

3 ways to shift your thinking to expand your options

Want to attract more possibilities than problems? **Learn to work with rather than against your brain's tendencies.**

The brain is your most complex and important organ, serving as your body's command center. While all human brains share the same architecture, each individual brain is unique. That's why if you become more self-aware and learn how *your* brain responds and reacts in different situations, you can transform how you feel, think, and act.



The brain's normal state is a "mental couch potato," according to Dr. Matthew Lieberman of UCLA. It's how the brain preserves its strength to react quickly whenever it senses you may be in danger. The brain's number one goal is to keep you safe.

However, if you're like most of us, **you want your brain to do more**, a la heavy-lifting thinking to help you grow and develop. You think critically and strategically using the brain's executive function. And you also can tap into your unconsciousness to discover new ways forward. That happens when you experience eureka moments and suddenly get ah-ha's.

You can intentionally generate insights – these ah-ha moments – by setting up your brain for success. You need to have these four elements in place:

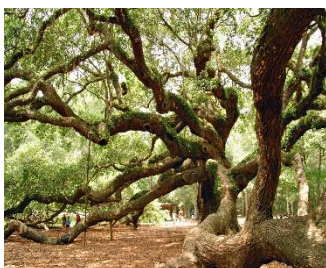
1. **Have a positive mindset, or at least neutral.** (No negative thoughts!)
2. **Be calm and quiet.**
3. **Avoid external stimulations.** Stay away from screens and anything else that requires concentration. Feel free to exercise, putter, or anything else that takes minimal brain power.
4. **Do not do any direct work on the problem you're trying to solve.** Don't think about solutions either. Instead, let your mind wander.

Most people find they tend to get great insights far away from work settings. Showering. Exercising. Being outdoors, especially in nature. Hanging out with a dog or cat. Driving. Letting your mind wander while listening to music. Doodling. Cooking. And so on.

When you experience an eureka moment, you systematically make new connections in your brain. These connections change the brain immediately. Yes, you literally think differently after having a self-generated insight. More importantly, you're also more compelled to take actions on your own.

You also can expand your options by shifting your thinking in these 3 ways, starting with the easiest to the hardest.

1. Look up and out, not just down and in.



When we use our devices or work at a desk, we tend to spend hours looking down and in. **When you shift to look up and out, you change your perspective and your perceptions.** Even a slight distance for a few moments can create clarity and a different point of view that will give you a fresh look at your situation. You'll also rest your eyes, relieve stress, and reenergize. And if you *additionally* make an effort to add physical movements and breathe fresh air outdoors, you'll recharge your brain even more.

2. Use the power of 3 to break the pattern of “binary thinking.”



Our lazy brains like “either/or” framing because it’s simple and takes minimal energy. Also called “binary thinking,” when you use this framing it has you put people into two categories, such as “us vs. them.” And in decision making, you limit yourself to two options. When you talk about “right vs. wrong” and other dueling extremes, you ignore the shades of gray in the middle. This “black and white” thinking can lead to oversimplifying complex information. Plus you can get stuck with two/too few choices.

To get out of this rut, break your pattern. Replace “either/or” with the “power of three.” Stretch yourself to come up with three categories, choices, potential solutions, or ideas. You can remember three things just as easily as two.

3. Reappraise your situation.



When you are annoyed, anxious, or frustrated about a situation, make an effort to turn it around and view it from another perspective, preferably a positive one.

For example, let’s say you applied for a new job, had several engaging interviews, and were told you were the top candidate – and then you hear nothing for weeks. Rather than feel rejected and angered that you had invested time and energy only to be ghosted, reappraise the situation.

You can tell yourself you were dealing with unprofessional people clueless about modern work practices. Do you really want to be part of an organization where you’d have to help people extricate themselves from the tar pits? Instead, you’ve avoided a bad situation and you can now focus on finding a position with an organization that shares your values and respects you.

By reframing the situation, you can see things in a more positive light (or at least less negative) and decrease your stress. Plus, you can start to think bigger and more creatively.

Note that for some people, this brain game doesn’t come naturally. If so, work with a coach or knowledgeable friend to help you refine your technique.

How you can be more intentional, insightful, and influential



If you’re eager to stop expanding your problems, you need to break some patterns to start seeing possibilities. Start by reaching inside yourself to take control of your thoughts and actions. That will help you become more intentional, insightful, and influential.

Individuals who want these skills often hire me. I’ve got a strong track record in serving as a trusted catalyst to help individuals and organizations thrive in our VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) world. By applying my deep listening skills as well as my broad expertise, I help individuals become better, more resilient versions of their authentic self. As an executive coach, consultant, and facilitator, I draw on applied neuroscience and psychology, behavior design, including habits, and communications.

I look forward to connecting with you! Contact info is below – Liz