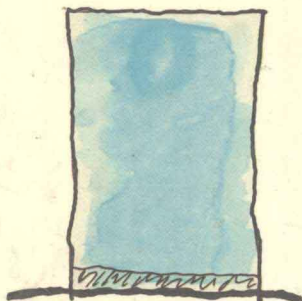
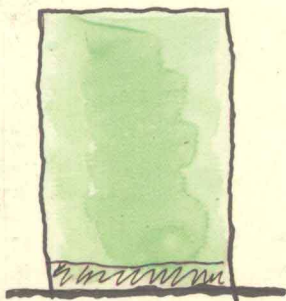
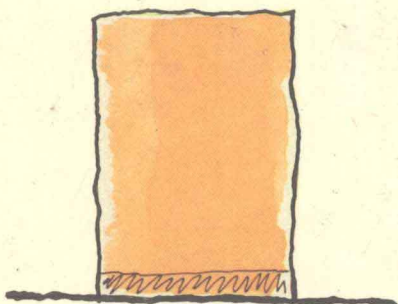
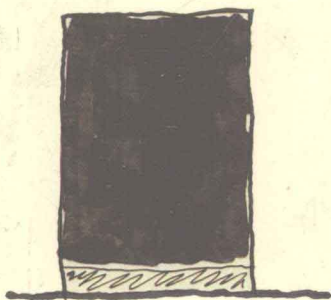
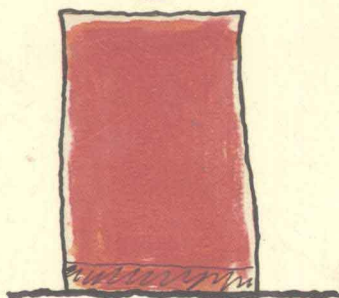
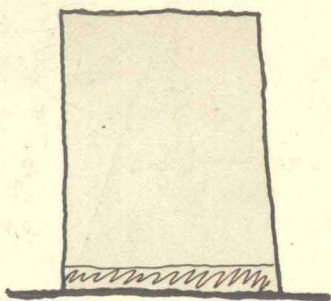


EDWARD DE BONO

Six Thinking Hats



An essential approach to business
management from the creator of
Lateral Thinking

Six Thinking Hats

EDWARD DE BONO



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Preface

Can you really change the effectiveness of your thinking?

In January 1985 *Time* magazine chose as "Man of the Year" the person who was ultimately responsible for the superbly successful Los Angeles Olympic Games: Peter Ueberroth. The usual pattern of such games is that they lose hundreds of millions of dollars. Even though the city of Los Angeles had voted not to spend any municipal funds on the games, the 1984 Olympics actually made a surplus of \$250 million. The extraordinary success of the games depended heavily on new concepts and new ideas, which were put into practice with leadership and efficiency.

What sort of thinking was needed to generate these new concepts?

In an interview in the *Washington Post* on September 30, 1984, Peter Ueberroth explains how he used lateral thinking to generate new concepts. Lateral thinking is a technique which I developed many years ago. I have written many books about it. Peter Ueberroth had come to a one-hour talk I had been invited to give to the Young Presidents' Organisation *nine years previously*.

There are hundreds of other examples of how a deliberate thinking technique has had a powerful

impact. I can only design the techniques and put them forward. It is up to individuals like Mr. Ueberroth to pick up on the techniques and to put them to work.

Thinking is the ultimate human resource. Yet we can never be satisfied with our most important skill. No matter how good we become, we should always want to be better. Usually, the only people who are very satisfied with their thinking skill are those poor thinkers who believe that the purpose of thinking is to prove yourself right – to your own satisfaction. If we have only a limited view of what thinking can do, we may be smug about our excellence in this area, but not otherwise.

The main difficulty of thinking is confusion. We try to do too much at once. Emotions, information, logic, hope and creativity all crowd in on us. It is like juggling with too many balls.

What I am putting forward in this book is a very simple concept which allows a thinker to do one thing at a time. He or she becomes able to separate emotion from logic, creativity from information, and so on. The concept is that of the six thinking hats. Putting on any one of these hats defines a certain type of thinking. In the book I describe the nature and contribution of each type of thinking.

The six thinking hats allow us to conduct our thinking as a conductor might lead an orchestra. We can call forth what we will. Similarly, in any meeting it is very useful to switch people out of their usual track in order to get them to think differently about the matter at hand.

It is the sheer *convenience* of the six thinking hats that is the main value of the concept.

E.B.

CHAPTER 1

Playacting

IF YOU PLAYACT BEING A THINKER
YOU WILL BECOME ONE

I believe that one of the two Rodin originals for *The Thinker* is in Buenos Aires in the square in front of the parliament building. At least that is what my guide told me as she pointed to this busy thinker frozen into immortal bronze.

As a *fact* this may well be wrong on several counts. It may not be an original. There may not have been two originals. My guide might have been mistaken. It may not be in the square in front of the parliament building. My memory might be mistaken. So why should I put forward something which has not been checked out absolutely as a fact? There are many reasons.

One reason is that later in this book I shall refer specifically to the use of facts. Another reason is to provoke those people who feel that facts are more important than their use. Another reason is that I want the reader to visualize that famous thinker figure, wherever it may be. The real reason is that this book was written in an airplane on a journey from London to Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia. In any case I did use the

words "I believe," which indicate my state of belief rather than a dogmatically asserted fact. We often need to indicate *the way in which something is being put forward*. That is what this book is all about.

I want you to imagine that much used – and over-used – image of Rodin's *The Thinker*. I want you to imagine that chin-on-hand pose which is supposed to come to any thinker who is being more than just frivolous. As a matter of fact, I believe that thinking should be active and brisk rather than gloomy and solemn. But the traditional image is a useful one for the moment.

Throw yourself into that pose – physically not mentally – and you will become a thinker. Why? Because if you playact being a thinker, you will become one.

The Tibetans say prayers by revolving their prayer wheels on which the prayers are inscribed. The rotating wheels spiral the prayers into divine space. Indeed, if the wheels are properly balanced, one assistant can keep a dozen prayer wheels turning like the circus act in which whirling plates are balanced on top of long sticks. It may be that the Tibetan is allowed to think of his laundry list while he spins the wheel. It is the intention to pray that counts rather than the emotional or spiritual flutterings that many Christians demand of themselves. There is another Christian view that is much closer to the Tibetan: go through the motions of praying even if you do not feel emotionally involved. In time your emotions will catch up with your motions. That is precisely what I mean by asking you to playact being a thinker.

Adopt the pose of a thinker. Go through the motions. Have the intention and make it manifest to yourself

and to those around. Quite soon your brain will follow the role you are playing. If you playact being a thinker, you will indeed become one. This book sets out the different *roles* for your playacting.

CHAPTER 2

Putting on a Hat

A VERY DELIBERATE PROCESS

The most striking feature of any crowd photograph taken more than forty years ago is that *everyone* is wearing a hat. Newspaper photographs and early films show this tremendous prevalence of hats.

Today a hat is a rarity, especially among men. Today hats tend to define a role. Hats are used as part of a uniform, which itself defines a role.

A bossy husband who issues orders to his family may be said to be wearing his "headmaster's hat" or his "chief executive hat." An executive may distinguish between the two roles she plays by telling her audience that she is wearing "an executive hat" or a "housewife hat." Mrs. Thatcher, the prime minister of England, occasionally claims that she carries over the prudence and frugality of a housewife into the management of government.

Just as well established is the idea of a *thinking hat* or a *thinking cap*.

... I'll have to put on my thinking hat and consider your new proposal. I am not sure I want to sell that building.

... Put on your thinking cap and phone me tomorrow.

... This is a dangerous development. We'll have to put on our thinking hats to see how we can get out of this mess.

I have always imagined the thinking hat as a sort of floppy nightcap with a tassel. Rather like a dunce's cap but without the stiff arrogance that is the only real hallmark of stupidity.

People volunteer to put on their own thinking hats or they request others to do so.

The deliberate *putting on* of a hat is something very definite.

In bygone days when Nanny put on her hat it was a definite signal that she – and the children – were going out. There was to be no argument. The signal was final. When a policeman puts on his hat, duty and performance are clearly signaled. Soldiers without hats never seem quite as serious or frightening as soldiers with hats.

It is a pity there is not a genuine thinking hat that you could buy in a store. In Germany and Denmark there is a student hat, which is a sort of scholar's cap. But scholarship and thinking are rarely the same thing. Scholars are too busy learning about the thinking of others to do any thinking for themselves.

Consider the usefulness of a *real thinker's hat*.

... Don't disturb me. Can't you see I am thinking?

... I am going to break off this discussion so that we can all put on our thinking hats and do some focused thinking on this matter.

... I want you to think about this right now. Let me see you put on your thinking hat.

... I want you to have second thoughts on this plan. Put your thinking hat back on your head.

... You pay me to think. So here I am sitting thinking. The better you pay, the better I think.

... How about giving this some deliberate thought? Up to now you have just given me knee-jerk reactions. Put on your thinking hat.

... Thinking is not an excuse for inaction but a way to get better action. So let's have the action.

That mental picture of someone wearing a real thinking hat could serve to switch on the tranquil and detached state of mind needed for any thinking that is to be more than mere reacting to a situation. Perhaps conscientious thinkers could set aside five minutes of the day for a deliberate wearing of the thinking hat. It depends on whether you believe you are paid to think or to follow the thinking of others.

I want to focus on the matter of *deliberate thinking*. That is the purpose of the thinking hat. You put it on in a deliberate manner.

There is the walking-talking-breathing type of thinking that we do all the time. We answer the telephone. We cross the road. We switch in and out of routines. We

do not need to be conscious of which leg follows which when we walk or of how to manage our breathing. There is a constant background of this type of ongoing automatic thinking. But there is a different sort of thinking that is much more deliberate and focused. Background thinking is for routine *coping*. Deliberate thinking is for doing better than just coping. Everyone can run, but an athlete runs deliberately and is trained for that purpose.

There is no easy way of signaling to ourselves that we want to switch out of this routine, coping type of thinking and into the deliberate type. So the thinking hat idiom becomes a definite signal we can give to ourselves or to others.

Let us contrast these two types of thinking: coping and deliberate.

When you are driving a car, you have to choose roads and follow roads and keep out of the way of other traffic. There is a lot of moment to moment activity dictated by the last moment and by the next moment. You are looking for signals and reacting to them. This is *reactive thinking*. So the walking-talking-breathing type of thinking is very like driving along a road. You read signposts and make decisions. But you do not *make the map*.

The other type of thinking has to do with *mapmaking*. You explore the subject and make the map. You make the map in an objective and neutral fashion. To do this you must look broadly. This is quite different from just reacting to signposts as they appear.

This contrast is shown in the following example.