

EDWARD DE BONO

The 5-Day Course
in Thinking



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General Summary

In these courses each reader has been his own laboratory. The purpose of the book has been to shift attention from the problems themselves to the way the mind tackles them. The problems are not tests, but practical opportunities to be fascinated by the processes of thinking. Why a problem appears to be difficult may be much more interesting than the solution itself.

The ideas that you develop about the processes of thinking are at least as valid as those suggested. From such ideas may arise a realization that the mind does not behave in the ideal logical way. Some of the problems appear very simple once they have been solved, and yet they may have been difficult to solve. What is it that prevents a problem with a simple solution from being solved with ease? Is it just a lack of logical efficiency? Sometimes it seems that the very efficiency of logic may lead one off in the wrong direction.

In practice thinking is a rather messy business; it is not just a matter of following the rules of logic. The approach to a problem is usually more important than the efficiency with which that approach is followed up. The choice of approach may be determined by habit, by an attitude of mind, or even by emotion.

Some people may have had difficulty with the problems

because they were unwilling to let go of the obvious and so became trapped by it. With others the self-imposed necessity to proceed carefully from stage to stage may have made impossible a solution that required a more imaginative step at some point. The very words used to describe a problem to oneself may have affected the ease with which it could be solved, for even a description may impose a rigidity that limits the approaches to the solution. These and many other points may have been noted.

The way new ideas come about or fail to come about may have made all the difference. It soon becomes obvious that you cannot dig a hole in a different place by digging the same hole deeper. A gradual distinction emerges between two fundamentally different sorts of thinking. With 'vertical' thinking one tries to dig the same hole deeper and proceeds rigidly along the path with the highest probability. With 'lateral' thinking one proceeds imaginatively along a variety of low-probability paths in the hope of generating a new and better approach to the problem. The difference between vertical and lateral thinking is a fundamental one.

It is these attitudes of mind and these strategies of thinking that are important. They are dictated by the nature of the brain and not by the importance of the problems that are being tackled. From a realization of the personal and general deficiencies of the mind may grow a better skill in thinking. The study of difficulty in thinking may serve a more useful purpose than an attempt to capture the nature of intelligence.