A New Way to Think
Changing your perspective changes everything.

QUICK OVERVIEW

As business leaders and customers, we covet innovation. We want products that are new, different, better, more cost-effective, more environmentally friendly, more exciting. But more often than not, we see variations of the same old things. Think about how little cars, houses and can openers have changed in the past few decades.

So how can we get new and different, rather than falling into the rut of adaptation? We think creatively.

_Creative Thinkering_ by creativity expert Michael Michalko is divided in two distinct sections. The first, “Creative Thinking,” focuses on techniques and thought experiments geniuses use when pondering complex problems. By sharing these stories and insights, Michalko teaches readers how to change their thinking, perspective and results.

The second section of the book, “The Creative Thinker,” focuses on the truth that following a technique won’t make a person creative. Michalko explains, “First, you must have the intention and desire to be creative; second, you must consciously cultivate positive speaking and thinking patterns; and last, you must act like a creative thinker and go through the motions of being creative every day.” He teaches readers that their speech, thoughts, behavior and feelings all work together to foster an active and productive imagination.

APPLY AND ACHIEVE

When was the last time you looked at clouds and saw recognizable shapes? As a child, this game may have kept you occupied for hours. But as an adult, you look at clouds to see if rain is headed your way.

Michalko explains that as preschoolers, our thinking was inclusive. Ideas jumbled together, allowing us to use our imaginations to turn something as simple as a box into a spaceship. As we learn to organize our thoughts, we give every concept a place in the file cabinets of our minds. A box is used for shipping or packing; it serves no creative purpose for our adult minds.
It’s time to exercise your creative muscles. Take a walk today and be intentionally aware of your surroundings. What do you see, hear, smell, feel? Write down at least five items you notice on your walk. Then, for each of those items, think of two or three alternative uses. For example, if you see a park swing, brainstorm several different ways the swing or its materials could be used. Stretch your thinking to see beyond the intended purpose. Doing so may help reawaken the creative child within.

We were all born spontaneous and creative. Every one of us. As children we accepted all things equally. We embraced all kinds of outlandish possibilities for all kinds of things. When we were children, we knew a box was much more than a container. A box could be a fort, a car, a tank, a cave, a house, something to draw on, and even a space helmet. Our imaginations were not structured according to some existing concept or category.

We did not strive to eliminate possibilities; we strove to expand them. We were all amazingly creative and always filled with the joy of exploring different ways of thinking.

And then something happened to us: we went to school. We were not taught how to think; we were taught to reproduce what past thinkers thought. When confronted with a problem, we were taught to analytically select the most promising approach based on history, excluding all other approaches, and then to work logically in a carefully defined direction toward a solution. Instead of being taught to look for possibilities, we were taught to look for ways to exclude them. It’s as if we entered school as a question mark and graduated as a period.

The thinking patterns that formal education has firmly wired in our brains limit our imagination and inventiveness. Our mental patterns enable us to simplify the assimilation of complex data. These patterns let us rapidly and accurately perform routine tasks such as driving an automobile or doing our jobs. Habitual pattern recognition provides us with instant interpretations and permits us to react quickly to our environment.

Though pattern recognition simplifies the complexities of life, it also makes it hard for us to come up with new ideas and creative solutions to problems, especially when confronted with unusual data. This is why we so often fail when confronted with a new problem that is similar to past experiences only superficially, and that is different from previously encountered problems in its deep structure. Interpreting such a problem through the prism of past experience will, by definition, lead the thinker astray.

THE SAME OLD IDEAS

Habits, thinking patterns, and routines with which we approach life gradually accumulate until they significantly reduce our awareness of other possibilities. It’s as if a cataract develops over our imagination over time, and its effects only slowly become obvious. The accumulation goes almost unnoticed until the cataract reduces our awareness significantly.

You cannot will yourself to change your thinking patterns any more than you can stop your foot from changing direction, no matter how inspired you are to do so. You need some means of producing variation in your ideas. How, then, can we change our thinking patterns? We form new connections. These new connections give you different ways to focus your attention and different ways to interpret whatever you are focusing on.

For example, suppose you want to improve the flashlight. If you sit down and think about flashlights, and will yourself to get ideas, you will likely come up with mostly the usual ideas, and the improvements will be marginal.

However, if you conceptually blend a flashlight with, say, a garage door opener, you will change your thinking patterns, and this will ignite your imagination. Combining a flashlight with a garage door opener gives you a different way to look at a flashlight. This may inspire the idea of a “Superman” flashlight.
Creative Thinkering

which is an X-ray flashlight that uses simple microwave technology. The flashlight emits radiation about the same strength as a garage door opener. Like the door sensors, the beam detects motion, including breathing. It can even detect people hiding, by a data display on a screen. You cannot get this kind of idea using your conventional way of thinking.

It is the marriage of dissimilar subjects or concepts that excites the imagination—so that it creates different thinking patterns—and produces novel ideas. An original idea is not the sum of combined thoughts but depends on how their patterns are fitted together.

LEONARDO DA VINCI’S SECRET

Leonardo da Vinci was the first to write about the importance of introducing random and chance events to produce variation in one’s thinking patterns. He suggested that you will find inspiration for marvelous ideas if you look for random subjects to conceptually blend with your challenge. He would gaze at stains on the walls, or ashes of a fire, or shapes of clouds, or patterns in mud, or in similar places.

He would imagine seeing trees, battles, landscapes, figures with lively movements, and so on and then excite his mind by conceptually blending his subject with the subjects and events he imagined. Leonardo would occasionally throw a paint-filled sponge against the wall and contemplate the random stains and what they might represent.

The human brain cannot deliberately concentrate on two separate objects or ideas, no matter how dissimilar, no matter how remote, without eventually forming a connection between them.

Try using your imagination to find sources for random stimuli. For example, pick a magazine, newspaper, book, picture, the yellow pages, a dictionary, or something else. Close your eyes and stab your finger at a page. Take the noun or picture closest to your finger. Visit a museum, an art gallery, or a shopping mall and list the objects that interest you.

Or, take a “thought walk” around your home, your neighborhood, or your workplace and the surrounding grounds. Come back with four or five things or objects (or a list of objects) that interested you during your walk—for example, children skipping rope, a pebble, a bag of jelly beans, a drinking fountain, and so on. Study the objects and list their characteristics and associations. Characteristics include an item’s shape, size, color, or use. Associations are phrases or statements related to each item. Then brainstorm for ideas by making a forced connection between each association and characteristic and a challenge you are currently working on.

CHANGE THE WAY YOU LOOK AT THINGS

Most people think of perception as a passive process. We think that we see, hear, smell, taste, or feel stimuli that come into contact with our senses. We think that we record what is actually there. Yet scientists and psychologists have proven that perception is demonstrably an active rather than a passive process; it constructs rather than records “reality.”

Our stereotyped notions block clear vision and crowd out imagination. This happens without any alarms sounding, so we never realize it is occurring. Not long ago, a man at a metro station in Washington, D.C., started playing a violin. It was a cold January morning. He performed six pieces by Bach, playing for about forty-five minutes. Since it was rush hour, thousands of people went through the station.

One man stopped for a few seconds and then hurried. A little later, a woman threw a dollar into the till and, without stopping, continued on her way. The person who paid the most attention was a three-year-old boy. Finally his mother pushed hard and the child continued to walk, turning his head to look at the musician the whole time. Several children did the same. In the forty-five minutes the musician played, only the children, it seemed, wanted to stop and listen.

When he finished playing and silence took over, no one noticed it. No one applauded, nor was there any other apparent recognition. No one knew it at the time, but the violinist was Joshua Bell, a world-renowned, premier musician, and he was playing one of the most intricate pieces ever written with a violin valued at $3.5 million. Two days

We make instantaneous judgments every day, all predicated on what we see and hear, which is colored by our past experiences.
before the subway performance, Joshua Bell sold out at a theater in Boston, and tickets sold for one hundred dollars or more.

This event, Joshua Bell playing incognito in the metro station, had been organized by the Washington Post as part of a social experiment. Because he was playing in a subway station, people assumed he was a street musician playing for handouts and paid no attention to his music. They saw and heard what they expected to see and hear from a street musician. Thumbs up to the children who recognized they were listening to extraordinary music.

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**Priming the Way You Look at Things**

I have always been fascinated by how easily we can change the way we look at things.

For example, researchers at Oxford University discovered a way to use inverted binoculars to reduce pain and swelling in wounds. Remarkably, when you look at a wound through the wrong end of a pair of binoculars, your perception of the wound makes it seem much smaller. This perception acts like a painkiller and diminishes pain. According to the researchers, this demonstrates that even basic bodily sensations are modulated by one’s perception.

Another way to shift perception is to try and look at the subject from someone else’s perspective. All of us, with a little thought, can come up with easy ways to change our perspectives by adopting different roles. One gym owner was trying to come up with innovative ways to market his gym. He adopted different roles, including those of a judge, Rosie O’Donnell, a comic, and Pablo Picasso. Picasso got him thinking about artists and their work, which inspired his idea. He hired a freelance caricature artist to sit in front of his gym with a sign offering “free caricatures in five minutes.” The artist drew caricatures of the person in a well-developed body, with the gym displayed prominently in the background. The person also got a brochure and business card. His business increased substantially almost overnight.

**THE CREATIVE THINKER**

The creative thinker is a result of the assembly and interactions of certain critical human traits. First, you must have the intention and desire to be creative; second, you must consciously cultivate positive speaking and thinking patterns; and last, you must act like a creative thinker and go through the motions of being creative every day.

One way to prime yourself for creativity is to generate an awareness of what you want to be or accomplish. You can do this by creating an “intention board.” An intention board is a large poster board on which you paste images, sayings, articles, poems, and other items that you’ve collected from magazines and

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**Let Your Subconscious Mind Work for You**

Following is a procedure that is remarkably effective in tapping the subconscious. Work on a problem until you have mulled over all the relevant pieces of information. Talk with others about the problem, ask questions, and do as much research as you can until you are satisfied that you have pushed your conscious mind to its limit.

Write a letter to your unconscious mind about the problem. Make the letter as detailed and specific as possible. Define the problem, describe its attributes, what steps you have taken, the difficulties, the gaps, what is needed, what you want, and so on. Just writing the letter will help better define the problem, clarify issues, point out where more information is needed, and prepare your unconscious to work on a solution. The letter should read as if it were written to a real person. Imagine that your unconscious is all-knowing and can solve any problem that is properly stated.

Instruct your unconscious to find the solution. Write, “Your mission is to find the solution to the problem. I would like the solution in two days.”

Seal the letter and put it away. You may even want to mail it to yourself.

Let go of the problem. Don’t work on it. Forget it. Do something else. This is the incubation stage, when much of what goes on occurs outside your focused awareness, in your unconscious. Open the letter in two days. If the problem still has not been solved, write on the bottom of the letter, “Let me know the minute you solve this,” and put it away. Sooner or later, when you are most relaxed and removed from the problem, the answer will magically pop into your mind.
other sources. It's simple. The idea is to surround yourself with images of your intention (what you want to create or who you want to become) and, in the process, to encourage your awareness and passion to grow. You'll discover that the board will add clarity to your desires, and feeling to your visions, which in turn will generate an awareness of the things in your environment that can help you realize your vision.

Change the Way You Speak, and You Change the Way You Think

We often describe things, good or bad, in terms of what they are not. For example, this morning I ran into an old friend and asked him how he was feeling. He answered, “No complaints.” Now, what does that mean? Does it mean he has a list of complaints taped on his bedroom wall that he reads every morning to see if he has anything to complain about?

Pay attention to how your friends and colleagues talk. You will find that many speak a language of exclusion, a language about “what is not,” instead of “what is” or “what can be.” You give an idea to your supervisor at work and you hear, “Not bad.” Does that mean every other idea you offered was bad? You suggest that you implement a new plan or idea and you hear, “It won’t hurt.” Does that mean that everything else you implemented did hurt?

How many times have you heard a friend say to you something like, “Why don’t we get together for lunch?” What’s interesting is that when someone asks another person “Why don’t we,” the receiver frequently replies with some type of “no.” When someone says, “Why don’t we…?” our first unconscious impulse may be to begin to think of reasons why not to get together. The phrasing creates ambivalence. However, if you were to change the question to “How about getting together on Monday?” or “Let’s get together on Monday,” the ambivalence would disappear.

Because most adults focus on deficiencies, they phrase some of their thoughts and ideas with negatives such as no, never, don’t, and not. By changing your language and speaking patterns in a positive way, so that they are about “what’s there,” you guarantee a feeling of optimism and real output in performance. What you say affects how you feel. How you feel affects how you think, and vice versa. All language, feelings, and thoughts interact with each other, and the entire accumulation of those influences creates your output and behavior.

If you change one element—your language—your thoughts and feelings will be changed as well. The cumulative impact will be new patterns of output and behavior.

You Become What You Pretend to Be

You can change the way you see yourself, and the way others see you, by your intention and by going through the motions.

When you look at the lives of creative geniuses throughout the history of the world, you find that their behavior and their creativity are inextricably connected. An example is Michelangelo, who was hired to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican. His rivals persuaded Pope Julius II to hire him because they knew Michelangelo had rarely used color in his early years and had never painted a fresco, which entailed a complicated process. His competitors were convinced he would turn down the commission due to his inexperience with fresco. If he did accept it, they were convinced, the result would be amateurish, and they planned to use it to point out his inadequacies to the pope and the art world.

Michelangelo believed he was the greatest artist in the world and could create masterpieces using any medium. He acted on that belief by accepting the commission. He executed the frescos in great discomfort, having to work looking upward, which impaired his sight so badly that for months he could not read save with his head in that same posture. By acting on his belief and going through the motions, he created the masterpiece that established him as the artist of the age.

Your speech affects your thinking, your thinking affects your behavior, your behavior affects your attitude, and your attitude...your creative ability.
ACTION STEPS
Get more out of this SUCCESS Book Summary by applying what you’ve learned to your life. Here are a few questions and thoughts to get you started.

1. Take a “thought walk” every day this week. After each walk, write down at least five things that you noticed.

2. Select an item from your thought walk list and identify its characteristics and associations. Then force a connection between the characteristics, associations and a problem you’re currently facing.


4. Look beyond the obvious and the stereotypes. How many people do you see every day but fail to notice?

5. Practice thinking affirmative thoughts. When someone asks you how you are, respond with a positive answer, rather than “not bad” or “I can’t complain.”

6. Look at problems from multiple viewpoints. How would you handle the problem if you were a child, a doctor, a famous actor, a teacher or a judge?

7. When you don’t feel successful, pretend you’re playing the part of a successful individual and make yourself take the actions that a successful person would take.

About the Author
Michael Michalko is an acclaimed creativity expert and the author of the best-selling books Thinkertoys, ThinkPak and Cracking Creativity.

As an officer in the U.S. Army, Michalko organized a team of NATO intelligence specialists and international academics in Frankfurt, Germany, to research, collect and categorize all known inventive-thinking methods. His team applied the methods to various NATO military, political and social problems and produced a variety of breakthrough ideas and creative solutions to new and old problems.

Michalko later applied these creative-thinking techniques to problems in the corporate world, with outstanding success. He has given speeches, workshops and seminars on boosting creative thinking to clients that include DuPont, Kellogg’s, General Electric, Microsoft, AT&T, Wal-Mart and Hallmark.

Recommended Reading
If you enjoyed the summary of Creative Thinkering, you may also want to check out:

Cracking Creativity
by Michael Michalko

The Accidental Creative
by Todd Henry

We Are All Weird
by Seth Godin