

**Here's what people are saying about
New Thinking, New Future by Sam Chand**

Old thinking at best will keep you where you are in life and in all probability moves you back. My friend Sam Chand's book *New Thinking, New Future* reminds us that new places and spaces in leadership are awaiting us as soon as we embrace new thinking. You'll be challenged to grow, even as you help others do the same.

—*John C. Maxwell*
Best-Selling Author and Speaker

Sam Chand has dedicated his life to champion the success of others. Known as a “dream releaser,” Sam is a leader of leaders who will constantly challenge and lift our mindsets, self-imposed limitations, and unexamined choices. Sam writes from the enormous wealth of his own experience with uncanny insight, good humor, and pragmatic advice. If you are hungry for a paradigm shift, to unlock uncharted dimensions of possibility for your life and leadership, *New Thinking, New Future* lays out a comprehensive “map and compass” to help you navigate the way.

—*Brian Houston*
Global Senior Pastor, Hillsong Church

Our world is changing faster than ever before in history. With new challenges and new opportunities emerging daily, we, as leaders, must work hard to change how we think, lead, and dream about what's possible. In his powerful book, *New Thinking, New Future*, Dr. Sam Chand will guide you through a series of crucial questions that won't just change how you think today, but will change how you impact lives in the future.

—*Craig Groeschel*
Founding Pastor, Life.Church
Host, *Craig Groeschel Leadership Podcast*

No one does this better than Sam Chand, and I can say that from our experience working with him in my own church. His reputation for helping companies find their way in the 21st century is exemplary and his integrity is beyond reproach. Whether you are a brand new company or ministry or, like us, you've been around for over thirty years, I can say with confidence that there is something transformational for you and your organization in his latest book, *New Thinking, New Future*.

—Jentezen Franklin

Senior Pastor, Free Chapel; *New York Times* Best-Selling Author

Great leaders have mastered the art of asking great questions, but legendary leaders like Sam Chand have mastered the art of questioning their own thinking. *New Thinking, New Future* is not just another leadership book; it's an introspective journey of self-discovery and self-awareness that could change everything for you and those you lead.

—Steven Furtick

Founder and Lead Pastor, Elevation Church

Just when I thought my friend, Sam Chand, had reached his pinnacle, he transcends to a new dimension. Sam has a masterful skill of asking piercing questions, which are better questions that lead to better answers and ultimately a better life! This is my kind of book! It will unlock a powerful, latent future within you!

—Bishop Dale C. Bronner

Author/Founder, Word of Faith Family Worship Cathedral

Sam Chand knows how our thought patterns color every decision we make—and *New Thinking, New Future* is proof he knows how to help us change them. With keys for dispelling negative, destructive thinking and cultivating a positive, life-giving perspective, Sam challenges and inspires us in ways both practical and profound. This book does something many books promise but few deliver—it changes your mind!

—Chris Hodges

Senior Pastor, Church of the Highlands
Author, *The Daniel Dilemma* and *What's Next?*

It is a sad truth that most businesses fail—and many quite quickly. The reason is most often not the lack of a noble vision, nor skills, nor detailed plans. Rather, it is the inability to cross the valley of execution—what Sam Chand calls the “muddy middle” between entrepreneurial dreams and marketplace victories. In the muddy middle, great plans are lost in the sea of ambiguity and confusion. In this book, *New Thinking, New Future*, Sam provides insights and advice for leaders navigating the challenges of building great businesses and organizations. These revelations will equip leaders entangled in traditional paradigms and frameworks with fresh ideas. As someone who has benefited from Sam’s wisdom, your breakthrough could well be on the other side of reading this book.

—Richard F. Chandler

Founder and Chairman, Clermont Group

Dr. Sam Chand is one of the best-kept secrets in leadership development of this age. In his newest book, *New Thinking, New Future*, he gets real, up-close and personal—intentionally and at times uncomfortably so—to challenge us once again with essential questions of who we really are and who we really want to be. This is more than a book—it’s a practical, groundbreaking, barrier-crushing leadership manual for newness in our personal leadership in ways we’ve not heard from him before.

—Judah Smith

Lead Pastor, Churchhome

Change is on the horizon, but it will not come by accident—it will require intentionality by those who lead the way! As a voice of influence on the subject of leadership, my friend, Sam Chand, will help you shape your future by reshaping the way you think! *New Thinking New Future* will challenge you to examine your present patterns of thought and will reposition you to face the future with boldness.

—John Bevere

Best-Selling Author and Minister; Cofounder, Messenger International

If Michelangelo is correct, that “the true work of art is but a shadow of the divine perfection,” Sam Chand casts a very long shadow. *New Thinking, New Future* is that master work and lifeline resource that could only be written from a lifetime of wisdom drawn directly from distinguished consulting contributions in the fields of business, church, and academy.

—Leonard Sweet

Best-Selling Author, *Bad Habits of Jesus*
Professor, Drew and George Fox Universities, Tabor College
Evangelical Seminary
Founder and Chief Contributor, preachthestory.com

I’ve known Dr. Sam Chand for years, and he’s always had his finger on the pulse of the culture. His new book, *New Thinking, New Future*, takes that to an entirely new level. Sam answers eleven critically important questions about launching a new venture or leading an organization. Talk about accurate. I’ve been a media producer and consultant for many of the largest religious and nonprofit organizations in the country for nearly three decades, and these are exactly the questions leaders are asking. Get this book. It will save you more frustration than you could ever imagine.

—Phil Cooke, Ph.D.

Filmmaker; Writer; Media Consultant; and Founder, Cooke Media Group

Here is yet another practical leadership gem from a wise and seasoned leader, and a great tool to help leaders think differently, correctly, and effectively. The subject of our thinking is of critical importance to pastors and business leaders in a world more and more driven by emotion rather than by reason. Every leader would do well to include this well-set-out, clear book in his toolbox, as well as recommend it to their teams. What a great job Sam Chand has done on *New Thinking, New Future* as it resonates with the times we are living in where the thinking person is paid so much more than the doing person. I highly recommend it.

—Andre Olivier

Senior Pastor, Rivers Church, South Africa; Author and Speaker

If leaders are going to engage a rapidly changing culture with impact, they are going to have to be willing to change how they think, not just what they think. Sam Chand's thought-provoking, thought-changing book, *New Thinking, New Future*, is one every serious leader must read. Just the first chapter has already shaken up the way I think about how I think! Thanks, Sam, for such a great, groundbreaking work.

—James Merritt

Pastor and Former President, Southern Baptist Convention

New Thinking, New Future is not only relevant, but a must-read! Undeniably the right flight plan to the future!

—Troy Korsgaden

Insurance Carrier and Company Consultant

Throughout history, there have been introductions of “new things” that have changed everything. The discovery of electricity radically changed the way the world lives. The invention of the airplane revolutionized transportation. The creation of the computer transformed the way we do business. I believe the next “new thing” will bring about change within ourselves. In his groundbreaking book, *New Thinking, New Future*, Sam Chand masterfully outlines the path to a changed mindset and provides the catalyst for a brilliant future. I encourage you to read and reread this powerful book. It will change everything.

—Dave Martin

Your Success Coach; Author, *The 12 Traits of the Greats*

The secret to learning is to ask questions! Questions most often challenge our internal thoughts and set us on a course of discovery that enlarges our world. In his book, *New Thinking, New Future*, my long-time friend Dr. Sam Chand asks the questions that trigger a recalibration in our thinking, resulting in the possibility of greater outcomes. As a consultant and teacher, there is no one I've ever known who has more practical brilliance than Dr. Chand. I believe you will find this book practical, yet very challenging! I recommend you read it slowly, inhaling and exhaling often!

—Tony Miller

Bishop and Lead Pastor, The Gate Church
Founder and Visionary, Destiny Fellowship

God told me I was not to covet my neighbor's wife or my neighbor's animals, but the Bible is silent about coveting Sam Chand's perception. This guy sees things that others—including me—do not see. And Sam's latest book, *New Thinking, New Future*, is another example of the genius at work.

—Anthony McLellan
Chairman Emeritus, Australian Christian Lobby

A brilliant inward journey. *New Thinking, New Future* will facilitate a raw conversation with yourself about true success and impact. You will be forever changed.

—Simon T. Bailey
Breakthrough Strategist, Simon T. Bailey International, Inc.

Sam Chand has done it again. *New Thinking, New Future* is a thoughtful book on effective thinking. Leaders will find this book relevant, practical, and helpful. Sam summarizes what plagues us as leaders and furnishes sound solutions that we can actually practice. I recommend this book to any leader. Thank you, Sam.

—Tim Elmore
President, Growing Leaders

Dr. Sam Chand is a gift to the body of Christ and has a unique way of challenging leaders to think on a deeper level. The eleven questions in his new book, *New Thinking, New Future*, are questions every leader needs to wrestle with and answer. It is the answers to these questions that will propel your leadership to another level.

—Daniel Floyd
Founding Pastor, Life Point Church

He's done it again! When you think Sam Chand has written his best book, he comes along with even a better book. *New Thinking, New Future* is a glimpse into the mind of one of the top thinkers in the world. He will not only catch-you-up on thinking into today's language, but most of all, he will help you examine the ways you are currently thinking so you can become the leader you want to be.

—*Mike Robertson*
Lead Pastor, Visalia First

Sam Chand is an intentional leadership guru who gets the big picture! Leadership is contingent to the quality of our mental models, which bestow upon the leader the crucial ability to *see*. In a world where organizations are reactively impulsive, rather than reflectively intentional, this excellent leadership book is a must-read!

—*Edmund Chan*
Leadership Mentor, Covenant EFC Founder
Global Alliance of Intentional Disciple Making Churches

NEW
THINKING

NEW
FUTURE

SAMUEL R. CHAND



WHITAKER
HOUSE

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NEW THINKING, NEW FUTURE

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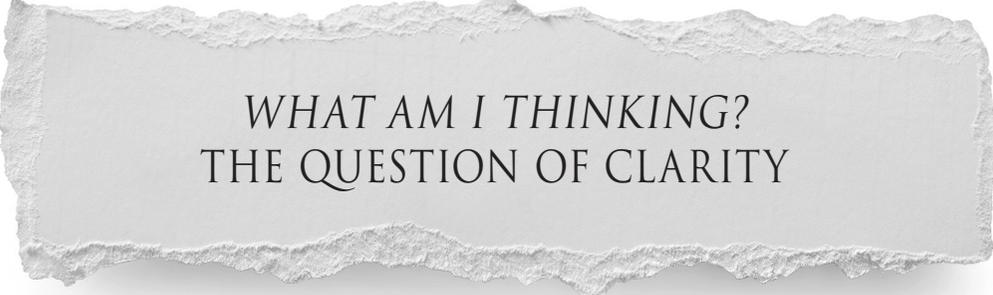
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WHAT AM I THINKING?
THE QUESTION OF CLARITY

The key to success is to risk thinking unconventional thoughts.

Convention is the enemy of progress.

If you go down just one corridor of thought you never
get to see what's in the rooms leading off it.

—Trevor Baylis

The way I think has changed over the years, and I've noticed the change even more in the recent past. For example, not long ago, I was asked to speak at a two-day event on the other side of the world. The people meeting with me told me about the history of the event, who had spoken in the past, and how many people were registered to attend. The offer was, by all measures, extraordinarily generous: first-class travel and accommodations, an ample honorarium, and an invitation for my wife, Brenda, to come along so we could enjoy a few extra days of vacation while we were there. The people who invited me couldn't have been more gracious. They asked me to look at my calendar and see if I was available.

In their minds, they had made me an offer I couldn't refuse. To them, our conversation was transactional: they wanted to secure a speaker for

their planned event. They had done their homework, checking me out on social media and talking to people who had heard me speak. They were convinced I was the right person to speak at their next event.

A few years earlier, I would have looked at my calendar and if the dates were open, I would have instantly told them “yes.” But in this season of my life, I wanted to think differently about the opportunity and ask a few more questions. I thanked them for their kind invitation, but my mind was a swirl of questions about issues beyond the prestige of speaking at their event, the money they would pay me, and the vacation Brenda and I would enjoy. I asked, “What do you expect to happen in the lives of the people who attend the event? What will be the long-term, existential impact on them?”

THINKING LONG-TERM

I could tell they assumed I would give a transactional response to their transactional offer; they were surprised when I asked additional questions. I sensed their frustration, so I explained:

“Let me tell you where I am in my life. I’m asking more questions about what I choose to do or not do, and I’m asking questions that are different than I’ve asked before. Here’s what I want to know about my choices: Will every activity give me the opportunity to influence influencers? And can I be part of a leadership *journey* instead of just a leadership *event*? I’m not opposed to events, but I want to be assured that each event where I participate leads to a multiplied influence. I’m more interested in investing in long-term, existential impact than just isolated events. If I say ‘yes’ to the event, will we also commit to a relationship in which I work with your organization to build leaders after the event? I understand that the event gives me an inroad into the organization and credibility with the people who attend, so the event itself has value—but it has value to *me* only if I can participate with the organization to have a deeper, wider, longer impact. That’s my focus today.”

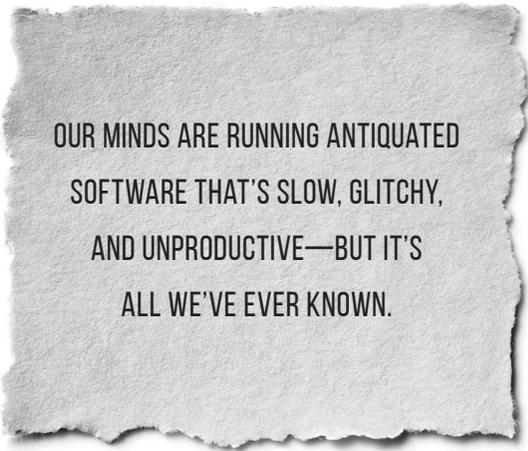
I thought I had explained myself very well, but one of them immediately began talking about the fee they were offering me. He had completely missed what I’d been telling them! His thought process was still transactional; so far, my existential reasoning hadn’t made a dent. A few years before, the questions of the calendar and fees would have been at the top

of my list, but now those questions were maybe fifth and sixth...while they were still one and two on this organization's list.

I realized then that we were thinking on two different wavelengths. They were trying to close a deal; I was interested in building a relationship. They wanted to finish our conversation by saying, "Done!" I wanted our conversation to begin by answering the question, "Where can we go together?"

Please don't misunderstand: I'm not insisting they were wrong and I was right. We were simply thinking on two different planes with two different sets of assumptions, two different goals, and two different processes to make decisions. Our questions were fundamentally different and to be honest, I had been exactly where they were only a short time before. They were seeking limited and specific goals, what some in the business world call key performing indices (KPI). I was operating according to the broader concept of objectives and key results (OKR). I'm much more interested in discussing the potential impact of any endeavor (i.e., the key results), which is almost always the result of meaningful relationships.

The way leaders think matters—it matters a lot. The problem is that we almost universally make a colossal subconscious assumption that the way we think is the only possible way to consider our situations. Our thought processes are so familiar, so ingrained, that we can't imagine thinking a new way. It's like our minds are running antiquated software that's slow, glitchy, and unproductive—but it's all we've ever known. We need to upgrade the software in our heads! That's what this book is about.



OUR MINDS ARE RUNNING ANTIQUATED
SOFTWARE THAT'S SLOW, GLITCHY,
AND UNPRODUCTIVE—BUT IT'S
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IS IT POSSIBLE?

Is it even possible to change how we think? Yes, but it's not easy. Too often, our thinking patterns change when we encounter heartache, failure,

and conflict, and the change may not be productive! Uncertainty makes us crave answers, but in times of difficulty, most people fill in the holes in their knowledge with fear and doubt instead of faith, reason, and hope.

To a large extent, our thought processes are shaped when we are young. I grew up in a very religious Christian environment in India, but it wasn't always positive. My parents were convinced their view of God and God's path for our lives was right and they were also sure anyone who disagreed with them was wrong. I bought into their perspective. We saw people as good or bad and teaching as right or wrong—no gray areas, no complexity, no rigorous discussions, just rigid certainty. Years after I came to America, I became the pastor of a similarly narrow, theologically rigid church. I felt right at home! Through a series of surprising events, I was asked to be the president of a Bible college. Suddenly, I led students who came from over fifty different Christian traditions, most of them unlike mine. During this time, I read an article that opened new doors to a world of new thinking. It said we need to realize there are three levels of commitment: to essentials, to convictions, and to preferences. I realized I had put virtually everything under the category of essentials and I expected everyone to agree with me. News flash: they didn't.

As the president, I also taught classes. One day after I had been thinking about these levels of commitment, I walked into a class of about fifty students, representing, I assumed, at least thirty traditions. I asked them, "What are the core beliefs of the Christian faith?" As they voiced topics, I wrote them on the board. After only a few minutes, we had about thirty-five statements.

Then I turned and asked them, "If I put a gun to your head, which of these are you willing to die for?" The room became very quiet. Soon, a few brave students identified the few truths that were absolutely essential to their faith.

Like them, I realized a lot of the things that had seemed so important before were no longer things I'd die for. Few things are absolutely *essential* and worth our ultimate devotion and sacrifice. Some are *convictions* that we believe but won't die for. Most are simply *preferences*, like music genres, clothing styles, or the proper length of a pastor's sermon. (Well, that may rise to a conviction!)

The identification of essentials, convictions, and preferences is helpful in every aspect of life: at home, in business, in neighborhoods, and with friendships. Many heated conflicts can be avoided (or at least the temperature turned down below the boiling point) by recognizing people have the right to their own preferences. We also need to give them room for their convictions—and we can even

love those who have different essentials, although we're sure ours will never change. This set of categories was very helpful for my students and it has been life-changing for me. I've learned to think differently. This simple but profound insight about how to think, perceive, and label people and ideas can radically change how we relate to virtually everyone we know. We will be more open to others' ideas, less defensive about at least some of our own, and more willing to appreciate different perspectives. What kind of difference would this make on a staff team or an executive team in goal-setting and planning? In a marriage and our relationships with our children? It makes a world of difference—and it all happens when we learn a different way to think.

The processes and contents of our thoughts determine everything: optimism or pessimism, persistence or apathy, security or uncertainty, care or recklessness—and seeing people as assets or viewing them as threats. Developmental psychologists tell us our perceptions are formed in the first years of life. Children are sponges, instinctively absorbing the emotions, values, and beliefs of those around them. These concepts are seldom *taught* by the adults in their lives, but they are *caught* like we catch viruses in the air we breathe or the things we touch. Some of us, to be sure, have caught viruses of racism, pride, shame, and xenophobia. Virtually all of us have absorbed values that are important to our families, but upon closer inspection, aren't really important at all.

THE IDENTIFICATION OF ESSENTIALS,
CONVICTIONS, AND PREFERENCES IS
HELPFUL IN EVERY ASPECT OF LIFE: AT
HOME, IN BUSINESS, IN NEIGHBORHOODS,
AND WITH FRIENDSHIPS.

For instance, Brenda and I grew up on different continents, but our families seldom, if ever, served fish. To this day, Brenda never eats fish and I eat it only a couple of times a year. We have been married for almost forty years and we've never cooked a piece of fish in our home. Neither of us read a scholarly article and decided to avoid fish. Our thoughts about it are the product of the (mostly unspoken) messages in our homes when we were children. Those messages still shape our decisions today. Our essentials, convictions, and preferences have been firmly implanted by those who shaped our early environments.

These early perceptions and thinking patterns are deeply ingrained in us, so it requires considerable wisdom and effort to change them. Most of us have never tried to step out of ourselves to analyze how we think; we just use the same old software that was downloaded many years before.

ASKING THE WRONG QUESTION

Almost universally, leaders ask the wrong question. They assume their thinking is good, right, and productive, so they jump to, "What am I going to *do* about this?" Instead, perhaps they should start a step earlier and ask, "How should I *think* about this?"

What prompts us to evaluate how we think? Sometimes, a friend or mentor prods us to see a situation from a different angle that requires us to think in a different way. But more often, a cataclysmic event shatters our closely-held assumptions about the way life should work and we're forced to reframe what we believe, who we trust, and how we think. If you have a choice, go with the first option: the mentor instead of the catastrophe! Those who are closest to us are often the first to notice that our thinking needs some remediation.

When I was a child, my parents only knew one way to discipline us. They had never heard of "time out"; they spanked us for every offense. Not surprisingly, when our girls were little, I followed my parents' example. One day after I'd spanked Rachel, Brenda walked into the room as Rachel ran out crying. Looking at me with a powerful blend of exasperation and hope, Brenda said, "Sam, have you noticed that the only way you know to discipline the girls is to spank them?"

It was like she was asking if I knew water is wet. I had no idea why she would ask the question. Thankfully, I had the good sense to respond,

“I’m not at all sure what you’re trying to say. Would you explain what you mean?” This began an eye-opening conversation about my childhood and my very narrow range of parenting skills, especially regarding discipline. It opened a door to a new way to think and respond to my daughters. The change was as dramatic as it was welcome. Everyone was happy Brenda had the courage to ask me a hard question.

We have powerful but largely unevaluated thinking patterns about a host of important elements of our lives: food, time, sex, possessions, privacy, savings, spending, giving, debt, and many others. Twice in the past, Brenda and I became overextended with credit card debt. Like most couples, it was easy to get into trouble and very hard to get out of it, but we did. Some people told us the problem was the credit cards, but I knew they weren’t the culprit. The real problem was human, not plastic. We got out of debt, but we still use credit cards. We pay them off every month, so we’re known as nonrevolvers—a moniker I’m proud to earn. If we had blamed the cards for our trouble, I’m not sure we would have learned important lessons about how to think about limits on spending.

HIDDEN BLOCKAGES

My friend Edmund Chan has observed that most of us, even the most successful among us, have a swirl of negative thoughts that affect how we think, what we feel, what we decide, and how we relate to the people around us. If these are left unresolved, they keep us prisoners of defective and destructive thinking patterns.¹ These include:

PRIMAL WOUNDS OF THE HEART: “I HURT”

If we’re alive, we’ve been hurt. We’ve been ignored, unfairly criticized or blamed, intimidated, used, and betrayed...countless times. When these hurts remain unhealed, ungrieved, and unforgiven, we erect walls to prevent anyone from hurting us again. We may also react defensively and angrily to the smallest slight because it reminds us of the greater hurt that still poisons our hearts. When old hurts aren’t healed, we try to avoid any new wounds, but we remain fragile, vulnerable, and easily hurt again. Some try to be exceedingly sweet so no one will hurt them; others try to

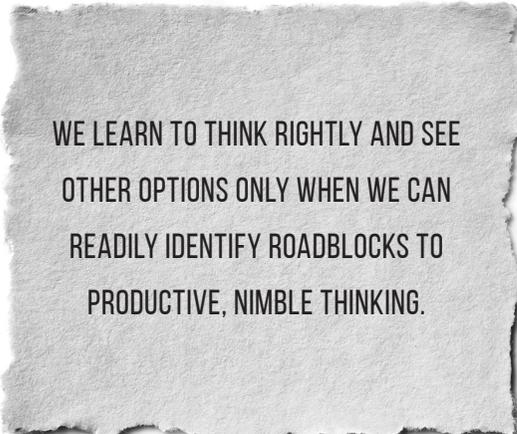
1. Adapted from *Growing Deep in God* by Edmund Chan (Singapore: Covenant Evangelical Free Church, 2008).

intimidate to keep people away or dominate them; and many become passive-aggressive, trying to appear innocent while they stick a knife of revenge in those who seem to threaten them.

CYNICISM OF THE MIND: “I DOUBT”

A collection of small wounds *erodes* trust, but even a single major betrayal *shatters* trust. To protect ourselves, we learn to doubt others’ motives and be suspicious of their actions. But our cynicism doesn’t stop with our perception of others; many of us live with severe self-doubt, questioning every motive, every decision, and harshly blaming ourselves for any perceived failure. Cynicism causes us to be defensive around others and brutal to ourselves. It has a hard edge of suspicion; it wants to find fault and delights in condemnation. Healthy skepticism, on the other hand, is simply due diligence; it asks good questions and welcomes honest answers.

PARALYSIS OF THE WILL: “I CAN’T”



WE LEARN TO THINK RIGHTLY AND SEE OTHER OPTIONS ONLY WHEN WE CAN READILY IDENTIFY ROADBLOCKS TO PRODUCTIVE, NIMBLE THINKING.

Unhealed wounds and a cynical mind sometimes produce a compelling demand to be on top, to win at all cost, but more often, it results in the opposite effect: hopelessness and passivity. We come up with plenty of excuses—“I’m too old.” “I’m too young.” “I’m not educated enough.” “I don’t have what it takes.” If people dwell on these excuses long enough, perception becomes reality: hopelessness

pervades their thinking and they feel completely helpless. Opportunities come and go because the person doesn’t have enough confidence to even try.

SIX COMMON BARRIERS

We learn by clearly identifying contrasts: we choose *this* instead of *that*; we believe *this* concept because *that* one doesn’t ring true. We learn to think rightly only when we can readily identify the roadblocks to productive,

nimble thinking. Only then can we see other options. I want to point out six common barriers to critical thinking:

1. SOCIAL CONDITIONING

As we've seen, our thoughts, beliefs, values, and decisions are, to a great degree, a product of our social environment. All of us are socially conditioned; it's unavoidable. We can be locked into our perceptions based on race, religion, politics, nationality, and every other conceivable factor, down to the sports team we cheer for...and the ones we can't stand.

The messages we internalized inflame our beliefs and limit our choices. We hold fast to particular ideas and prejudices even when we find ample evidence against them. We listen to "experts" who confirm our biases and we disregard those who have an opposing view. We can't imagine living in certain neighborhoods, driving particular cars, having a wider range of friends, or marrying a specific kind of person. I'm quite sure Brenda's parents and friends were stunned when she told them she wanted to marry a guy from India!

2. INSTANT JUDGMENT

Based on our social conditioning and past experiences, we prejudice people and ideas, eliminating them from careful consideration, shutting off conversation, perceiving their values as defective, and seeing them as enemies of all we hold right and good.

I've noticed that the longer a leader serves in an organization, the greater the propensity for pessimism. Old hurts haven't quite healed, hard words aren't forgotten, and the memory of past opposition still lingers. All become a recipe for instantly assuming any question, even an honest, good-hearted one, represents an attack on the leader's position and character.

The answer isn't to be naïve. Good leaders have a blend of healthy skepticism and openness to new ideas. President Ronald Reagan famously stated his policy about the Soviet Union: "Trust but verify."

3. EGOCENTRIC

In a self-absorbed, unreflective, defensive mind, people assume their thinking is always right and others are always wrong. This, of course,

predisposes them to instant judgments and they use power plays to dominate and intimidate those who might disagree.

To counter this tendency in my life, I've learned to walk into a meeting and say, "I have a great idea, but I need you to make it even better." This simple statement tells the people on our team that I'm a leader who initiates creative new plans, but it also tells them I value each one of them and welcome their input.

4. ALWAYS CERTAIN

Some people are so insecure that they hide behind the protective walls of absolute certainty. They feel uncomfortable with complexity and they refuse to live with ambiguity. They don't want to think abstractly; they insist on concrete solutions, so every question must have a definite and irrefutable answer. They see people as all good or all bad, totally loyal or completely suspect, and they are either fully behind an idea, candidate, or organization, or they fiercely oppose them.

When I was a college president, staff at different levels often asked me to help them solve problems. I learned to listen carefully and then ask them to come back with three possible solutions. If I had asked them for only two, they would probably come with one good solution and one that was obviously inferior. Asking them for three required them to get out of binary thinking and be more complex and thorough. Sometimes, I really stretched them by asking for four or five possible solutions.

5. BLINDLY LOYAL

Some people don't want to think for themselves, so they believe whatever those in authority tell them. After all, they surmise, those people got to the top for a reason. They may exhibit blind loyalty to a person, a group, or an institution, and they don't want to listen if someone has even a mildly critical view of this authority. Quite often, this response is the product of being raised by parents who used more limits than love and more demands than kindness with their children.

I'm certainly not saying the problem is always the leader's fault for exercising authority. Leaders must lead. They must wield authority and

influence to be effective. The problem here is in the minds of the followers, those who aren't secure enough to be objective and ask good questions.

Today, leaders need to understand that different groups of people may mean very different things by their questions. Millennial leaders feel very comfortable with other people in the organization asking, "Why?" These leaders know the person is genuinely searching for answers. But Boomer leaders may hear the same question and interpret it as a challenge to their authority, responding defensively and harming the relationship. These older leaders too often interpret blind loyalty as a positive character trait. It's not. It kills creativity.

6. GO ALONG TO GET ALONG

Some people are conflict-avoidant, so they don't question people who have different opinions, even if they don't agree. This lack of mental involvement almost completely shuts down innovation. These people aren't blindly loyal. They see the flaws in their leaders and members of their teams, but they're not willing to engage in meaningful conversation to change minds or invest their best efforts in achieving the organization's objectives.

BREAKING THROUGH BARRIERS

When we can identify these barriers in others, we can help them make better choices, find freedom, and serve with passion and creativity. When we identify the barriers in ourselves, we uncover choices that lead to the most challenging and rewarding paths of our lives. We suddenly have more options, more intellectual energy, and more innovative solutions than ever before.

OUT OF THE BOX

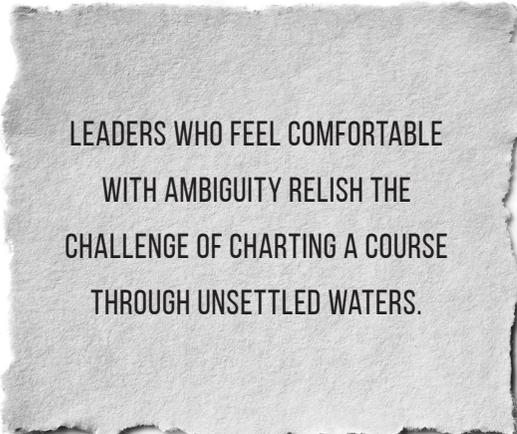
I've noticed that the best leaders use three kinds of thinking: strategic, genius, and oblique. Throughout most organizations, people in different roles often use *strategic* thinking. Their goal is to accomplish a task, so they think through the basic questions to make sure every base is covered. They ask questions about *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and *how*. They may or may not ask *why* because they assume others have already thought through that question.

GENIUS THINKING IS DIFFERENT

Genius thinking asks, “What if...?” These leaders begin to contemplate their options even before they start crafting any kind of formal plan. They know they have some resources in hand and they know how to find other resources. Other resources may be out of reach, but they don’t limit their vision to the ones they can readily identify. They dream, they imagine, and they envision possibilities. When they don’t have enough resources, they’re even more resourceful. Some might ask, “Which is better, strategic thinking or genius thinking?” The answer is “both.” Like two wings of an airplane, leaders need both kinds to thrive.

As organizations grow larger and more complex, leaders need to engage in *oblique* thinking. By the time a challenge or opportunity reaches their desks, these issues are far beyond strategic thinking and they often don’t have clear answers even genius thinking is looking for. At this point, there’s no right or wrong, no black or white; there are multiple answers and all of

them have promised benefits and potential risks. The answers to these questions often are both/and rather than either/or.



LEADERS WHO FEEL COMFORTABLE
WITH AMBIGUITY RELISH THE
CHALLENGE OF CHARTING A COURSE
THROUGH UNSETTLED WATERS.

Some leaders are stuck in strategic thinking and lack creativity. They’re good managers, but they seldom inspire people around them and their organizations usually remain a modest size. Genius thinkers are looking outside the box, but they’re still expecting to find clear paths

forward. Their organizations grow because they think in terms of possibilities, not limits.

A few leaders feel comfortable with ambiguity. They don’t insist on guaranteed outcomes for their biggest decisions. In fact, they relish the challenge of charting a course through unsettled waters. The people closest to them often become genius thinkers and a few might even learn to think obliquely.

What kind of thinker are you? Press, stretch, and grow to become a genius thinker, and perhaps even learn to think obliquely.²

PRACTICAL PAYOFFS

The questions I'll address in this book peel back the layers of our assumptions and challenge us to think more deeply, more clearly, and more productively than ever before. We'll look at the fundamental topics all leaders instinctively address, including security, location, ownership, team, growth, and benchmarks of success. It's not easy to step out of ourselves to think about thinking, but it's essential—and the payoffs are enormous. Let me list a few:

YOU'LL WELCOME NEW IDEAS

Other people see things from a different perspective. That doesn't make them wrong and it doesn't make them right. It only means they may have something to offer that we haven't considered before. As our defenses go down, new ideas are no longer seen as a threat. We can live with nuances and we aren't thrown off guard by complexity. A new world of options opens to us.

YOU'LL BE MORE APPROACHABLE

The corollary to welcoming new ideas is that the people with those ideas feel welcomed. We value their experiences, their perspectives, and their suggestions. They may have a different way of saying the same thing, but their way may work better with part of your audience, so you learn from them. Or they may have diametrically different views, even about the essentials of your life and faith, but you're secure enough to engage in meaningful dialogue without demanding or intimidating. When we talk to people who have a different perspective, we don't react. Instead, we say those magical words, "Tell me more about that." This simple statement works wonders.

When we're approachable, others sense it. They pick it up by our non-verbal cues: our gestures, the look in our eyes, our tone of voice, and our body language. They feel comfortable being themselves in our presence.

2. Three kinds of thinking is adapted from "Creative Leadership," *Futuring* (Highland Park, IL: Mall Publishing, 2002, 123–128.

When we need directions and there are five people standing on the corner, we look for the person whose appearance communicates, “You can ask me. I’ll be glad to help.” When we’re shopping, we’re drawn to the sales clerk who has open gestures and a ready smile, not the intense one who has pursed lips and a furrowed brow. One is happy to show us the shoes we’re looking for; the other makes us feel we’re an inconvenient distraction.

YOU’LL BE MORE PATIENT WITH YOURSELF

Many leaders are in a hurry. They have a vision and they’re desperately trying to move heaven and earth to fulfill their dream. They aren’t very patient with others who aren’t running as fast as they are and they aren’t patient with themselves. Great leaders realize the best ideas, the best products, and the best results come from a process, a process that is stunted by hurrying. Yes, they have big plans. Yes, they have a lot to do. But the most important aspects of leadership—thinking and planning—require ideas to marinate until they are ready for the oven.

I was born impatient. Now is too late! Everything should have happened yesterday! But over the years, I’ve learned to value the process of starting with good ideas, thinking about them, and getting others to think about them, until they become great ideas.

Brenda used to frustrate me with her commitment to process. I wondered how a simple question could inspire so much thought. Her silence was deafening. Over the years, she has learned to say, “I’m thinking.” And I’ve learned to respond, “I know.”

YOU’LL COMMUNICATE MORE CLEARLY

As leaders ask more questions and listen more carefully, they understand their people far better. Their message then goes beyond facts to connect with the hopes and fears that have surfaced in the conversations. These leaders now understand not only what people need to do, but how they feel, what they believe, and how they dream. When leaders connect with people on that level, they accelerate motivation and engagement.

The best communicators “read the room” to notice how their message is being heard. Even before that, they anticipate responses so they can say,

“Some of you are thinking...” or “Some of you are feeling...” and “Some of you have these concerns...”

YOU’LL MAKE BETTER DECISIONS

When we think more expansively, we consider more options, involve more people, develop a better grid to sort out ideas, and come out with better decisions for ourselves and those around us.

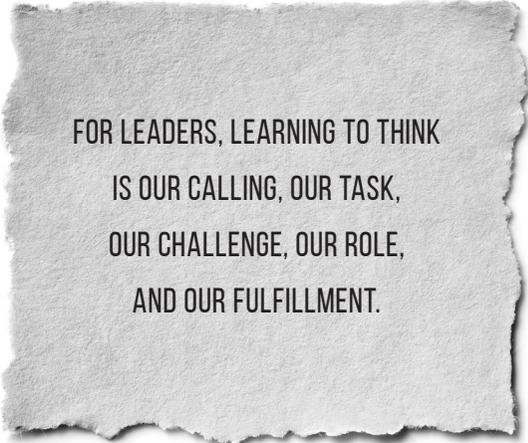
My thinking about decisions has changed over the years. I used to instantly ask, “Can I do this?” then “How much will it cost?” I’ve learned to begin with the question, “Who do I need?”

For instance, I was asked to help in the reorganization of a major, nationwide company. The first question I asked myself was, “Who do I need on my team to help these leaders pull off the best possible reorganization?” Better questions lead to better results.

YOUR EXPECTATIONS

Every executive is hired for one primary purpose: to make the hardest decisions in the organization. Whether it’s the president of the United States, the CEO of a company, or the pastor of a church, each one is hired to make decisions that will solve seemingly intractable problems and propel the organization forward. Others give input and provide data, but the executive must make the final decisions. Better decisions,

though, don’t come out of thin air and they aren’t the product of chance. They are the result of high-level thinking processes, which then can be articulated as viable options so the best choice can be made. Only then will the team spring into action, implementing plans, seeing tangible results, and fulfilling the organization’s destiny.



FOR LEADERS, LEARNING TO THINK
IS OUR CALLING, OUR TASK,
OUR CHALLENGE, OUR ROLE,
AND OUR FULFILLMENT.

Learning to think, then, isn't optional for leaders. It's our calling, our task, our challenge, our role, and our fulfillment. You can choose your thoughts as carefully as you choose what you wear. Explore your thought processes and challenge your assumptions. Cultivate new ways to think about old problems and new opportunities. Be brave enough to ask yourself hard questions and be a leader who excels at asking others great questions. Pick up new ways to think. Dress your mind on purpose!

If you learn to think better, you'll be a better leader. I guarantee it. Become an expert at asking penetrating questions. If no one ever says to you, "Nobody has ever asked me that question," you need to learn to go deeper. If you become a person who thinks more clearly, expansively, and nimbly, you'll also be a better leader, speaker, spouse, parent, and friend.

Let me be very practical with you now. Pastor Craig Groeschel is a phenomenal leader. At a conference, he gave a talk on "Busting Barriers with Mindset Changes." He addressed the need to think differently about a range of important topics, including organizational culture, programming, purpose, and limitations. His first recommendation to implement these principles was, "Find someone one or two steps ahead of you and learn how they think. Most want to learn what they do—not what they think."³ That's my advice to you: If you want to be a better leader, invest time and energy in being a better thinker. But realize you'll make much more progress if you have a coach, a mentor, or a wise friend who is farther along than you are. Lean on this person, be open to suggestions, and realize that being uncomfortable with progress is entirely normal.

In the next chapters, I'll ask ten more crucial questions. I've asked myself these questions, and they've helped me grow. I trust they'll do the same thing for you.

At the end of each chapter, you'll also find some questions to stimulate your thinking and focus your application. Use these for personal reflection and discussions with your coach. You may also want to use them as a guide for group discussions with your team.

3. Cited by Will Mancini, "Groeschel on Thinking Different: Culture, Programming & Mission," <https://www.willmancini.com/blog/groeschel-on-thinking-different-culture-programming-mission>.

THINK ABOUT IT...

1. Do you agree or disagree with the point that virtually all of us make colossal assumptions as the basis of our thinking? Explain your answer.
2. How does it help to differentiate between essentials, convictions, and preferences? How does making virtually everything an essential inevitably lead to conflict?
3. Why are messages we absorbed in our childhood so ingrained and hard to change?
4. Look at the three negative assumptions: "I hurt," "I doubt," and "I can't." Which of these has the biggest impact on your thinking and your life? Describe the impact it has made.
5. Which of the payoffs of better thinking is most attractive to you? Explain your answer.
6. How would it help you think more deeply and clearly if you have a mentor who is one or two steps ahead of you in this pursuit? Who might be this person in your life?
7. Why are you reading this book? What do you hope to get out of it?