

THINK!



Many of us are unknowingly trapped by sensory input/output or within the confines of memories and experiences. Paying more attention to our thinking promotes greater joy and creativity at work.

THINK! Certainly you recall the connection between this word and IBM. At one point it was on every IBM building, office wall, letterhead, and newsletter. Tom Watson was even pictured on the cover of *Time* with it carved on his office moldings.

Few people know, however, that this word was first used at the Company's management school, engraved in a brass plaque over the front door of the building where IBM's future leaders were trained. It is a fitting word for an organization whose core products help people perform analytical "thinking."

But how many of us know as much about how we think as the engineers and scientists at IBM know about to make their equipment mimic human thought? In other words, how well do we comprehend the process of our own thinking?

Perhaps, you have never reflected on this question. After all, isn't thinking sort of like breathing? We do it so naturally and never give it a second thought. But if breathing is the very "breath of life," then thinking is the "manifestation of life." We each create our own life via thought. We become what we think, and with our thoughts we create our world.

Computers provide a fitting metaphor for examining the thought process. Imagine, for a minute, a typical modern organization.

Workstations sit at every desk, either waiting for a stimulus or responding to instructions. Software "tells" them what to do, and memory "defines" what they know. This illustrates the most basic level of consciousness in humans. Our senses take in information, process it, and tell us how to respond based on the sum total of our previous experience. When we are driving a car, this mode of thought works great, and we can operate our vehicles on automatic pilot.

But if we are not aware that we are the ones doing the thinking, it is easy for sensory input to overload us. It is as if those thousands of electronic messages start taking control of our lives, while we, the thinkers, begin responding like automatons.

The senses can be like the worst party crashers, loud, boisterous, and obnoxious -- because all they really know is how to satisfy their own urges. Whenever we allow our senses to control things, they go for the easy and the pleasurable, in other words, for whatever they desire.

This is why computers are networked together and controlled by system software. The analogy might be that the terminals need to be governed by a higher form of thought, the intellect that serves as the network function in our brain.

These networks not only control the computers but also vastly extend their power and information. Perhaps you have seen those rooms full of servers. They look like modern age temples, racks and stacks of computers whirring and blinking with a faint smell of electrical circuits. Their power is tangible and slightly frightening, frightening because we know that these machines can only do what they are programmed to do, relying on their memory banks to guide their action.

Well, the same is true for humans. Our intellect is formed by knowledge that already exists in the world, information that we learned or experiences that we once had. Whenever we think about a memory, it comes alive for us in that moment. Its activation immediately sets off an emotional response. And too often we are powerless before that impulse.

Here's an example: you have prepared for a presentation to the boss and are ready mentally to make the strongest case for your desired course of action. Suddenly, just as you turn on the projector, someone makes an off-hand comment about the company's budget problems, and you find yourself in despair, certain that your proposal will be for naught. Dazed by the memory of what happened the last time the company tightened its belt, you ramble through the slides and respond to questions in the most perfunctory way.

No amount of reasoning, reminding, or arguing with yourself can overcome your feelings of gloom. Where is our intellect when we need it most?

Well, if our intellect can be so powerless in the face of these random thoughts and memories, just exactly who is minding the store? All of this computer power, investment, and equipment appear to be working on its own, sending us the expensive mental energy bills called worry, anxiety, fear, busyness, or self-centeredness.

But if we poke around the servers, we might find ourselves face to face with a person sitting at the control station, someone who seems to know what he is doing, even if he is unkempt, with a long beard and scraggly hair. This, of course, is Mr. Ego, the systems engineer.

At last, someone who is in charge! So we ask Mr. Ego for help. How can we control our senses and guide our intellect so that they do our bidding and we don't do theirs? After all, isn't Mr. Ego the ultimate systems engineer, who knows how all the programs work and how the memory files are accessed?

Not according to him! No siree! Nope! Those computers and programs do only what the users want, whenever they want it. His job is to locate the bugs that prevent the programs called our senses from doing whatever they want and to make sure that our intellect's memory tapes are loaded and accessible whenever we want to draw on what we think we already know.

Mr. Ego is fiercely loyal to that silicone horsepower, input/output devices, and memory drives. But don't ask him to be accountable. He is here to make sure the machinery keeps working. What we do with it, well, that is our choice entirely.

And that is how many of us live: unknowingly trapped by our sensory input/output thoughts or living within the confines of our memories and experiences. Mr. Ego, our systems engineer, keeps things working exactly the way we say we want them, using pride, self-centeredness, busyness, or fear to prevent us from seeing the essence of life much less living with this knowledge.

But do not despair! There is another player, the energy used to power those machines, run that software, and access those memories. It is always there waiting for us to discover its presence.

Sometimes we call it our Self, our Soul. This is where "thought" originates. It is the energy source that lies at the heart of every living creature. But the senses cannot feel it, the intellect cannot discover it by reasoning, and the ego refuses to acknowledge its presence.

When we deepen consciousness about our true Self, we take a step back from the pleasures that drive us (crazy!), the memories that tell us, "This is the only way our life can ever be," and the self-centeredness that the ego engenders. For we have reached the very source of life itself, the place from which the Mind connects us with every other living thing.

Perhaps this is what Tom Watson meant when he used the word "think."

THINK about a life free of the stimulus/response characteristic of a consciousness working from sensory input along. No more angry outbursts when a co-worker does something unexpected! No more yelling, shouting, or pounding the table when results don't meet expectations! In their place would be tranquility -- calmness reigning in the senses.

THINK about using your intellect as a tool for generating fresh insight, not merely storing the memory of already discovered knowledge. In place of all-night cram sessions, you learn to trust innate wisdom, knowing that any problem can be solved or any dream realized. In the place of complicated reasoning and jargon, you put your faith in simplicity itself and your work suddenly becomes as simple as seeing the obvious and then doing it. Work takes on a freshness and responsiveness that not only brings joy to you but also makes life more enjoyable for those around you.

THINK about being free of your ego, no more torment, distraction, or pain. Seriously, do you actually believe that Mr. Ego, the systems engineer, is there to serve you, or is it more likely that he is there to play with the latest and greatest technology? When the Self tames the ego, it is as if those technology geeks actually begin to serve the needs of the business, not their own need to push the technology boundaries.

In other words, THINK about living and working with joy, compassion, gratitude, generosity, and creativity. What are these worth to you?

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