

## **THINK AGAIN—The Power of Knowing What You Don't Know**

By Adam Grant

### **Prologue**

2—Rethink and unlearn is an important skill. Key to mental fitness.

4—Cognitive laziness—unwilling to grapple with new views and only hanging on to old views.

4—Psychologists call this—seizing and freezing.

4—“We favor the comfort of conviction over the discomfort of doubt.” Allowing our beliefs to get brittle long before our bones.

4—Frog in the kettle story. Good, just not true. It's not the frogs who fail to re-evaluate, it's us. Once we hear the story and accept it as true, we rarely bother to question it.

5—Mann Gulch fire—applied. Amazing story. The ability to rethink saved lives. While being unable to rethink assumptions cost people their lives.

6—Study of firefighters who if they had dropped their tools they would have escaped due to moving faster with less weight to carry. Counterintuitive because they have been taught to rely on their equipment, but scientifically verifiable they would have/could have moved 15-20% faster. And thus saved their lives.

7—Note: Dropping their tools creates an existential crisis. “Without my tools, who am I?”

7—Our ways of thinking become habits that can weigh us down, and we don't bother to question them until it's too late.

7—Re-evaluation is necessary in all walks and aspect of life from squeaky brakes to money to marriage, to work. And more.

8—This book is about the value of rethinking. It's about adopting the kind of mental flexibility that saved Wagner Dodger's life (leader of Mann Gulch fire escape).

8—Tools we cling to (chart)—assumptions, instincts, habits, having an open mind. (Rob—or rethinking more deeply.)

8-9—Facebook story—Grant was one of the co-founders of the original e-group at Harvard. But they then abandoned the network. And then Zuckerberg started Facebook. An example of missed opportunities to “rethink.”

9—Covid example—leaders around the world were slow to rethink their assumptions: 1)wouldn't affect their country, 2)would be no deadlier than the flu, 3)could only be transmitted by people with visible symptoms.

10—Division—views on the pandemic, politics, racism, culture wars, and more...destroying marriages, families, friendships, communities.

10-11—Book focuses on how rethinking happens—3 parts: 1)Open our minds, 2)Examine how we can encourage other people to think again, 3)Create communicates of lifelong learners. (Rob—focus on “how” to think, not just “what” to think.)

11—Mann Gulch Forrest Fire story—greatest tragedy is many died fighting a fire than did not need to be fought. As early as the 1880's scientists had begun highlighting the important role that wildfires play in the lie cycles of forests (remove dead matter, send nutrients to soil, and clear a path for sunlight). When forests fires are suppressed, forests are left too dense. The accumulation of brush, dry leaves, and twigs becomes fuel for more explosive wildfires. Smokejumpers were called anyway because no one in their org had done enough to question the assumption that wildfires should not be allowed to run their course.

12—Wisdom requires that you “Rethink” and re-evaluate...well.

### **PART 1: INDIVIDUAL RETHINKING—Updating Our Own Views**

## **Chapter 1: A Preacher, a Prosecutor, a Politician, and a Scientist Walk Into Your Mind**

*Progress is impossible without change; and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.* George Bernard Shaw

16—Mike Lazaridis, BlackBerry. Device to send and receive emails. By 2009 BB accounted for ½ of the smart-phone market. By 2014 it's market share had plummeted to less than 1%.

16—Most of us take pride in our own knowledge and expertise—we need to spend as much time rethinking as we do thinking.

16—Rethinking is a skillset and mindset.

17—SECOND THOUGHTS—life at the speed of change or change at the speed of life. “With advances in access to info and technology, knowledge isn't just increasing. It's increasing at an increasing rate.

- In 2011, you consumed about 5 times as much info per day as you would have just a quarter century earlier.
- As of 1950, it took about 50 years for knowledge in medicine to double.
- By 1980, medical knowledge was doubling every seven years.
- By 2010, it was doubling in half that time.

The accelerating pace of change means that we need to question our beliefs more readily than ever before.

18—We often favor “feeling right” over “being right.” We need to develop the habit of forming our own second opinions.

18—As we think and talk we often fall into the mindsets of three different professions:

- Preachers—We go into preacher mode when our sacred beliefs are in jeopardy—we deliver sermons to protect and promote our ideas,.
- Prosecutors—We enter prosecutor mode when we recognize flaws in other people's reasoning—we marshal arguments to prove them wrong and win our case.
- Politicians—We shift into politician mode when we're seeking to win over an audience—we campaign and lobby for the approval of our constituents.

The risk is that we become so wrapped up in the preaching that we're right, prosecuting others who are wrong, and politicking for support that we don't bother to rethink our own views.

19—Tragic story of Stephen Greenspan and his sister who invested big in Bernie Madoff's ponzi scheme and lost a fortune. (and he had just finished writing a book on why we get duped—“Annals of Gullibility: Why We Get Duped and How to Avoid It”—wow!)

19-20—A DIFFERENT PAIR OF GOGGLES—Being a scientist is not just a profession. It's a frame of mind—a mode of thinking that differs from preaching, prosecuting, and politicking. We move into science mode when we're searching for the truth—we run experiments to test hypotheses and discover knowledge.

22—Scientists morph into preachers when they present their pet theories as gospel and treat thoughtful critiques as sacrilege. They veer into politician terrain when they allow their view to be swayed by popularity rather than accuracy. They enter prosecutor mode when they're hell-bent on debunking and discrediting rather than discovering.

23—BlackBerry demise—the failure to rethink. Mike was sure people only wanted a work tool for emails. Not an entire computer in their pocket with apps for home entertainment like the iPhone. In 1997, one of his top engineers wanted to add an internet browser, but Mike told him to focus only on email. In 2007 the iPhone buried him. Mike failed to think again like a scientist, the very thing he was and gave rise to his success in the first place.

24—In 2010, when his colleagues pitched a strategy for text messaging he balked again, only to see WhatsApp seized the market share.

24—THE SMARTER THEY ARE THE HARDER THEY FAIL—mental horsepower doesn't guarantee mental dexterity.

25—Confirmation bias—seeing what we expect to see. Desirability bias—seeing what we want to see. These two can contort our intelligence against the truth. There is another bias trap, the “I’m not biased bias,” that smart people can fall into (people who think they are objective).

26—The purpose of learning isn’t to affirm our beliefs, its to evolve our beliefs.

26—How to Think Chart—Beliefs I Stand By. Shows people belief more in what their friends brother told them in 2006 then the latest scientific studies, new evidence, unconventional thinking, or data that goes against my opinions. (We are victims of bias.)

27—DON’T STOP “UNBELIEVING.” Have intellectual humility—knowing what you don’t know.

28—If knowledge is power, knowing what we don’t know is wisdom.

28—The Rethinking Cycle vs. the Overconfidence Cycle

- Rethinking Cycle—Humility→Doubt→Curiosity→Discovery
- Overconfidence Cycle—Pride→Conviction→Confirmation & Desirability Biases→Validation

28—Scientific thinking favors humility over pride, doubt over uncertainty, curiosity over closure.

29—Our convictions can lock us in prisons of our own making. The solution is not to decelerate our thinking—it is to accelerate our rethinking.

30-31—Apple/iPhone story—good example of “rethinking.” They changed their minds and advanced.

Rethinking the smart phone vs. BlackBerry. Amazing study of in rethinking, bias, evaluation, and more.

32—The curse of knowledge is that it closes our minds to what we don’t know. Good judgment depends on having the skill—and the will—to open our minds. (Eval and Self-Eval)

## **Chapter 2: The Armchair Quarterback & The Imposter**

Finding the Sweet Spot of Confidence.

35—Anton’s syndrome=a deficit of self-awareness! Application=we all have blind spots.

35—Anton’s syndrome now accepted in medical literature. First introduced by Seneca in describing a blind woman who contended she was just in a dark room.

35—We all have blind spots in our knowledge and opinions. In driver’s training we are taught to identify our visual blind spots using mirrors and sensors. In life, we need to be aware of cognitive blind spots and revise our thinking accordingly.

35—TALE OF TWO SYNDROMES.

37—In theory, confidence and competence go hand in hand. In practice, they often diverge.

37—Armchair quarterback syndrome—fans in the stands know more than coaches in the trenches. Confidence exceeds competence.

37—Imposter syndrome—opposite of armchair quarterback syndrome. Competence exceeds confidence.

38—Probably ideal level of confidence lies between being an armchair quarterback and an imposter.

38—THE IGNORANCE OF ARROGANCE.

38—Dunning-Kruger published “modest report” that became famous. They found that in many situations, those who can’t...don’t know they can’t.

38—Dunning-Kruger effect is when we lack competence that we’re most likely to be brimming with overconfidence. In the original Dunning-Kruger studies, people who scored the lowest on tests of logical reasoning, grammar, and sense of humor had the most inflated opinions of their skills.

39—Bottom line—the less intelligent we are in a particular domain, the more we seem to overestimate our actual intelligence in that domain. (ie, in a group of football fans, the one who knows the least is the most likely to be the armchair quarterback, prosecuting the coach for calling the wrong play and preaching about a better playbook.) This tendency compromises self-awareness.

40—“One of my pet peeves” is feigned knowledge, where people pretend to know things they don’t. As Dunning quips, “the first rule of Dunning-Kruger club is you don’t know you’re a member of the Dunning-Kruger club.”

42—STRANDED AT THE SUMMIT OF MOUNT STUPID.

42—Lacking competence can leave us blind to our own incompetence.

45—Arrogance is ignorance plus conviction.

46—WHAT GOLDBLOCKS GOT WRONG.

46—Many picture confidence as a seesaw. Too much tips toward arrogance. Too little tips toward too meek. Looking for amount that is “just right” like Goldy.

46-47—What we want to attain is “confident humility.” Having faith in our capability while appreciate that we may not have the right solution or even be addressing the right problem.

47—The Confidence Sweet Spot—believe in your tools/belief in yourself.

48—Confidence and Humility (not or). Good diagram—Belief in yourself. Belief in your tools. Certain. Uncertain. Insecure. Secure. Quadrants—obsessive/inferiority; debilitating/doubt; blind/arrogance; confident/humility.

49—Confidence vs. Competence graph. Notes confident/humility zone.

49-50—THE BENEFITS OF DOUBT.

51—Benefits of the Imposter Syndrome—tested out more empathetic, respectful, professional, etc.

51—Venn diagram of Armchair Quarterback vs. Imposter Syndrome. Excellent diagram. Thread—Armchair=confidence is greater than competence. Imposter=not really an imposter and competence is greater than confidence.

51-52—3 Benefits of Doubt (imposter)

1. It can motivate us to work harder.
2. It can motivate us to work smarter.
3. It can make us better learners.

53—Doubt can be a “cue” to improve tools. Uncertainty primes us to ask questions and absorb new ideas.

54—Great thinkers don’t harbor doubts...they maintain them for greater learning and perspective.

54—Arrogance leaves us blind to our weaknesses. Humility=reflective lens: sees weakness clearly. Confident humility is a corrective lens: it enables us to overcome those weaknesses.

### **Chapter 3: The Joy of Being Wrong**

The Thrill of Not Believing Everything You Think

55—*I have a degree from Harvard. Whenever I’m wrong, the world makes a little less sense.* —Dr. Frasier Crane, played by Kelsey Grammar

57—Key mindset of good thinkers--They aren’t just comfortable being wrong; they actually seem to be thrilled by it. Point—we are often wrong and need to admit it.

58—Savage Christians cartoon on gaining wisdom. 1) Live. 2)Make mistakes. 3)Learn from your mistakes. 4)Repeat steps 1-3 until wisdom is acquired. 5)Realize that the wisdom you acquired in step 4 was not really wisdom at all. This realization brings new wisdom. 6)Repeat steps 1-5 for the rest of your life.

62—Being wrong is the only way I feel sure I’ve learned anything.

62-4—Attach vs. Detach—Don’t be too attached to your ideas—it’s was keeps us from realizing when your opinions are off the mark. Detach your opinions from your past and detach them from your identity. (Illustration of above. Chart—bad things to tie your identity to.)

71—Think and rethink--Put truth above tribe.

71—Be wary of “desirability bias”—allowing preference to cloud your judgment.

72—Jeff Bezos quote—People who are right a lot listen a lot, and they change their mind a lot.

73—Psychologists find that admitting we were wrong doesn’t make us look less competent. It’s a display of honesty and a willingness to learn.

75—Wow! Dark story about someone who did not think and think again well. Unabomber story.

76—Every time we encounter new info we have a choice. We can attach our opinions to our identity and stand our ground in the stubbornness of preaching and prosecution. Or we can operate more like scientists, defining ourselves as people committed to the pursuit of truth—even if it means proving our own views wrong.

#### **Chapter 4: The Good Fight**

The Psychology of Constructive Conflict

77—Wilbur and Orville Wright story throughout the chapter. Theirs is a story of many inventions. They said of each other that they “thought together.” And they “fought together” (81). Entertained new ideas and new ways of thinking. One of their most passionate and prolonged arguments caused them to “rethink” crucial assumptions about flying.

78—Leading expert on conflict is an organizational psychologist from Australia named Karen “Etty” Jehn. When people think of conflict the most of the time think of Relational conflict. But there is another type of conflict and that is Task conflict. This is the clashing about ideas and opinions.

80-81—A good fight is “productive disagreement.” Whereas the absence of conflict is seen as harmony by some, it is actually apathy. Respectful arguing is good. Agreeableness at all costs is not.

82—“Why I Avoid Conflict” chart—1)It saves time, 2)It might save the friendship, 3)It might not help to argue, 4)I don’t want anyone to be mad at me.

83—“Incredibles” franchise a case study in respectful disagreement.

88—Strong people criticize and disagree, not just to criticize and disagree, but because they care. You can disagree without being disagreeable.

90—Wilbur and Orville Wright—Example of task conflict and not relational conflict.

91—Problem with task conflict is that it can spill over into relationship conflict if you aren’t careful.

Wright bros were masters of having intense task conflict without relationship conflict.

91—Framing a dispute as a debate rather than as a disagreement signals you are receptive to considering dissenting opinions and changing your mind.

92—Scientist vs Preacher, Prosecutor, or Politician

### **PART 2 INTERPERSONAL THINKING—Opening Other People’s Minds**

#### **Chapter 5: Dances with Foes**

How to Win Debates and Influence People

98—Exhausting someone in argument is not the same as convincing them.

102—Show more humility and curiosity and invite others to think more like scientists.

103—There is a science to good debating. And debating is not a war.

106—Skilled negotiators (debaters)—1)prethink a series of dance steps to help find common ground, 2) use fewer reasons to support their case so they don’t water down their best points, 3)don’t go on offense or defense but express curiosity, and 4) use questions (less assertive).

109—Interesting differences between War, Debate, Dance (Venn Diagram)

110—There are times when preaching and prosecuting can make us more persuasive. But research suggests that the effectiveness of these approaches hinges on three factors—how much people care about the issue, how open they are to our particular argument, and how strong-willed they are in general.

115—When someone is losing control, your tranquility is a sign of strength. It takes the wind out of their emotional sails.

119—By asking questions rather than thinking for the audience, we invite them to join us as a partner and think for themselves. If we approach an argument as a war, there will be winners and losers. If we see it more as a dance, we can begin to choreograph a way forward. By considering the strongest

version of an opponent's perspective and limiting our responses to our few best steps, we have a better chance of finding a rhythm.

### **Chapter 6: Bad Blood on the Diamond**

Diminishing Prejudice by Destabilizing Stereotypes

121—Daryl Davis and White Supremacist/KKK story. Daryl has convinced many white supremacists to leave the KKK and abandon their hatred.

124—We don't just preach the virtues of our side; we find self-worth in prosecuting the vices of the our rivals.

134—Study in stereotypes and how they can be unreliable.

136—In psychology, counterfactual thinking involves imagining how the circumstances of our lives could have unfolded differently. When we realize how easily we could have held different stereotypes, we might be more willing to update our views.

136—How would you have been different had you been born—black, Hispanic, Asian, native American, etc?

138—Psychologists find that many of our beliefs are cultural truisms widely shared, but rarely questioned.

139—Sometimes letting go of stereotypes means realizing that many members of a hated group aren't so terrible after all. And that's more likely to happen when we actually come face to face with them.

139—For over half a century, social scientists have tested the effects of intergroup contact. In a meta-analysis of over 500 studies with over 250,000 participants, interacting with members of another group reduced prejudice in 94% of the cases.

139-40—Neutralize stereotypes by talking to them...like Daryl did. Daryl had planted a seed of doubt and made him curious about his own beliefs. As we work toward systemic change, Daryl urges us not to overlook the power of conversation. Daryl doesn't do this by preaching or prosecuting. He uses thoughtful dialog.

### **Chapter 7: Vaccine Whisperers and Mild-Mannered Interrogators**

How the Right Kind of Listening Motivates People to Change

144—"It's a rare person who wants to hear what he doesn't want to hear."—attributed to Dick Cavett

145—Measles illustration. This is a common problem in persuasion: what doesn't sway us can make our beliefs stronger.

146—Help people change. Motivating though interviewing. One way to help people change.

147—Motivational interviewing—1)Asking--ask open-ended questions. 2)Engaging—Engage in reflective listening. 3)Affirming—affirm the person's desire and ability to change.

150—Much better than scare tactics, yelling manipulation, belittling.

153—Be a conversational guide

153—Add one more: 4)Summarizing—review, restate, invite change.

154—Change your mind flow chart.

158—Good listeners---inverse charisma. The magnetic quality of great listeners described.

159—Remember if you present information without permission, no one will listen to you.

159—The power of listening doesn't lie just in giving people the space to reflect on their views. It's a display of respect and an expression of care.

160—When we succeed in changing someone's mind, we shouldn't only ask whether we're proud of what we've achieved. We should ask whether we're proud of how we've achieved it.

### **PART 3: COLLECTIVE RETHINKING—Creating Communities of Lifelong Learners**

## **Chapter 8: Charged Conversations**

### Depolarizing Our Divided Discussions

163—"When conflict is cliché, complexity is breaking news." Amanda Ripley

165—Knowing another side exists isn't sufficient to leave preachers doubting whether they're on the right side of morality, prosecutors questioning whether they're on the right side of the case, or politicians wondering whether they're on the right side of history.

165—Presenting two extremes isn't the solution; it's part of the polarization problem.

165—Psychologists have a name for this: binary bias. It's a basic human tendency to seek clarity and closure by simplifying a complex continuum into two categories.

165—To paraphrase the humorist Robert Benchley, there are two kinds of people: those who divide the world into two kinds of people, and those who don't.

165—A dose of complexity can disrupt overconfidence cycles and spur rethinking cycles. It gives us more humility about our knowledge and more doubts about our opinions, and it can make us curious enough to discover information we are lacking.

166—Refusing the impulse to simplify is a step toward becoming more argument literate.

167-8—Thorny issues require more complexity in our conversations. Fundamentally, that involves drawing attention to the nuances that often get overlooked. It starts with seeking and spotlighting shades of gray.

168—A fundamental lesson of desirability bias is that our beliefs are shaped by our motivations. What we believe depends on what we want to believe.

169—But when the only available options are black and white, it's natural to slip into a mentality of us versus them and to focus on the sides over the science.

169—To overcome binary bias, a good starting point is to become ware of the range of perspectives across a given spectrum. (ex—polls suggest, for example, that there are at least six camps of thought on climate change alone. Not two).

169-170—It's especially important to distinguish skeptics from deniers. Skeptics have a healthy scientific stance: They don't believe everything they see, hear, or read. They ask questions and update their thinking as they gain access to new information. Deniers are in the dismissive camp, locked in preacher, prosecutor, or politician mode: They don't believe anything comes from the other side. Denial is a priori rejection of ideas without objective consideration.

170—Range—6 positions: Alarmed→Concerned→Cautious→Disengaged→Doubtful→Dismissive

173—Psychologists find that people will ignore or even deny the existence of a problem if they're not fond of the solution.

173-4—Including caveats can help convey complexity. And so can highlighting contingencies.

174—Acknowledging complexity doesn't make speakers and writers less convincing; it makes them more credible.

176—Dealing with complex issues consider 3 things—nuances, caveats, contingencies.

177—Nuance and complexity—2 factors to consider. Rob thought: ambiguity and incongruence.

177—Appreciating complexity reminds us that no behavior is always effective and that all cures have unintended consequences.

178—In polarized discussions, a common piece of advice is to take the other side's perspective.

178—The greater the distance between us and an adversary, the more likely we are to oversimplify their actual motives and invent explanations that stray far from their reality.

179—We can reject the belief, but we can respect the person.

179—People get trapped in emotional simplicity, with one or two dominant feelings. (Rob—binary bias).

181—It helps to remember that we can fall victim to binary bias with emotions, not only with issues.

183—Charged conversations cry out for nuance.

## **Chapter 9: Rewriting the Textbook**

### Teaching Students to Question Knowledge

186—Inquiry-based learning—inspect, investigate, interrogate, interpret.

190—Rethinking needs to become a regular habit.

192—Teach people to think for themselves. Teach them how to think.

200—School projects ex—Rethink, rework, polish.

203—Great teachers introduce new ways of thinking.

203—Ultimately, education is more than the information we accumulate in our heads. It's the habits we develop as we keep revising our drafts and the skills we build to keep learning.

## **Chapter 10: That's Not the Way We've Always Done It**

### Building Cultures of Learning at Work

205—"If only it weren't for the people...earth would be an engineer's paradise." Kurt Vonnegut

206-7—Illustration of human error—Rethinking is not just an individual skill, it's a collective capability, and it depends heavily on an organization's culture.

208—Rethinking is more likely to happen in a learning culture.

209—Psychological safety is NOT a matter of relaxing standards, making people comfortable, being nice and agreeable, or giving unconditional praise. It's fostering a climate of respect, trust, and openness in which people can raise concerns and suggestions without fear of reprisal. It's the foundation of a learning culture.

211—"How do you know?"—A question we need to ask more often.

213—Normalize vulnerability—making teams more comfortable opening up about their own struggles.

215—It takes confident humility to admit that we're a work in progress. It shows that we care more about improving ourselves than proving ourselves.

217—A bad decision process is based on shallow thinking.

## **PART 4: CONCLUSION**

## **Chapter 11: Escaping Tunnel Vision**

### Reconsidering Our Best-Laid Career and Life Plans

228—"When I'm successful I'll be happy." Locking on to a single target can be good or can blind and limit us.

229—Escalation of commitment is a major factor in preventing failures. Ironically, it can be fueled by one of the most celebrated engines of success: GRIT. Grit is the combination of passion and perseverance, and research shows that it can play an important role in motivating us to accomplish long-term goals.

229—There is a fine line between heroic persistence and foolish stubbornness. Sometimes the best kind of grit is gritting out and turning around. (Consider the dark side of grit.)

230—Identity foreclosure—When we settle prematurely on a sense of self without enough due diligence and close our minds to alternative steps.

232—Identity foreclosure can stop us from evolving.

235—Check ups are important in every area of our lives (health, finance, relationships, career, etc).

236—A successful relationship requires regular rethinking.

237—When chasing happiness chases it away.

237—The Kingdom of Bhutan has a Gross National Happiness index. In the US, the pursuit of happiness is so prized that it's one of the three unalienable rights in our Declaration of Independence. If we're not careful, though, the pursuit of happiness can become a recipe for misery.



237—Psychologists find that the more people value happiness, the less happy they often become with their lives.

238—Four factors—too busy evaluating life we don't experience it; too much time striving for peak happiness; overemphasize pleasure over purpose; individual pursuit can leave us feeling lonely.

240—Happiness redefined as searching for meaning—purpose, people, persevere, passion.

241—Evolution of self-esteem: 1)I'm not important, 2)I'm important, 3:I want to contribute to something important.

241—John Stuart Mill wrote, "Those only are happy who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness; on the happiness of others, on the improvement of mankind, even on some art or pursuit, followed not as a means, but as itself an ideal end. Aiming thus at something else, they find happiness by the way."

241—There isn't one definition of success or one track to happiness.

242—At work and in life, the best we can do is plan for what we want to learn and contribute over the next year or tow, and stay open to what might come next.

243—Keep growing, rethinking, reimagining. It takes humility but keep at it.

### **Epilogue**

"What I believe" is a process rather than a finality. —Emma Goldman

248—Rethinking must be ongoing.

250—Mental flexibility on complex issues is required.