

LMII Journal



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Develop Your Creativity for Maximum Success

By Tom Northup

We have all experienced that “A-Ha” moment when we connected an idea we had struggled to understand with an experience that made the idea perfectly clear. This experiential learning process is fundamental to best thinking.

Those who develop best thinking become experts in their fields. They gain increasing esteem from their peers and a confidence level that places them at the top of their profession. Best thinking becomes an attitude of continuous discovery. Best thinkers don't segment their thinking into periodic events. They make strategic thinking a regular process.

People who take best thinking to its highest level interact with others who have a mutual desire to share knowledge, education, experience, and wisdom with one another. A burst of creativity flows from the combined energies and intellects of those who share experiences and build from a combined base.

When this happens, the participants create knowledge greater than the sum of the parts, a case where two plus two can truly become five. Everyone involved raises their personal effectiveness to a higher level than they could achieve

by themselves.

In this article, I will share the reasons why best thinking is particularly important in today's business environment and will present ways you can develop your best thinking to become a top player in your profession. Sole practitioners and company executives can all benefit from personal best thinking.

Best Thinking Levels

When we strive to become experts in our field, we build expertise through formal education and practical experience. Over time, experiential learning allows us to effectively apply our knowledge to a wide variety of situations. At this level of best thinking, our educational gaps, innate ability, and personal biases constrict our expertise, keeping our learning one dimensional. We need more knowledge and experience than we possess but often fail to recognize that need.

It comes as a surprise to many people that when they

build increased experience and knowledge through interaction with other professionals, they raise their best thinking to a level they never expected to achieve.



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The highest level of best thinking happens because group interaction supports expanded creative thinking. We build our expertise on a far wider base of education and experience than we could have attained by ourselves. We rise above our personal limitations and biases. Individual gems of wisdom and experience from many sources combine to form a creative base of practical knowledge.

Historical Perspective

Many of us remember when change in business happened slowly. Executives and professionals could develop best thinking over time through reading and continuing education. Interpersonal interaction, though important, was not critical to increasing our expertise.

Today, technology changes faster than ever, creating a business environment in which we find it difficult to keep up with current practices by using only our personal resources. We cannot read books and get practical experience fast enough to maintain the necessary expertise. Interaction with others with complementary experience is now the only way to develop best thinking.

Organizations are an excellent place to develop best thinking because the organizational culture promotes creative interaction within company teams. As professionals, we do not have this luxury because our support groups are not self-contained within a single organizational environment. We must develop our own creative terms.

Effective Attitudes for Best Thinking

To embrace best thinking, professionals need to adjust their attitudes and behaviors.

Best thinking is a continual process, not an event. We must develop an “I’m always learning” mentality. We must make regular dialogue with others a way of life. When we notice and remember the little gems of wisdom we get from others, experiential learning happens, giving us “A-Ha” moments and great leaps ahead in our thinking.

When we share with others, we need a strong sense of self and a positive mental attitude, which allows us to interact comfortably with others and to accept them even when they have very different ideas. People with strong self-awareness understand their emotions, strengths, limitations, values, and motives at a deep level. They are honest with themselves about themselves. They know the direction they want their life to take and why.

When we ask others to participate with us in a dialog about our projects and concerns, we must share with them. These wide-ranging, in-depth creative discussions must involve true give-and-take between the two parties for the absolute best thinking to take place.

To develop a strong give-and-take relationship, become

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significant in the lives of others. People with significance understand that they contribute to the success of others. They ask, “How can I help you?” They dedicate their time and energy to the success of those who help them achieve their success. When you get others to realize that you truly care about them and have their best interests at heart, you will have created a relationship that fosters best thinking.

In contrast, self-centered people lose the opportunity to develop the highest level of best thinking because they focus too much on themselves, making it difficult for others to interact with them. They don’t have the give-and-take attitude necessary for interpersonal dialog.

You must be non-judgmental when you interact with others. Accept others for what they can contribute. Don’t force your values and expectations on them. Don’t expect more than they can give. Be open to all contributions.

When you engage in open-ended discussions, use the creative right side of your brain. You will discover that no wrong answers exist and that everything is possible. The more ideas you develop the better. You can later use the left side of your brain to analyze the ideas you have created.

Summary

When you communicate with others on a continuous basis, you develop and maintain your status as an expert in your field. You will achieve “A-Ha” moments by being non-judgmental and remembering that everything is possible. Nurture a mind open to all ideas.

Develop significance in the lives of others. You will foster the highest level of best thinking when others realize that you are giving your time and energy to their success and they can contribute to yours.

Most importantly, best thinking is not an event but a continuous thought process. Ask everyone to contribute their thoughts and experience as you seek the gems of knowledge that will turn into that “A-Ha” experience.

To quote John Wooden, “It’s what you learn after you know it all that counts!”

Motivation Through Attitudes and Habits

Motivation by attitudes and habits involves accepting responsibility for your own actions. It provides opportunity for growing, for developing creativity and for helping others. Unquestionably, motivation by attitudes and habits is the most powerful and lasting force available for development of personal leadership. When you change your attitudes toward your family, your friends, your work, and yourself and life generally, you shape the basic structure of your personality to conform to the idea you choose as your purpose and goal for life.

Dealing with lingering attitudes, formed over a number of years, takes time. You may even occasionally become frustrated, but it helps to remember that attitudes are only habits of thought, and habits can be acquired. You can add new dimensions as you encounter new experiences. You can make new decisions and adjust old attitudes.

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Designing Personal Growth

Philosophers, poets, and other writers from many centuries in the past have left us a rich legacy of literature that demonstrates one of the most vital tools of personal leadership development. This technique is the firing pin for rapid-fire change, the scope for the rifle of self-direction. This marvelous tool is affirmation. The dictionary calls affirmation “the act of asserting or affirming as true a positive assertion.” Affirmation is a positive declaration that describes what you want to be, what you want to have, or how you choose to live your life.

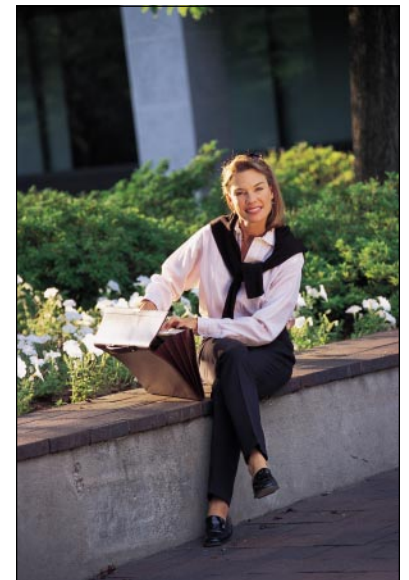
There is nothing particularly startling or new in using affirmation as a method of personal growth. It has been done for thousands of years. More than a hundred years ago, the French doctor Émile Coué began telling his patients they would feel happier and better if they adopted one simple idea: all they had to do was say over and over “Every day in every way I’m getting better and better.” Many people laughed at Dr. Coué. His method was so simple that they doubted its validity. He was teaching his patients nothing new. It was just another way of describing the power of affirmation used with spaced repetition to affect attitudes.

When you see in the world what you believe to be there and affirm it through self-talk, you psychologically reinforce your opinions and ideas. “But,” you may say, “this does not alter reality. The fact that I believe or disbelieve doesn’t change anything.” Objectively, an affirmation may not change anything, but subjectively, it certainly does. You tend to live up to what is expected of you, to your reputation – good or bad. The real importance of this truth in the area of personal leadership is that you tend not only to live up to what others expect of you, you also live up to what you expect of yourself. This is why the use of affirmation is such a dynamic tool for personal leadership development.

Types of Affirmations

You have the choice of several kinds of affirmations:

1. A *numerical affirmation* makes use of some number that has a special meaning for you. It may represent money, a date, or a number of activities. For example, a salesperson might use an affirmation such as 10-6-3-50. This would be a reminder that 10 telephone calls every day will result in six appointments for sales presentations, lead to three sales, and produce an income of \$50,000 per year. Repeating this affirmation makes it easy to make calls because the salesperson knows the benefit.
2. *Pictorial affirmations* intensify and build desire in your subconscious mind. Looking often at a picture that represents your goal stimulates your imagination and helps you create ways of transforming it into reality.
3. *Verbal affirmations* are condensed statements of a desired result or an attitude you wish to possess. For example: “My annual income is \$50,000.”
4. *Actions serve as affirmations*. Repetition of a new tennis stroke in practice is an affirmation. Repetition puts the law of displacement to work for you.

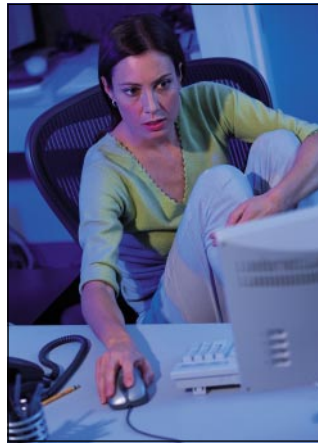


Overcoming Negative Attitudes

Because a positive attitude forms the foundation for a positive self-image, building a positive attitude is the most effective method for developing a positive self-image. Knowing exactly what a positive attitude is will help accomplish this important task. Simply stated, a positive attitude is the opposite of a negative attitude; it is entering every activity without giving mental recognition to the possibility of defeat. A positive attitude creates a dynamic aura; people with a positive attitude have a positive expectancy toward self, other people, the organization, work, the market, new ideas – toward life in general.

Almost all of us have at least a few negative attitudes from time to time. In addition, you will often notice these same debilitating habits of thought in others. Recognizing

negative attitudes for what they are is the first step toward taking specific actions to replace them with more productive attitudes; once negative attitudes are acknowledged, replacing them with more positive, constructive attitudes is a matter of commitment and persistence. **Here are frequent negative attitudes encountered in the workplace:**



- ◆ *Blaming others.* Blaming others causes one to react with hostility toward other people or circumstances in order to avoid accepting personal responsibility. When you as a leader in your organization assume responsibility for your work, your decisions, and the results you produce, those in your work group will be more likely to follow your example. Take strong, appropriate action to develop a corporate culture in which people do not blame others but assume responsibility for the consequences of their decisions.
- ◆ *Giving up.* One of the most common reasons for failure is simply giving up before the goal is reached. To work on eliminating this negative attitude and habit, adopt a “Never Give Up” attitude on every goal you set, and demonstrate that determination as you lead your work group through the action steps required to reach that goal. View stumbling blocks as stepping stones. Learn all you can from obstacles; then go over them, under them, around them—or straight through them.
- ◆ *Excessive worry.* It has been said that worry is the interest, paid in full, on troubles that rarely happen.

Worry fritters away valuable energy and immobilizes. In contrast, facing each situation as it arises – identifying a goal, developing a plan of action, and then taking constructive steps – is the most effective way to overcome the crippling habit of excessive worry.

- ◆ *Indecision.* “Analysis paralysis” keeps some intelligent leaders from moving forward to the organization’s goals; they spend so much time gathering information, analyzing data, and reconsidering issues that they never get around to making a decision and moving on. The most effective individuals are those who gather information in a reasonable amount of time, assume a certain degree of calculated risk, and then make the best decision they can based on the available information.
- ◆ *Feeling guilty.* This attitude is caused by conditioning that implies you’re not smart enough, not good enough, or not experienced enough to do anything right. People who accept such conditioning suffer from a low self-image and blame themselves for everything that goes wrong. Whenever one of your team members appears to assume false guilt, help that person to analyze the causes of the problems, what steps can be taken to rectify the situation, and how to avoid similar pitfalls in similar situations in the future. Help them to see the things “done right” rather than focusing entirely on the things “done wrong.”
- ◆ *Unreasonable fear.* Helping people to understand that fear robs them from using more of their potential may help motivate them to change this negative attitude. Another important approach is to analyze each situation in which unreasonable fear is experienced and to formulate an appropriate plan of action to react more constructively in similar future situations.
- ◆ *Overdependence.* Overdependence is often expressed as a strong need for the approval of others – a desire so strong it causes people to act against their own best interest. Try to give the overdependent team member opportunities to experience success. Encourage them to enjoy the intrinsic satisfaction that comes from a job well done. As they use more of their potential and grow and develop, they will find that the positive attitude of being independent offers more gratification than the negative attitude of overdependence.
- ◆ *Fear of success.* Many people actually fear success. These people feel unworthy and undeserving of success. A great deal of courage is required to leap this hurdle to a positive self-image. Those who fear success need to be convinced that it is appropriate to like themselves, and that they are worthy of success.

If you have a tendency toward one of these negative attitudes, now is the time to work toward a new self-image.

Planning, Preparing, and Preventing: Keys to Enhancing Authority

Making team members aware of the importance of their work and how best to get it done prevents most problems that affect performance. Most performance problems fall into three general areas: problems related to training, problems arising in an environment which the team member cannot control, and problems of motivation. To prevent problems and increase your effectiveness, incorporate these four strategies into your training and motivation program:

1. Fit the job to the team member. Aptitude, qualifications, interest, skill, physical fitness, and mental capacity are essential for good performance, so take great care to match assignments with each team member. Individuals who are ill-suited to their work frequently grow bored or frustrated and become dormant volcanoes likely to erupt into active problems at any moment. For some team members, assignments that provide frequent opportunities for small successes are essential for building their confidence in preparing them for new, more difficult projects. On the other hand, the more performance-oriented top producers often need assignments that provide increased mental and emotional challenge to prevent decreased motivation and loss of momentum.

2. Provide adequate training for the job. Undertrained workers frequently become confused, frustrated, bored, or all three. Their potential is not being maximized. You can prevent most poor performance and negative behavior by communicating clearly to the members of your work group what they are expected to do, and by training them consistently on how to do it.

3. Provide necessary tools, supplies, and procedures. An employee whose efforts are thwarted by a lack of information, supplies, or equipment cannot satisfy the requirements of the work situation. Provide clear instructions, possibly with a manual or handbook identifying and describing your organization's expectations and procedures. A physical environment that encourages productivity is often overlooked but is very important. Make sure your team members have what they need to do their best work.

4. Give team members periodic feedback about their performance. Periodic feedback about their performance lets people know when they need to take corrective action to get back on track. In addition, feedback affirms people

who are performing well and lets them know they can enjoy the satisfaction that comes from meeting expectations for their work. Communicate clearly and frequently to the members of your work team how their particular jobs contribute to the overall work of the organization. If their work seems to go unnoticed, team members may assume that either the work itself or the quality does not really matter. Or they may simply be unaware that they need to take corrective action. When feedback quickly follows poor performance and corrective action is agreed upon, team members are less likely to repeat mistakes. They are also more receptive to corrective action whenever it is needed. In addition, feedback motivates team members to work toward the ultimate goal of discipline – assuming responsibility for monitoring their own work. As a leader, you are responsible for training and motivating your employees to become contributing members of a high performance team.

Taking Corrective Action

An integral part of working with and through people to accomplish desired results is taking corrective action when it's needed. Discard any fear that upholding high standards hurts relationships with your team members. On the contrary, avoiding corrective action and failing to help each member make a positive contribution to the team projects an impression of weakness and is a sure way to lose the respect of your team members, diminish your authority, destroy motivation, and jeopardize the results you are seeking.

When problem behavior occurs, the first step in correcting it is to define the real problem. Find out whether the employee can perform in an acceptable manner. Ability to perform depends upon adequate training, supplies, materials, and information, all of which are part of the work environment. Ask questions to learn whether the employee knows what performance is desirable, knows how to do the job, and understands the requirement in question. The answers you receive reveal whether the problem involves training. If it is a training problem, provide the instruction needed. If training is adequate, next find out whether anything in the environment is preventing satisfactory performance. Are the necessary materials available? Is equipment in good order? Is information available about standards, deadlines, or other pertinent details? If a problem exists in the environment, it is your responsibility to solve it. Learn to ask pertinent questions and to listen attentively as you seek the best solution to motivation and other problems with lack of productivity.



Developing Your Freedom to Choose

You may lead a rich, full life or a shallow, empty existence. But whatever you gain from life is largely a matter of choice – your choice. You are free to choose whatever you want to do or to be. Your greatest power is the power to choose your own destiny. That freedom of choice is your birthright and no one can steal it or deprive you of it. The reality of the power that comes from your freedom of choice becomes evident when you understand the unalterable principles under which this freedom works.

▲ *Choice is a talent that must be developed.*

Like any other talent, the power of choice can be developed. If you are reluctant to make choices and decisions because you fear failure, you may choose to play it safe and miss experiences that could lead to making better choices. Good decisions are based on prior decisions.

▲ *You must choose for yourself.*

Because no two people are exactly alike, no one can make a completely satisfactory choice for someone else. When you allow others to make your choices, you hand over to them your destiny and rob yourself of your birthright. You then bear the consequences of borrowed choices.

Certainly it is wise to collect all the facts before you choose or make a decision, but the opinions you solicit should be considered for what they are – the opinions of others. The choice is yours.

You are eminently more qualified than anyone else to choose what is best for you, what course you should take and what destiny will be yours. The world stands aside for you when you know where you are going, but it gives little notice or attention to one whose choices are dictated by others.

▲ *The choice determines the consequences.*

You may select any action you choose; but once you make a choice, the consequences follow the principle of cause and effect. A poor choice leads to undesirable results as surely as a wise choice produces a favorable consequence. Often a desirable result must be paid for in advance with work and effort while the resulting penalty of a poor choice is often deferred. Postponement of the date when we must “pay the piper” may lull us into the belief that we will somehow escape making the payment, but it doesn’t happen that way. You cannot have the pleasures of one choice and the rewards of another; nor can you blame fate or luck when you must subsequently pay the price of a carelessly-made choice or decision. To

control the outcome of your ventures, guard your decisions and choices with meticulous care.

Once you accept responsibility for exercising your freedom of choice, you can use it to make whatever changes of habit or attitudes are necessary for developing personal leadership and self-motivation. Give your choices time to yield results; be patient. Today’s habits are the result of choices made long ago. Tomorrow’s habits will be the result of the choices you make today and the attitudes and habits you adopt.



Making Choices with Self-Confidence

Self-confidence comes from practical know-how; know-how comes from knowledge and experience; and experience necessarily involves confrontation and engagement. When you know from first-hand experience that you can do something, you are incomparably more confident than if you have merely observed how someone else did it. You can always acquire knowledge; libraries are full of it. But experience is something else. Real experience – the kind that turns theoretical knowledge into practical, personal know-how, and results in self-confidence – comes only when you are willing to become involved in situations that others avoid. Conflict and involvement give you the assurance that you are truly in control of the situation. Once you recognize the significance of practical experience – what it is and what it can do for you – you usually welcome even those stressful experiences that stretch you to the limit of your abilities.

When you know where you stand and where you are going, your confidence knows no bounds because you are motivated by results, not by methods. But if you do not know where you are going or what path to follow, you have confidence in nothing and are fearful of everything.

Self-confidence allows you to be realistic instead of dependent on vague hopes. When you are realistic, you do not wait for time and circumstances to come along and transform your dreams into reality. You take the lead and work progressively toward achievement; and most important, you have confidence in your own ability to lead, to grow, and to make the internal changes necessary to reach your objectives. You believe in the concept of continual change. You know that you are indeed a creature of change. Your response to new experiences is that they are natural and to be expected. They pose no threat to you.

Initiating Achievement Through Empowerment

No matter how ambitious, talented, or self-disciplined you are, at some point it becomes necessary to involve other people in achieving results and building effective productivity. Empowerment is the means for accomplishing these goals. *Empowerment is the creation of a motivational climate that releases power, resources, and responsibility to each team member to foster maximum involvement, commitment, and desired results.* Empowerment extends productivity beyond the organizational skill and knowledge of one person; it is the art of enabling others to take action.

Empowerment is an essential building block in win-win, interdependent human relationships, regardless of your position and responsibilities. Allow others to make more decisions, and they bring more commitment to any corporate endeavor. Impart a degree of ownership to others, and they become involved in your vision and action plan. This is true in sales, education, customer service, management, manufacturing, and any other field. Empowerment allows anyone striving for personal and professional productivity to move forward.

Because it is the essence of true leadership and influence, empowerment achieves results and progress through the commitment and involvement of others. In the past, only leaders were allowed to control information flow and decision making, taking full credit for results. Today, however, it is widely recognized that all team members can make valuable contributions and share in both credit and responsibility for outcomes. Empower those who are in the best position to take action by giving them the direction, knowledge, and authority they need. Handled correctly, empowerment multiplies your efforts as well as your vision and goals. Communicate to your team members your respect through delegating some of your traditional authority and power to them.

Empowerment takes many shapes and forms: self-directed work teams, asking for ideas, turning over leadership of meetings, delegation of training responsibilities, flex-time policies, surveys, cross training, and other methods encouraging participation. These strategies are tools for empowerment.

Recognize the expertise of all team members and unleash their creativity. In today's diverse, internationalized,

information culture, top-down autocratic control is obsolete; mutual respect, reasonable delegation of authority, and mutual commitment to organizational goals are the hallmarks of an effective organization.

Give employees the responsibility to adapt, respond, and take advantage of opportunities. Experimentation and innovation must occur regularly to keep up with a world characterized by information and technology change. Consumers increasingly demand instantaneous service, faultless quality, and low prices. To address these demands, train team members in more than procedures; help them to understand the spirit and missions of their work. Even temporary workers need information and training to function as empowered, dynamic team members.

The Benefits Of Empowerment

High quality service is one of the significant results of an empowered team. Because empowered team members are well-informed, well-trained, and vested with the necessary

authority, they are able to seek ways to satisfy customers without being forced to wade through mountains of bureaucracy and red tape. **Empowerment can be the spark of progress, with many tangible and intangible benefits, including:**

- ◆ Retention of creative, skilled people as they participate and share in the success of the group,
- ◆ Logical, reasonable policy and decision making based on information from diverse sources in the organization,
- ◆ High-caliber information flow as people know their ideas are solicited, respected, and acted upon,
- ◆ Decreased waste and inefficiency as people closest to situations take initiative,
- ◆ Ideas captured in time to respond to market needs,
- ◆ Unique competitive advantages derived from maximizing the talents of all individuals in the organization,
- ◆ Increased high payoff time for upper management, and
- ◆ Improved morale as group members become emotionally and intellectually involved in projects.

Initiating the process of achievement through empowerment can take longer than imposing an agenda upon others. However, once people experience the fulfillment that comes through empowerment and involvement, they are eager to adapt and make full use of their potential. They recognize the many personal benefits they reap as the organization succeeds and their responsibility and effectiveness expand through empowerment.



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