

Thinking For a Change

By John C. Maxwell

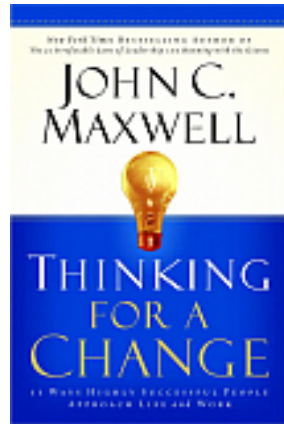
An Executive Book Summary By Ron Biberdorf

“Good thinkers are never at a loss to solve problems, they never lack ideas that can build an organization, and they always have hope for a better future. A person who knows *how* may always have a job, but the person who knows *why* will always be his boss.”

-Thinking For A Change

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John C. Maxwell is one of America's most sought after speakers and presenters on leadership. He is the founder of the INJOY Group, an organization widely recognized for leadership training. Maxwell has authored over 30 books, many of which are *New York Times* best sellers. On his path towards becoming America's foremost expert on leadership, Maxwell worked as a Christian minister for over 25 years. He now lives in Atlanta, Georgia.

In any walk of life, whether it is in business, love, or family, one key difference between successful and non-successful people is *thinking*. **Thinking For a Change** is a “hands-on” journey of discovery, reflection and assessment of our own thinking which can greatly increase our capacity to achieve. John C. Maxwell provides a rationale for changing thinking, steps required to initiate and develop the change, self-assessment quizzes to guide you along the way, and an array of stories and real-life examples of positive effects of focused thinking.

Thoughts About Thinking:

- Everything begins with a thought
- What we think determines who we are. Who we are determines what we do!
- Our thoughts determine our destiny. Our destiny determines our legacy
- People who go to the top think differently than others
- We can change the way we think!

Part One: Change Your Thinking and Change Your Life



"Life consists of what a man is thinking about all day"
-Ralph Waldo Emerson

The first portion of this book is devoted to an inspection of thinking. John C. Maxwell shows the reader how **changing** your thinking can **change** your life. Part one consists of three chapters that help the reader: understand how good thinking can effect our lives, realize how changed thinking can impact success and, begin the journey towards mastering intentional thinking.

Chapter 1: Understand the Value of Good Thinking

Do I believe that good thinking can change my life?

John C. Maxwell begins this chapter discussing the difficulty of changing our thinking. Some people have a difficult time with change in general. For many people, it becomes a life-long struggle. Maxwell submits that the largest barrier to making personal changes is **feelings**. He uses the following syllogism to help us understand the link between change and feelings:

MAJOR PREMISE = *I can control my thoughts.*

MINOR PREMISE = *My feelings come from my thoughts.*

CONCLUSION = *I can control my feelings by controlling my thoughts!*

If we change our thoughts, we can change our feelings and our focus. Maxwell contends that success does not come from our college degrees or family background, but rather from the quality of our thoughts or the size of our thinking.

As is the case at the end of every chapter in this book, Maxwell makes this study a "hands-on" affair by posing guiding questions to the reader to allow for concentrated and deliberate consideration of the chapter. In this case, Maxwell has the reader consider whom he/she thinks are "good thinkers" and what makes them stand above the crowd. The reader is also encouraged to consider how his/her definition of "good thinking" has changed, and to identify some personal or professional obstacles standing in the way of their success. Along with the meaningful stories throughout the book, this "workbook" approach to developing our thinking capacity is what gives the book such impact!

One of the reasons people don't achieve their dreams is that they desire to change their results without changing their thinking.

Chapter 2: Realize the Impact of Changed Thinking

Is my desire for success and to improve my life strong enough to prompt me to change my thinking?

Maxwell asserts that unsuccessful people need to change their thinking. He then asks, “But what about people who have achieved some degree of success?” How do these people move on to the next level of success? Do they too need to change their thinking? Maxwell then describes how Karen Ford, a former school teacher, used changed thinking to move up the ladder of success with Mary Kay Cosmetics. Ford had immediate success as a Mary Kay consultant, and worked herself up the ladder very quickly based on her energy and desire. However, when she hit a point where she was no longer progressing, she had to look inward rather than outward to overcome the obstacles. Karen Ford had to change herself and take **personal responsibility for changing** her thinking.

Through the journey of Karen’s story, Maxwell outlines six steps towards taking responsibility for changed thinking:

1. Changing your thinking changes your beliefs
2. Changing your beliefs changes your expectations
3. Changing your expectations changes your attitude
4. Changing your attitude changes your behavior
5. Changing your behavior changes your performance
6. Changing your performance changes your **LIFE!**

“Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.”

-Leo Tolstoy

Chapter 3: Master the Process of Intentional Thinking

Am I willing to pay the price to cultivate the habit of giving birth to, nurturing, and developing great thoughts every day?

In this final chapter of the first section, Maxwell sets to put the wheels in place towards becoming a changed thinker. He states, “Becoming a good thinker isn’t overly complicated. It’s a discipline.” Like any disciplines, becoming a master requires understanding of a process, devotion to the task, and refinement as required. Maxwell outlines the steps of intentional thinking as finding a place to: *think* your thoughts, *shape* your thoughts, *stretch* your thoughts, *land* your thoughts and finally, to *fly* your thoughts. Maxwell also suggests, in order to **master** this process, one should :

- Expose yourself to good input
- Expose yourself to good thinkers
- Choose to think good thoughts
- Act on your good thoughts
- Allow your emotions to create another good thought
- Repeat the process

The questions at the end of this chapter are designed to encourage a start for the process. Maxwell asks the reader to identify good thinking places, good thinkers and good input. He also has the reader identify an issue that could use some quality “think time” and to begin devoting some deliberate energy toward that issue. It is the author’s way of helping the reader to **get the ball rolling!**

Ideas have a short shelf life. You must act on them before the expiration date.

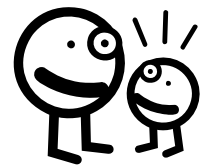
Part Two: Eleven Skills Every Successful Person Needs

Thinking Skill #1: Acquire the Wisdom of Big-Picture Thinking

Just as the title suggests, it is important to develop thinking beyond our own personal needs and requirements. Big-picture thinkers take a holistic approach to problem solving. They attempt to look for ideas and solutions that are out-of-the-ordinary, or in uncharted territory. According to Maxwell, big-picture thinkers *learn continually*. “They are always visiting new places, reading new books, meeting new people, learning new skills.” Big-picture thinkers *listen intentionally*. They realize that they have much to learn from others and ask strategic questions to increase their understanding. Another significant characteristic of big-picture thinkers is they *look expansively*. Maxwell states that, “It’s hard to see the picture while inside the frame.” People need to look beyond their world and see through the eyes of others. Finally, big-picture thinkers *live completely*. They expand their experiences by expanding their world. Through big-picture thinking, people accomplish more, have fewer unwanted surprises and are more tolerant of others and their ideas.

You have to think anyway, so why not think big?

-Donald Trump



Thinking Skill #2: Unleash the Potential of Focused Thinking

Eliminating distractions is the greatest challenge towards achieving focused thinking. Focused thinkers can determine priorities and can concentrate on areas that can give them the most success. In fact, focused thinkers are able and willing to give up some of the things they love in order to concentrate on priority areas. Focused thinkers can come to terms that, *I can’t know everyone, I can’t do everything, I can’t go everywhere, and I can’t be well-rounded*. In addition to prioritizing, focused thinkers also set aside *deliberate* scheduled times, daily and weekly to devote to thinking. Finally, focused thinkers continue to monitor their progress by questioning their focus, their strategies and their priorities.



“He did each thing as if he did nothing else”

-Spoken of Novelist Charles Dickens

Thinking Skill #3: Discover the Joy of Creative Thinking

Interestingly, Maxwell contends that one of his greatest weaknesses was creativity. Instead of hiding from this “flaw” he decided to pluck and steal creative ideas from other sources— people, books, etc. In fact, Maxwell became an idea *collector* rather than *creator*. He stored good ideas, thoughts and quotes away in journals and files, and retrieved them as required for his own purposes. This strategy not only fulfilled a need for good, creative ideas, it also developed a creative ability within Maxwell himself. Like big-picture thinkers, creative thinkers constantly ask questions and draw upon the ideas of others. Creative thinkers look for ways to connect ideas previously viewed as unconnected, seek new approaches for old ideas and look to connect ideas from other fields. Most importantly, creative thinkers do not fear failure, and look to work in environments that support risk-taking and creativity.



“You can’t use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have”

-Maya Angelou

Thinking Skill #4: Recognize the Importance of Realistic Thinking

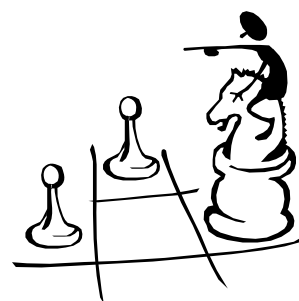
This is probably the least “positive” or “upbeat” thinking skill that Maxwell describes. Realistic thinking involves consideration of the risks, down-sides and worst-case-scenarios of a plan or idea. It also encourages a weighing of pros versus cons and prepares the thinker for “less than expected” results. In the question section of this chapter, Maxwell also has the reader think realistically about themselves. The reader is instructed to gain insight about his/her own abilities and weaknesses by tapping into the observations of friends and colleagues. This feedback is to be used as a self-examining tool in order to improve on areas of weakness and capitalize on strengths.

“Actions always have consequences; realistic thinking helps you to determine what those consequences could be.”

-John C. Maxwell

Thinking Skill #5: Realize the Power of Strategic Thinking

Through strategic thinking, one is better able to break down complex issues into a more simplified, laid-out plan. Of considerable importance is the identification of available resources, finding the right people for your team, and being able to ask the right questions. Through strategic thinking, one is better able to identify the real issue and develop a plan that works.



Thinking Skill #6: Feel the Energy of Possibility

Thinking

In spite of technology that did not yet exist, a significant lack of investor money, and an industry that did not believe in the possibilities, George Lucas produced *Star Wars*, a movie beyond its time that influenced how movies were made and marketed like no other before it or since. Lucas did not limit his vision to what was only conceivable at the time; rather he pushed the limits of technology to satisfy what he *believed* could exist. He stopped focusing on what had never been attempted and stretched the possibilities! Maxwell believes that all of us, just like Lucas, can achieve greater possibilities in the future if we extend the possibilities of today.



Thinking Skill #7: Embrace the Lessons of Reflective Thinking

Maxwell states that he is a person of action. He has very high energy and likes to get things accomplished. Not in spite of this, but rather to complement it, he also claims it very necessary to be reflective about his actions. Reflective thinking gives you perspective, brings the big picture into focus and helps distinguish important ideas from trivial. Reflective thinking not only keeps you grounded about the task at hand, but also is used to take stock on how your life is going as a whole.

“The
unexamined
life is not
worth living”

-Socrates

Thinking Skill #8: Question the Acceptance of Popular Thinking

Maxwell warns against following popular thinking:

- popular thinking sometimes means not thinking for yourself
- popular thinking offer false hope
- popular thinking is slow to embrace change
- popular thinking only brings average results.



Two interesting antidotes to following popular thinking are to constantly try new things in new ways and to get used to being uncomfortable. Following the status quo is comfortable, but it is no way to effect positive change!

Thinking Skill #9: Encourage the Participation of Shared Thinking



Maxwell has highlighted the value of surrounding yourself with good people throughout this book. In this chapter, Maxwell outlines how placing high value on the contribution of others and thereby utilizing “shared thinking” can be faster, more innovative, and stronger than working by yourself. He also concludes that “shared thinking” produces more mature results and returns greater value than “solo thinking”. To encourage the start of better use of a team approach, Maxwell encourages the reader to make a list of good thinkers and to identify their area of strength. This way, tapping the resource can be much quicker when required.

“None of us is as smart as all of us.”

-Ken Blanchard

Thinking Skill #10: Experience the Satisfaction of Unselfish thinking

Not all of our thinking time should be devoted to our own problems, tasks and initiatives. *Thinking for a Change* is a journey about making improvements in our lives. Maxwell contends that helping others with their tasks, or providing “unselfish thinking” can bring about personal rewards of satisfaction and humanity, which are just as fulfilling as personal extrinsic rewards. But do not be confused; this chapter is not about charity. By investing in those around you, you gain better collaboration and more effective teamwork for your own endeavors too!

“Little did I realize that my desire to add value to others would be the thing that added value to me!”

-John C. Maxwell

Thinking Skill #11: Enjoy the Return of Bottom-Line Thinking

Success is not always measured in money or personal gain. Maxwell indicates that the bottom-line can be thought of as, “..the end, the take away the desired result.” Regardless of what your bottom line is however, it is important to establish benchmarks to see if you are doing what you intended on doing, and to ensure that you have not steered off the path, clouded the picture, or created mismatches. Bottom-line thinking helps provide clarity, generates high morale, helps you assess every situation and ensures your future. It is important to develop a strategy for achieving results and put your effort into execution. From a personal standpoint, areas such as career, marriage, family and recreation can also be more fulfilling when bottom-line goals are established.



“If you want to be successful tomorrow, you need to think bottom line today”

-John C. Maxwell

Concluding Thoughts

Maxwell ends his book by offering, “**May thinking become your greatest tool for creating the world you desire.**” *Thinking for a Change* does not tell you what to think, but rather- how to think. This book is a process. It has starting points, checkpoints and points of interests. It taps the minds, thoughts and actions of the famous, the greats and the successful. It gives meaningful and useful answers for our questions about thinking and success:

- How can changing my thinking change my life?
- How have others effected positive changes through thinking differently?
- How can I get started thinking differently?
- Who can help me with changing my thinking?
- How will I know if I am on the right track?



From the Lighter Side...



“Outside of the killings, Washington has one of the lowest crime rates in the country.”

-Marion Barry,
former Washington, D.C., mayor

*“The police are not here to create disorder.
They’re here to preserve disorder.”*

**- MAYOR RICHARD DALEY, during 1968 Democratic
National Convention in Chicago**

“A bus station is where a bus stops. A train station is where a Train stops. On my desk, I have a workstation...”

- AUTHOR UNKNOWN



*“If it is true that we are here to help others,
then what exactly are the OTHERS here for?”*

- AUTHOR UNKNOWN

“Things are more like they are now than they ever were before.”

- DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER,
thirty-fourth president of the United States

“Everything that can be invented has been invented.”

- CHARLES H. DUELL,
director of the U.S. Patent Office, 1899

“Ever since I was a kid, I’ve always been a real deep thinker and stuff.”

- BILLY RAY CYRUS, country music singer

