-intuitive individual, on the plus side, can be very creative and insightful and on the negative side can live in a world of unreality.

There are also other types of thinkers – other ways we think that are worth touching on. Another type of thinker we're going to discuss, and this will be the last one we discuss for today, is the antithesis of the intuitive thinker, which is the very logical thinker – the person who is very causally connected to the world and who always thinks in terms of logic and whose ideas are connected to someone else's ideas and what the implications are. We're going to discuss the logical person first as the person who has logical thinking to the nth degree and where it takes an all-or-nothing form – A leads to B or B leads to C. Such a person is logical in a very basic way so that he tends to be prone to extreme forms of logical thinking, as opposed to another type we'll consider later, which is more gray-area thinking or looking for shades of gray in thought patterns. So, such a thinker is logical. A logical thinker in the extreme might say, "So-and-so looked at me cross-eyed; therefore, he or she doesn't like me and they're an enemy and a threat to me." Or if it's a child, "Johnny wouldn't play with me today; therefore, he must hate me." There's a certain logic to the thinking, but it may not be accurate if the world, in fact, is more of a gray-area world, and if Johnny just got up on the wrong side of the bed or preferred playing with someone else on that day it might not represent an extreme degree of illogic. So the key to our logical thinker is to realize that logic, when it's in an extreme form, may lend itself to all-or-nothing thinking.



Now, let's consider the positives. A logical thinker is very analytical and will consider the consequences of actions, will have very, very clear opinions about things. "Sally made a joke at my expense today; she is therefore my enemy," is a clear, definitive opinion, no two ways about it. "Harry was nice to me today; he's my good friend." "The local candidate shares my religious philosophy; therefore, I'm going to vote for him" (parenthetically, with no consideration of his domestic or international policies, etc.). So the person can be strong-minded, strong willed, very devoted to a direction and carry out a plan in a logical, straightforward way. Some very, very successful business people may be characterized by this type of thinking that allows them to create a plan, carry it out, and pursue it with a single-minded intensity that makes them successful. Or there may be a certain charisma and leadership associated with that single-minded intensity. They know how the world works – what's good, what's bad – and have very, very clear views of goodness and badness. They also know what they like, whether it's food or music. They also know who they like, in terms of people, and such a quality can be very attractive, at times, particularly when other people are feeling anxious or uncertain. Also on the positive side, such people may be good at taking care of themselves; they may embrace very strong, positive health habits. If they're parents, they may set up a very straightforward, clear set of guidelines for their children; they may deal with people in a very straightforward and honest way that helps them be perceived as people of integrity and honesty and, most important, they're always tied to external reality.

On the negative side, they may not have as many creative ideas or tune into their intuition or their subtle sensations – they may not be aware of the multiple emotions they have in situations because they may just focus on the one that "makes sense" to them. So, as adults, they may be upset with their spouses or their children over something minor but because it doesn't "make sense" they ignore it, but it keeps coming out the back door with teasing comments or mildly negative comments or being overly controlling or overly critical and they don't understand that part of their nature or their character. So that's one of the negatives – lack of awareness of subtle emotions, lack of creativity or intuition – not that the person isn't capable of it, but gives it short shrift. Also, the person may, on the negative side, see reality as an extreme reality. When the political arena was being described in the last election as one divided into the blues and the reds, they see it as all blue or all red – I'm conservative or I'm liberal or she's conservative or she's liberal – and not see that there are shades of gray and there are some beliefs where you're a little more one way or a little more another way. So,



the extremely logical thinker who takes it to the extreme degree on the negative side may not have a very accurate picture of reality, even though his goal is to be very reality based because reality often involves subtleties and balance. When trying to simplify the world and see it as just extremely logical they miss out on the subtlety. One can probably think of lots of examples of individuals who miss out on the subtleties of relationships. So misreading one's friends, as we mentioned before, such as a child who takes another child who's busy as not liking him; an adult who takes the boss's lack of enthusiasm as a criticism; the spouse who misreads the spouse's tiredness as being angry and not loving them enough or gets unnecessarily jealous when the other person is simply being nice to someone else – all those may represent forms of “logical thinking” that are extreme. The person who takes extreme political beliefs and doesn't appreciate the various opinions in the political spectrum or the various solutions that should be considered for a problem – that can lead to poor solutions, rather than good solutions. So there can be many negatives to the all-or-nothing or extreme logical thinker, as well as many of the positives we just talked about.

Now, as we're talking about these different ways we think or these different types of thinkers it's also important to be aware that, historically, we've talked about ways of thinking more in terms of the different facets of our minds or brains, such as there are more visual thinkers or more mathematical thinkers or more verbal thinkers or more movement-oriented thinkers – those who create dance – or more artistic individuals who can express their ideas that way. To be sure, these are all different ways of thinking. In later discussions we will address exactly what thinking is and separate the expression of a thought in words or in pictures or in drawings or in music from the process of having the thought itself and get into the nature of what a thought is; we'll do that a little later on because that will get quite abstract and, first, I think it's better to lay out the different types of thinkers and then get into the nature of thought itself.

So for now, we're going to stop and then we'll pick up next time and go into some of the other types of thinking.