

## TIME TO THINK

### An Imperative -- of Behavior, Not Time

By  
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Some facts are chilling. Consider this one: *the quality of everything we do depends on the quality of the thinking we do first*. It is chilling because its implications are enormous. The key implication is that there is nothing – nothing—more important in developing organizational effectiveness than ensuring that people *think for themselves* with rigor, imagination, and courage. Everyday. In every meeting. In every interaction.

And so we must ask: In hierarchical structures often driven by the alternation between reward and reprisal, what does it take for people to *think clearly and for themselves*? And how do we find the time?

These questions have driven the work and research of Time To Think for 30 years. The recurring answer has not been IQ, education, experience, power, or time itself. The key factor in whether or not people can think clearly for themselves is *the way they are being treated by the people with them while they are thinking*.

The impact of our *behavior* on people's ability to think is, whether we realize it or not, that big.

#### THE TEN COMPONENTS

At Time To Think we have identified 10 key enablers to improve thinking. We call them the Ten Components of a Thinking Environment™. Some of them are simple, but in our organizational cultures none is easy. All ten operating as a system have the greatest impact.

The Ten Components are:

Attention

Listening with palpable respect and without interruption

Equality

Ensuring equal turns to think and speak

Ease

Offering freedom from internal urgency

Incisive Questions

Finding and removing untrue assumptions that distort thinking

Information

Supplying the facts

Dismantling denial

Diversity

Encouraging divergent thinking and diverse group identities

Encouragement

Giving courage for cutting edge thinking by removing internal competition

Feelings

Allowing sufficient emotional release to restore thinking

Appreciation

Practicing a 5:1 ratio of appreciation to criticism

Place

Creating a physical environment that says to people, "You matter."

## WHAT ABOUT TIME?

Perhaps surprisingly, time is not one of the Ten Components. We have discovered that time is a *by-product* of a Thinking Environment, rather than a component of it. That is, time to think is *generated* by the ten enablers. If you allot the usual amount of time for a meeting, for example, and everyone behaves with each other in these ten ways, you will generate high quality thinking *and* finish early. If you meet for even ten minutes with a colleague and behave with each other in these ten ways, you will accomplish more in less time. The principle here is:

*In a Thinking Environment, people think so well in the time they have that the time they have increases.*

So, finding time to think is not the point. Changing the *way we treat each other* while we are thinking *is* the point. To gain time to think we need to become masters of the Ten Components, not masters of time.

#### WHEN WOULD AN ORGANIZATION APPLY THE TEN COMPONENTS?

A more apt question here is: When would you *not* apply them? When would you *not* want to spawn and harvest the best ideas? When would you *not* want to release people's best contribution? When would you *choose* to settle for mediocre ideas and de-motivated co-workers? And when would you *not* want people *actually to practice* corporate values of inclusiveness, respect, collaboration, integrity, and innovation? Surely never.

It follows, then, that The Thinking Environment is productively applied to any moment when human beings are communicating. To date we have found no human interaction (except the indoctrination and execution of obedience) that cannot be improved dramatically by setting up a Thinking Environment as its infrastructure.

This is particularly true of meetings, both face-to-face and virtual. Meetings in a Thinking Environment are a microcosm of core values in action. And they are based on the decisions a) not to meet unless everyone's thinking is going to be sought, and b) to create the best possible conditions for thinking.

Once a team has mastered the Ten Components, we begin to hear this comment: 'We find non-Thinking-Environment meetings almost intolerable now.'

Equally powerful is one-to-one application. Thinking Partnerships, based on the Six-part Thinking Session™, add value to many people's working week. One Senior Partner said, 'From these weekly Thinking Sessions I gain both valuable ideas *and* physical energy.'

The Thinking Session model is also the foundation of Thinking Environment Coaching™ which, according to Bill Ford, executive coach and author of *High Energy Habits*, “uniquely develops the vast thinking ability of the client.”

The Thinking Environment is a particularly powerful tool for attorneys and doctors, and other helping professionals. It can dramatically add quality to their interactions with clients. Because helping professionals are educated to have the answers and to come up with those answers as quickly as possible, they often, in fact most of the time, miss the chance to formulate the best answers. This is because the best answers usually lie inside the client’s thinking. They are deeply informed by the client’s ideas, experience, perspective. And neither school nor supervised practice gives professionals the skills to help their clients think thoroughly for themselves. Most professionals are not educated in the Thinking Environment nor do they see their colleagues behaving in these ways. And so they go for years, often for their whole career, settling for less than the very best solutions and advice and ways forward for their clients. When, on the other hand, professionals learn the theory and skills of a Thinking Environment, the quality of their work at every level rises measurably.

## HOW DO ORGANIZATIONS BECOME THINKING ENVIRONMENTS?

Turning an organization into a Thinking Environment happens most successfully in five stages:

### 1 The Question

First leaders are asked: Do you *want* people to think for themselves?

### 2 Learning

When the answer is ‘yes,’ groups learn the Ten Components, practicing them in results-driven, real-time interactions and meetings.

### 3 Development

Coached teams apply the process to all management processes.

#### 4 Assessment

They assess the impact.

#### 5 Expansion

They introduce the Thinking Environment more widely.

This five-stage sequence produces optimal results. But impressive benefits come also from implementing even one of the Ten Components in any interaction. Restoring people's ability to think for themselves, even for a moment, is worth the courage and skill it takes to do it.

And although there is plenty of research substantiating the efficacy of this way of being with people, very little research is actually necessary to prove the benefit. Become skilled at it; do it wherever you have influence; and the results will be there in front of you.

#### WHAT ARE THE TANGIBLE BENEFITS OF THINKING ENVIRONMENT CULTURE?

Consider these reported results:

- 🕒 A global pharmaceutical company rescued a multi-million-dollar project in 45 minutes.
- 🕒 A government agency saved 62% of Senior Management time over six months.
- 🕒 An independent economy airline created a management program that underpinned the company's rise to #1 in the UK.
- 🕒 A national health team reduced by 80% the cost of each high-quality decision.
- 🕒 A global communications company saved 30 days of work in 30 minutes.

#### WHAT ARE THE HUMAN BENEFITS?

Consider these comments:

- 🕒 The Thinking Environment has become a core part of our Strategic Visioning Leadership Program

(Scott Farnsworth, President SunBridge INC)

- 🕒 Learning this framework for thinking is one of my best investments. There are not many things that can transform behaviors in organizations, but this has.  
(J. Harper, Head of Innovation, Pedigree MasterFoods Europe, MARS INC)
  - 🕒 The Thinking Environment was used successfully in our governance team meetings and had the added benefit of helping us really listen to each other during our integration of Pfizer and Pharmacia.  
(A. Jennigan, Vice President, Pfizer)
  - 🕒 When we use the Thinking Environment process, the quality and outcomes of our work together are staggering.  
(T. Stevens, Vice President HR, Time Warner)
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