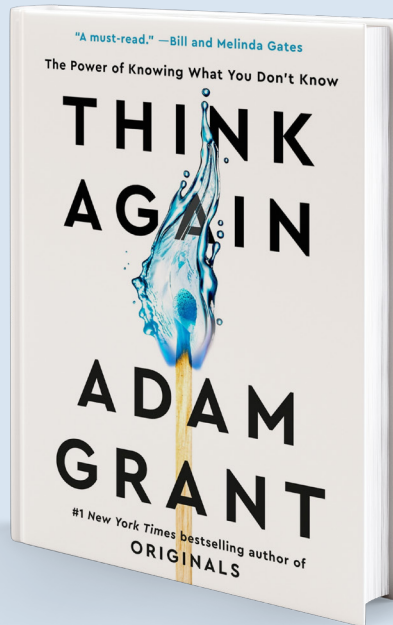


Book Snaps™

In-depth reviews of best-selling business books.



Think Again

The Power of Knowing What You Don't Know

By Adam Grant

Adam Grant is an organizational psychologist at Wharton, where he has been the top-rated professor for seven straight years. He is one of TED's most popular speakers, his books have sold millions of copies, his talks have been viewed more than 25 million times, and his podcast WorkLife with Adam Grant has topped the charts. His pioneering research has inspired people to rethink fundamental assumptions about motivation, generosity, and creativity.

A Book Review by Soundview

Rethink and Unlearn

We all have preconceived notions about the way the world spins. We have opinions and ideas and are hard-pressed to give them up because the conviction of correctness is so strong. But what would happen if we took the time to second-guess those convictions? What if we changed our way of thinking to be more like a scientist, where we tested our theories, and instead of digging our heels in our raging, we explored those ideas? Maybe even accepted them?

In *Think Again: The Power of Knowing What You Don't Know*, Adam Grant invites the readers to challenge the way they think. He states that part of the reason the general population struggles to rethink is that we would instead be settled in the comfort of the things we know rather than allow the doubt to cause us to squirm. He calls this cognitive laziness because rethinking styles, decor, and more so we can stay up with the latest trends is easy. Rethinking our knowledge and opinions, however, isn't easy.

It can be challenging to drop the knowledge gained over the years, but Grant invites the reader to do just that because it might cause them to miss things that are becoming problems in their lives. He calls this mental flexibility, and his goal in *Think Again* is to explore how rethinking happens and how this can happen by speaking with those he considers to be some of the world's best rethinkers.

He does this by breaking *Think Again* into three sections for the reader. Doing this makes it easy for the reader to understand what is being said and digest it to see how it applies to their lives. The first section is about the reader opening their minds and learning to see things in a different light. The second is about the reader motivating others to do the same and open their minds. Finally, the third section shares how to build communities of individuals who are lifelong learners.

Throughout the book, Grant shares examples of great re-thinkers. He does this to show the reader that it can be done and why it should be done. He closes the prologue by saying that the hallmark of wisdom is knowing when to drop some of our tools and treasured parts of our identity. In doing so, the rust is removed, the dust is displaced, and the world and its problems are seen and addressed in a new way.

Beginning with “Why”

Grant begins by sharing that when most people think of the term “mentally fit,” the word “intelligent” comes to mind. However, in today’s turbulent world, the reader must use a different set of cognitive skills, usually left in the mental tool shed to rust: the ability to rethink and unlearn how to address a situation.

He states that the reader doesn’t just hesitate to rethink an issue; they are nervous about the very thought of rethinking. Part of the problem is the ease of hanging on to prior beliefs (cognitive laziness) and the fear of admitting that things might have changed; facts were proved wrong, and now something new must be learned. It’s uncomfortable to do this, so digging heels in has become the norm.

Refusing to rethink or stretch one’s cognitive ability is a common mistake. Grant encourages the reader to adopt a new way of thinking that includes mental flexibility. When this is done, the reader has a better chance of facing and conquering an obstacle others might not have.

A Personal Update

Why is it difficult to rethink? The idea of the unknown may cause worry. Or is it because change is uncomfortable, and staying put is too convenient? People would often rather the world change to suit themselves and might be unwilling to adapt when faced with something new. Adapting needs to happen, however; when this isn’t done, something or someone will likely get left behind in this ever-changing world.

It’s usually easy to see when someone else needs to rethink. Often, people are quick to adopt one of three mindsets, preacher, prosecutor, or politician, when trying to convince someone of their wrongness. They deliver sermon-like dissertations and courtroom-worthy arguments or use every persuasive campaign trail debate when convinced of one’s rightness and another’s incorrectness.

Can something else be done? Grant says there is a fourth, necessary option: to think like a scientist, to address the situation by being willing to see things from a different perspective in a quest for the truth, and to reserve the mental space to change views based on presented information.

Grant comments that he hopes his ideas will encourage readers to develop their beliefs. It’s an encouraging invitation out of stagnation and into a place of evolution and growth.

The Right Kind of Confidence

Just as there are blind spots in cars when being driven, there are also blind spots in knowledge. The problem comes when they go unrecognized, resulting in false confidence that can hinder a desire to rethink. It becomes difficult to rethink or relearn what we need when this happens. The good news is that with the right kind of confidence, it is possible to spot those blindspots and learn to see oneself more clearly. It is essential to recognize the mental blind spots and then revise thinking accordingly.

Grant shares that many want to use a Goldilocks method of finding that sweet spot but that it’s not the best way to be confident. It’s necessary to remain grounded so that one can believe in oneself and still have the humility to question whether the correct tools are being used to achieve one’s goal.

When confident humility has been learned, it will improve the quality of rethinking. When doubts creep in, they can cue the reader to enhance their cognitive toolkit.

When Being Wrong Is Alright

Grant says that when one is attached to one’s beliefs, it is harder to recognize the flaws in one’s opinions. A type of detachment needs to happen, and he shares two varieties for the reader to try. The first requires a detachment of one’s present self from one’s past, which can lead to a place where the reader is mentally healthier over time.

The second requires the reader to detach their opinions from their identity. When their identity is based on their values—core principles such as integrity, freedom, and security—they can remain open about what can update them in light of new, presented evidence.

These two forms of detachment will help the reader grow and relate to the people around them. Being wrong is not always a negative experience. Sometimes, it leads the reader to a place where they discover something new and exciting.

Taking a Different Approach

When readers gain the ability to rethink for themselves and open up to a new way of learning, they are also presented with a new opportunity: they now have the chance to convince others to rethink in a new way. Often, challenging the thoughts of others is done in an adversarial way. The result that follows is usually the other person digging their heels in, shutting down, and refusing to consider a new way of thinking or new ideas. In exploring a new way of personal thinking, the reader will then be able to convince others in a more collaborative way that will invite them to think more like a scientist.

This takes practice, though, and much self-reflection. Grant realized this when conversing with a former student and being called a “logic bully.” Instead of thinking like a scientist and being willing to consider a different point of view, he was thinking like a preacher and a prosecutor and ended up alienating his student.

He shares that to succeed in changing someone else’s mind, one must first be willing to be open to the stance of the person with whom one is debating. This is about more than making a good argument. It’s about making sure that the reason for convincing someone else to change is right and changing the way an argument is carried out. When this is done, a common ground is more likely to be found, leaving those involved in a more positive place.

It’s essential to learn this skill and show others that the desire for growth, openness, and willingness to learn are mutual. Simply presenting someone with a reason to change their mind isn’t



“... a critical way to help others rethink their views is to ask them to consider their opinions if they were living in a different reality.”

enough and might not work, but it needs to be done in a way that doesn't feel like an ambush.

Grant draws the reader in by sharing a story of his own failure as he goes on. Why is this important? This makes him relatable to the reader because it conveys his humanity and fallibility, and he does this in a genuine way.

Where to start?

It is important to start with a conversation to understand how change can happen and how the cycle of overconfidence can be broken. What would a conversation do? It can lead to common ground and help establish a common identity. However, a conversation must go further because common ground may not always be enough.

Grant shares that he turned to the psychology of peace, which helps to establish empathy. Through several examples, he shared that learning about individual members of a disliked group and forming positive opinions about them in an ideal world could change how the group is seen. Sadly, typically, the individual of that group is seen as an exception to the rule, and negative opinions are held, so go back to the drawing board many will go.

Seeing Things in a New Way

Grant states that a critical way to help others rethink their views is to ask them to consider their opinions if they were living in a different reality. For example, what views might they hold fast to if they were born in a certain time period or to a family that is a fervent supporter of a particular team?

This way of thinking helps people gain humility as they reflect on how certain changed circumstances might have led them to live a completely different life. When that curiosity begins to seep in, they are opened up to a place where they can find some new commonalities to displace the stereotypes that are there.

Grant also shares a practice that has been called motivational interviewing, which focuses on helping others find their motivation to change (rethink). Three key techniques are involved in this that are extremely helpful:

- Asking open-ended questions.
- Engaging in reflective learning
- Affirming the person's desire and ability to change,

This needs to be done accompanied by an attitude of humility so that the cycle of overconfidence can be broken and others

can see the new opportunities around them in a new light.

When trying to convince someone to change, Grant shares a critical caveat: When conversing with someone who is successful in changing their mind, it is essential to ask oneself not just if they're proud of what they achieved but how it was achieved.

A New Community

Learning doesn't stop when a diploma is handed out at graduation. Or at least it shouldn't.

It might not always be comfortable, especially since information is abundant and only a few clicks away. However, the problem comes when that information isn't accurate, and only the extremes are presented (which then polarizes issues even more).

This is called "binary bias," and it happens when a topic is presented as simply black and white as if there are only two sides to it that should be discussed. Instead of being open to different perspectives, human nature tends to seek clarity by simplifying a complicated subject.

So, what can be done to combat this way of thinking? Grant shares the good news that there is an antidote, and it comes when a range of perspectives is explored on a given topic. He uses the imagery of looking at the issue through the lens of a prism, multifaceted and complex. When this is done, the reader is more likely to rethink their stance and look at it through a gaze of curiosity.

Grant wants the reader to be able to rethink well so that they can continue to learn as they go through different stages of life. It's hopeful to think that the possibility for us to change and grow does not stop when graduation happens, and a career begins. There will always be something new to learn, but there must be a willingness and openness that accompanies it.

Does it have to be complicated?

Complexity is not always negative, and it is possible to communicate complex topics well. One way to do this is to look at how scientists communicate: They include in their presented research the caveats that they have found along the way. Grant shares that this is a type of porthole in how they think and the research that they have done.

Acknowledging that a topic is complex, Grant states that it doesn't make it less convincing but makes it credible, particularly in social sciences. It shows that the researcher hasn't picked out the pieces that will best support their argument and instead has explored a variety of views to share with the world.

Productive vs Unproductive

When presenting a complicated topic, a lack of emotional range can sometimes hinder a conversation. This is quite the opposite of what might be common, though, and it's vital for the researcher to understand how people can share their emotions in a charged conversation. When this is done, there is a higher potential for rethinking and understanding another's point of view.

A hindrance to this happens when a binary bias controls one's emotions. Binary bias doesn't only play a role in relation to topics. It can affect how one feels about a situation or a topic. Just as it is possible to see a presented topic through a prism-like lens, it is also possible to see emotions that way. It can lead to a place of frustration as well as curiosity. It can cause sadness and mix it with excitement at a new discovery.

When thinking like a scientist, one has the opportunity to discover new truths that will lead to both personal and communal progress and growth. Sometimes, this can cause confusion, but that can and should cause one to pause to recognize the cue that something new is to be learned or discovered.

Conclusion

Think Again: The Power of Knowing What You Don't Know by Adam Grant is a read that is very encouraging and inviting. It is an invitation for the reader to change how they think without name-calling, belittling, or oversimplifying how this can be done. He genuinely cares about how the reader thinks and what their impacts can be on the world at large. It encourages the reader to seek outlets for new knowledge and shows them how to do this in a healthy and effective way.

Grant is humble in saying that he wishes he had thought about some of these things in his previous publications. This is a refreshing show of humanity and his willingness to practice what he shares with the world. In the epilogue to the conclusion, he shares moments of rethinking he experienced when writing *Think Again*.

He believes that rethinking can and should happen. It is more likely to happen in a culture that is passionate about learning instead of staying stagnant. He also says that it's not necessary to totally upend one's life in order to rethink. Small pivots in rethinking one's position can end up having a huge impact, both personally and on the people around them.

Grant closes by saying that rethinking is not just a way for the reader to update their knowledge or opinion base—it goes much deeper than that. It takes humility, doubt, and curiosity to start down the path of rethinking, and the result? We will have a new tool to help us lead a more fulfilling, learning-led life. He also shares the thought that if people put on their scientist goggles a little more often, the world might be a better place, but if the reader disagrees, he closes with an open-ended question: “What evidence would change your mind?” showing his willingness to step into a place of continued growth.

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