**How Do You Know?**

***A Review of Think Again by Adam Grant***

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Many of us are familiar with the famous Einstein quote, **“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.”**

Adam Grant’s ***Think Again: The Power of Knowing What You Don’t Know***explains just how hard it is to **not** do the same thing over and over.

Intuitively, we all know the importance of being able to rethink ideas, opinions, and methods… *when it comes to coaching others.* But the ability to rethink becomes more difficult when it involves our own ideas and opinions. This isn’t a knowledge issue; this is an ego issue.

If you, like me, have difficulty rethinking your own ideas and opinions, this doesn’t make you egocentric. It makes you human. According to Grant, we are all wired to fall into three personas when faced with competing views: **Preacher**, **Prosecutor**, and **Politician**.

We become preachers when we talk about our sacred beliefs. We become prosecutors when we see flaws in someone else’s argument. We become politicians when we want to win. To combat this natural tendency, Grant explains that we, instead, need to think like **scientists**, or, as I would argue, **creatives**. When we approach problems, issues, and disagreements as experiments, we start with questions rather than pre-determined answers. This leaves room for rethinking.

Grant, an organizational psychologist at The Wharton School of UPenn, presents the ability to rethink as an essential cognitive skill that is far too often overlooked. Like a muscle, this skill needs to be exercised, and he offers a 257-page fitness routine as support. The ability to rethink boils down to the **virtue of humility**, which Grant defines as “being grounded - recognizing that we’re flawed and fallible” (p. 46).

The term humility can be extended to **intellectual humility,** which focuses on our acknowledgment of the limitations of our own intellect. When using humility as our compass, we move in the direction of uncertainty instead of conviction. Uncertainty leads to curiosity, and curiosity leads to discovery.

Because intellectual humility is a current interest of mine, I’m often asked to define the term for others. I’ve found that the easiest definition for me to articulate is that intellectual humility is the ability to say, **“I couldbe wrong,”** which is a definition I was first introduced to by the works of Dr. Mark Leary from Duke University.

However, Adam Grant has helped me to *rethink* this. He argues that intellectual humility is not defined by our ability to make a statement. It’s actually defined by our ability to ask a very important question: **“How do you know?”** This is not only a question we need to be asking others; it’s a question we need to be asking ourselves. And, if we ask the question with genuine curiosity, we open up new possibilities for problem-solving. Grant writes that humility requires “being *actively* open-minded” and “searching for reasons we might be wrong - not for reasons why we might be right” (p. 25). This takes intentionality, motivation, and, most importantly, practice.

**So, what does this mean for creativity?**

The act of rethinking helps us to develop a tolerance for complexity and ambiguity. We live in a society that believes everything is black or white, but, as Grant explains, real life is actually gray. We are constantly bombarded with the pressure to simplify complex issues. Tweets are limited to 280 words. Headlines are created as clickbait. GIFs are animated to automatically loop redundantly.

If we intentionally **fight the urge to simplify** and, instead, become willing to live in the gray area, we start to open up to the “complexity of [the] spectrum of beliefs” (p. 170) that exist. For instance, polls have shown that there are at least six different camps of thought related to climate change, yet we typically lump individuals into two: believers and non-believers.

When we make a conscious effort to avoid premature closure and listen to different perspectives, we adopt a more nuanced view of the world, and this new lens gives us a greater appreciation for **diversity of thought** - a crucial component of creativity. This isn’t to say we aren’t to have opinions or that there isn’t a notion of right or wrong, but when we embrace ambiguity and complexity, we increase our access to a larger pool of resources to help us find creative solutions.

Grant’s challenge for us to think and rethink, learn and unlearn, listen and listen some more has a significant impact on our problem-solving abilities. According to Grant, if people do not like a proposed solution to a problem, they will deny the problem even exists. Remember that Einstein quote?

One way we can confront this as creative leaders is by modeling openness and humility to those around us. **Leading by example will always be more effective than lecturing**. If this sounds like a difficult task, Grant assures us that every little bit counts. He states, “I think most of us would benefit from being more open more of the time” (p. 27). With a little more openness more of the time, we bring about a lot more possibilities and a lot more change.

Source:

Grant, A. (2021). *Think again: The power of knowing what you don't know.* Viking.