

MONTHLY MENTOR

“A” Player human capital leadership by
HUNT EXECUTIVE SEARCH

Volume 16, Issue 4



For twenty seven years, the Monthly Mentor has been a value added service to encourage our employer and candidate clients in their Personal & Professional Development.



Improve Your Thinking Skills

By Joe Hunt

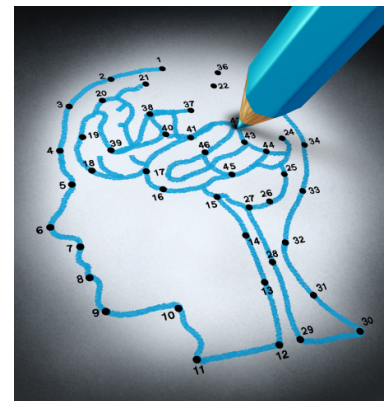
Are you using your brain to its optimum capacity? What thinking skills should you develop? A recent article in Harvard Business Review proclaims that successful organizations of the future will place a premium on our thinking skills.

“... in today’s marketplace, the smartest companies aren’t those that necessarily out-produce the competition. Instead, it’s the organizations that outthink them. And while there are plenty of tools that help us quickly understand what our teammates do, it’s harder to tell how they think.” ~ Mark Bonchek and Elisa Steele, Harvard Business Review, “What Kind of Thinker Are You?”

Not everybody approaches a problem or a decision in the same way. Understanding your own preferred thinking style and those of your co-workers helps teams collaborate more effectively.

Here are examples of thinking styles:

- **Analytical:** clear thinking, orderly and rational
- **Inquisitive:** curious, alert and interested in the surrounding world
- **Insightful:** prudent, humble, reflective and strategic
- **Open-minded:** intellectually tolerant and fair-minded
- **Systematic:** conceptual, process-oriented and intuitive
- **Timely:** efficient, reliable and responsive
- **Truth-seeking:** independent, tough-minded and skeptical



Mental Awareness

No matter what your preferred style is, you can improve your thinking skills. If you're primarily a right-brained thinker (creative, non-linear) you can improve your abilities to use your left brain (rational, logic). Since none of us operate solely or completely using one side of the brain, you will gain perspective when you use more of the whole brain.

It starts with awareness. How conscious are you of how you approach a problem? How observant are you of other people's thinking processes? The more observant you become of your mental processes, the more of your brain you'll be using.

The problem is, our brains love to take shortcuts. We jump to conclusions and automatically respond without thinking. This is because it takes a lot of glucose to run neural networks, and the brain is geared to conserve energy.

But you can change that by simply becoming aware of mental activities, just as you would observe an athlete engage in physical actions. When you do start noticing mental actions, you also notice alternative perspectives. This opens your brain to more creativity.

Brain Fitness: Keeping Sharp at Work

You can't expect yourself to perform well on the job unless you pay attention to brain fitness. Stress and job pressure can cause you to lose or forget things, but you can actually do a few exercises to prevent brain fog.

Our brains are sensitive to many things, and they respond when you take good care of them. Don't take your brain for granted.

Here are three things you need to respect if you rely on your thinking skills in your career.

1. Use your whole brain
2. Sharpen your focus
3. Maintain your motivation



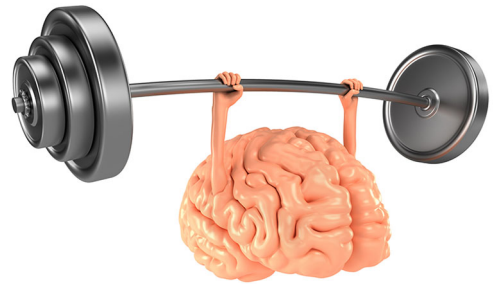
Whole Brain Exercises

While a lot has been exaggerated about right and left-brained people, the truth is we all use both sides of the brain. Successful colleagues just use more of both sides; they don't ignore one side simply because they prefer the other. Just as we all have problem-solving thinking styles, we all have habitual ways of using our brains.

The right hemisphere of the brain provides more creative and flexible visual and spatial processing. The left is used more in structured, analytical thought processing and focuses on language and symbols. The two sides of the brain are connected by a wide band of cells that passes information between the two hemispheres.

To develop whole brain thinking, you can do a number of things:

- Try using online mind-mapping tools
- Engage in both mental and physical exercise
- Try certain sports like tennis, golf, and dancing



When you combine physical movements with structure, such as in a dance routine, you engage both linear and non-linear thinking. This will help you boost both your powers of perception and your creative visualization.

“In business, whole brain thinking will greatly increase your entrepreneurial potential.”
~ Dr. Jill Ammon-Wexler, *How Successful People Think Smart*

Brain Fitness: The Lost Art of Single Tasking

Sometimes the demands on managers' time and attention make one feel like a juggling octopus. After a while we get awfully good at multitasking. Perhaps we need to rehabilitate the skill of single tasking; of being able to really dial in to get work done.

One [study of office workers](#) showed that they switched tasks every three or four minutes, with a 30-minute refocusing time necessary when that happens--certainly not an efficient way to work.

You may not have control over interruptions at the office, but you can set some priorities and tactfully set boundaries on your thinking time. This may require you to close your office door, or tell people in advance when you can or can't be interrupted.



The question of why we are willing to fracture our attention and risk errors remains unanswered. There is perhaps some pride in believing we are able to multi-task in order to prove our cognitive prowess, but it can also be fear driven. We are terrified of missing something or not having an answer immediately at our fingertips. This contributes to our own loss of time and inability to focus on single tasking.

Gaining an awareness of your thinking style and engaging in whole-brain exercises will improve your overall “brain fitness.” Through awareness and exercise you can increase your ability to efficiently achieve success and avoid the pit-falls that multi-tasking can present.

Joe Hunt is a Managing Partner at Hunt Executive Search/The Hunt Group, a boutique executive search firm that provides human capital solutions to consumer goods, retail, life sciences and diversified industrial markets.

Contact Joe Hunt:

212.861.2680 | 800.486.8476 | info@huntsearch.com

[Retained Executive Search](#)

[Executive Assessment](#)

[Private Equity Advisory](#)

[Executive Coaching & Outplacement](#)

[Human Capital Consulting E-Dossier](#)

[Video Presentation](#)

