

Focused Thinking and Creative Thinking

“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things.”

Philippians 4:8

Unleash the Potential of _____ Thinking

Many people flit through life from one project to another, spreading themselves so thin that they do nothing well. They never learn to say NO to the good so they can say YES to the best. They toy with many activities but give themselves passionately to nothing.

The focused thinker establishes priorities, knowing that one person cannot do everything. He drops some good activities in order to passionately embrace a cause that truly makes a difference. He refuses to be like a bumblebee, flitting from place to place, leaving a blur, but not a mark.

Focused thinking can do several things for you:

1. Focused thinking harnesses _____ toward a desired goal.
2. Focused thinking gives _____ time to develop.
3. Focused thinking brings _____ to the target.
4. Focused thinking will take you to the next _____.

Discussion: Talk about your response to this statement—“A good idea can become a great idea when it is given focused time.”

One must learn to concentrate his or her thinking for a prolonged period of time in order to successfully conquer difficult challenges. Many people achieve what they long thought impossible when they learned how to focus their thinking on areas of life that really matter. How do you determine what matters?

1. Identify your _____ in life.
2. Discover your _____.
3. Develop your _____.

Discussion: What are your priorities for yourself, your family, and your team? Do you believe they are God’s priorities for you?

How Does a Leader Stay Focused?

1. Remove as many _____ as possible.
2. Do first things first – the activities that give the greatest _____.
3. Block off time for _____.
4. Set specific _____.
5. Empower _____ to keep you accountable.

To do well at a few things requires that you give up doing many things. Consider these simple principles:

1. I can't know _____.
2. I can't do _____.
3. I can't go _____.
4. I can't be _____.

Questions to Ask

When deciding where to invest your time and energy, ask:

1. Is this consistent with my _____?
2. Is this within my area of _____?
3. Can someone else do it _____?
4. Do I have _____ to do it?
5. What do my trusted _____ think?

Discussion: Are you willing to give up some things you love in order to focus on what has the greatest impact for God's Kingdom? What things will you need to give up?

Biblical Case Study: Paul (Philippians 3: 5-14)

Paul's absolute focus gave him a willingness to let go of the accomplishments and honors of the past. Paul so narrowed his focus that he discarded not only the things he once counted as gain, but he counted everything as garbage for the sake of intimacy with Christ. His focus was on the essentials. What was his secret?

1. He let go of those things that _____ him.
2. His eyes were on the ultimate _____.
3. He pressed forward with single-minded _____.

Biblical Case Study: King Solomon (Ecclesiastes 2: 1-11)

Unlike Paul who had a "this one thing I do" approach to life and ministry, Solomon desperately pursued several unrelated goals in a vain attempt to satisfy himself. By the time Solomon wrote the words of Ecclesiastes 2, he had reached a high level of success – but still felt empty. Because he lacked focus, he experimented with many goals. The old axiom remains true: If you chase two rabbits, both will escape. So what can we learn from Solomon about lack of focus?

1. He pursued too many _____ in too short of a time frame.
2. He pursued the wrong goals to reach his desired _____.
3. His goals were _____.
4. The result was _____.

Discussion:

- How well do you focus your thinking?
- Write down your current goals.
- Block off specific times in your calendar to focus on ideas and plans for achieving those goals.

Discover the Joy of _____ Thinking

The most valuable resource you bring to your ministry is your creativity. Despite the importance of creativity, few people seem to possess the skill in abundance. If you are not as creative as you would like to be, you need to change your way of thinking. Creative thinking isn't necessarily original thinking. It is often a composite of other thoughts you have discovered along life's journey.

Consider the following characteristics that creative thinkers have in common:

1. Creative thinkers value _____.
2. Creative thinkers explore _____.
3. Creative thinkers don't fear _____.
4. Creative thinkers are willing to be _____.
5. Creative thinkers explore _____ paths.
6. Creative thinkers ask _____.
7. Creative thinkers spend time with other _____ people.
8. Creative thinkers avoid _____ people.

Discussion: Rate yourself on each of the eight characteristics in the previous list of creative thinkers. Where do you need improvement?

Five Specific Benefits from Creative Thinking:

1. Creative thinking adds _____ to everything you do.
2. Creative thinking _____ over time.
3. Creative thinking _____ people to you.
4. Creative thinking is the _____ to learning.
5. Creative thinking _____ the status quo.

Why We Fail to Think Creatively:

1. An overloaded _____ leaves no time for thinking.
2. An urgent _____ makes it difficult to slow down and ask questions.
3. A "know it all" _____ does not value the ideas of others.

Discussion:

- Have you established a system to record your creative ideas?
- If you have, is it working?
- If you haven't, investigate your options and begin a system.
- How do you follow up with an idea that you believe has great potential?

Biblical Case Study: Rahab (Joshua 2:1-21)

God strategically positioned Rahab in a home built into the wall of Jericho. When two Hebrew spies came to her for assistance, she displayed a clear understanding of spiritual issues. She acknowledged that the Lord had given the land to the Israelites and that the fear of the Lord had engulfed the inhabitants of Jericho. When the king of Jericho sought to capture the spies, Rahab moved into action with creativity. She designed a plan:

1. To hide the _____ from the king.
2. To secure long-term _____ for her family.
3. To help the spies _____ from the city.
4. To _____ the spies from their pursuers.
5. To help accomplish the _____ of God in Jericho.

Rahab helped the spies by her quick wisdom, courage and creativity. She saved her own life and served God's purpose. Her name occupies an honored place in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11:31.

Discussion: Rahab occupied no position and held no official title in the city. This story implies that anyone, regardless of title and position, can think creatively. Share about times you have experienced similar creative thinking by those without title or position.

Biblical Case Study: Saul (Acts 9:23-25)

Another escape story is told in Acts 9. Saul, a new follower of Christ, was being sought by the Jewish leaders in Damascus who desired to put him to death. The disciples moved into action:

1. They chose to get involved. (*Courage*)
2. They decided on a rescue plan. (*Creativity*)
3. They executed the plan. (*Commitment*)
4. They launched Saul (Paul) into a worldwide ministry. (*Compound results*)

How to Improve Your Creativity:

1. _____ to God's voice.
2. Seek _____ from others.
3. Learn from past _____.
- successes and failures
4. Evaluate all your _____.
5. Expand your _____ opportunities.
6. Take _____.

Assessment and Application

Assessment:

Has your organization created an environment that encourages creative thinking?

Application:

List specific ways you can praise and reward creativity in your organization.

Discussion: What are three steps you will take to become a more creative thinker?