Are You Open to Opposing Viewpoints? 3 Tips for Improving Critical Thinking.

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The ability to change one's mind when confronted with new evidence or information — or better yet, the willingness to actively seek out opposing viewpoints — is an important quality needed to be successful in both business and in life. It is crucial for leaders who want to ensure their organization remains innovative and necessary for society to function optimally. All too often, however, we can become insulated from information that runs counter to our existing beliefs.

Breaking this type of thinking should be a priority for anyone interested in enhancing their critical thinking skills. After all, when you insulate yourself from opposing viewpoints, you are potentially depriving yourself of information needed to make a more informed decision. Toward that end, here are a few strategies you can begin incorporating right away that can help you become more open to opposing viewpoints and enhance your ability to think critically.

1. Be willing to question your current view of reality

Take a moment to reflect on some of your most deeply held beliefs and opinions. As you do so, try to be intentionally

broad, accounting for the full spectrum of social, political, and organizational issues that comprise your current view of reality. For example, you may reflect on your beliefs regarding the nature and source of inequality present in society, the trade policies most conducive to advancing a country's economic interest, or how to effectively lead during moments of crisis.

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As you take stock of your own constellation of views and beliefs, what is the likelihood that each reflects a fully informed opinion? More pointedly, assuming that there is some truth to be known about each of these issues, such that the views you hold may be more or less factual, consistent with reality, or conducive to human flourishing, *what is the likelihood that you just so happen to hold the correct view on each one of them?*

An honest and humble assessment of this question should open your mind to the possibility of your own fallibility and the value in exposing yourself to arguments that run counter to your current perspective. Accordingly, a critical first step toward becoming more open to opposing points of view requires a sense of humility, which constitutes a willingness to learn from others and an acknowledgment of your own limitations and fallibility. Luckily, this is a quality that can be developed and nurtured through practice.

2. Regularly seek out counter-information

Simply recognizing your own fallibility, while necessary, is not a sufficient condition for becoming more open and tolerant to opposing viewpoints. Indeed, it is all too easy to get into the habit of narrowly focusing our attention on information that aligns with our pre-existing views. Organizational

leaders, for example, can easily find themselves in insulated information silos, such as when they surround themselves with sycophants eager to express opinions their leader wants to hear. Likewise, within the general public, the increasing prevalence of media curated for each individuals' idiosyncratic interests and preferences makes it easier than ever to remain oblivious to information and evidence that runs counter to one's existing beliefs. Overcoming such tendencies can be exceptionally difficult, especially when the beliefs and opinions we hold are highly entrenched or become tied to our identity.

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Given the mental discomfort that can arise when we encounter information contrary to our current views, a willingness to seek out alternative perspectives takes a conscious effort. Identifying your dominant or "default" point of view and making a habit out of consuming information that runs somewhat opposite of this reference point is therefore a crucial next step. For example, as a leader, you may reflect on how you view your current organizational processes and procedures and actively seek out sources that are critical of such practices. A good illustration comes from the open office space movement. Over the last few decades, many leaders have embraced open office concepts in their organizations, believing that such environments enhance teamwork and creativity. Yet, conventional wisdom regarding the benefits of open office plans is quite disconnected from the science.

Importantly, such advice can (and should) be incorporated into all aspects of your life, not merely those issues of an organizational nature. For example, if you naturally lean toward one end of the political spectrum, it can be helpful to regularly consume information from media outlets that lean opposite of your own political viewpoint. You may not agree with everything you're exposed to – nor should you – but you

will undoubtedly identify blind spots in your own thinking and may even strengthen your own convictions by understanding not only the best and most convincing arguments for your position but also those against it.

3. Become aware of how you feel in the moment

Even with the best intentions to remain receptive to opposing viewpoints, putting this mindset into practice can be exceptionally challenging. Oftentimes, the moment we encounter information that lies in contrast to our own beliefs, we run the risk of being carried away by intense affective reactions that can thwart a genuine effort to understand the opposing viewpoint. For example, we know from research that when we encounter morally-charged situations, we often make quick, instinctive judgments based on emotion. Only after the fact do we justify how we came to the evaluation in the first place. More troubling, this process often occurs below the level of awareness, leaving us to (mistakenly) think that the judgment we've made was the result of a rational, thoughtful process. Accordingly, it is important to remain mindful of these processes and to regularly monitor how you feel in the moment to ensure your judgment of the opposing evidence is based on reason and not on unbridled emotion.

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There is value in exposing yourself to arguments that run counter to your current perspective. To reap the benefits, be sure to acknowledge your own fallibility, seek out opposing information, and remain mindful of your emotions when evaluating the evidence.

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