



Inquiries: Pamela Wallin, Box 581, Wadena, Saskatchewan, S0A 4J0 | [Pamela.wallin@gmail.com](mailto:Pamela.wallin@gmail.com) | 306-338-9045

---

## BECOME A SMARTER THINKER

*“If you look at the three most important things in life – it’s like a triangle: the top is values - personal values, spiritual values, religious values; then you have health; the third is thinking. People spend a lot of time on health but how often do you hear someone say “I’m interested in becoming a better thinker?” Edward de Bono*

Thinking smarter, unlike staying stupid or keeping an open mind, is really about thinking in a different way. This idea has captivated me for years. How do we think? What’s the difference between mind and brain? So I’ve put the questions, time and gain, to artists, Nobel Prize Winners, high tech gurus and to the world’s leading thinker on thinking.

Dr. de Bono has written more than fifty books, he teaches thinking to Nobel Prize winners and he discovered the concept called lateral thinking which he explains this way:

“You can’t dig a hole in a different place by digging the same hole deeper.” As for becoming a smarter thinker:

“It’s like a car – you can have a powerful engine, good suspension – that’s the potential of the car. An intelligent brain also has a lot of potential – the neurons work faster. But the way you drive the car makes all the difference. So does the way you use your brain – and that’s the thinking skill.”

He was so smart I just wanted to hug him or at the very least, hope that the prediction of another brainiac would come true. Ray Kurzweil is a futurist and high tech wizard. In *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence*, he argues that we are not far from the day when we will be able to download our brains onto computer disks. It begs the question: if we can download our intelligence, emotions, feelings and other thoughts into the computer, will we truly become immortal – is that the definition of eternal life? But I digress. I just wish we could download the brains of both he and de Bono now. As we await the technology, I thought a conversation would be the next best thing. Kurzweil explains that because our problems are so much more complex these days, we need new approaches and a

willingness to embrace new thoughts if we are to survive and thrive. We need to think not only laterally, but emotionally.

"Our emotion is actually the most complex, deep, rich, subtle thing that we do. It's the most intelligent thing we do, it's not some sort of by-product or distraction from our intelligence. And it's the hardest thing for machines to emulate."

Daniel Goleman is a former journalist who, much to his own surprise, became a best selling author with a look at this very idea.

"Emotional intelligence is really a different way of being smart. It's how you manage yourself and how you handle relationships. It involves self awareness, managing emotions, motivation, empathy, social skills, those are not things you learn in school, those are abilities you learn in life."

We all knew them, the geeks with straight A's and no dates. IQ versus EQ. So if being smart is about understanding people, human interaction and the human condition, and not just about an ability to pass a test, memorize facts and figures and retain data, then perhaps that explains why his idea has struck such a chord.

"It seems so self-evident when you say it - that how you deal with people is sometimes more important than how smart you are - but if you think about it, school is set up as though all that mattered was IQ, when, in fact, if you track people in life - how well you do in your marriage, as a parent, in the workplace - depends much more on your emotional intelligence."

"IQ might get you hired, but EQ will get you promoted. There are studies that companies have done to see what makes someone outstanding as opposed to mediocre. They found that for jobs of all kinds, emotional intelligence abilities were twice as important as IQ and technical skill combined in distinguishing the stars from the average. The higher you go in the organization, the more it matters. For top leaders, it's 85% of the ingredients of star performance."

\*\*\*\*\*

Fellow journalist Ann Medina agrees and was adamant about there being more to life than IQ.

“Brilliance is the most over rated virtue. How many times have we heard “Oh, he’s brilliant” or “She’s brilliant”. And sometimes they haven’t got a soul in them and sometimes they’re not smart.”

That very point had come up in my discussion with Dr. de Bono. Intelligent people, he says, aren’t necessarily smarter because some highly intelligent people are poor thinkers because they can’t think new thoughts.

“They take a view on a subject and use their thinking just to defend their point of view well but they never see any need to listen to anyone else or to think of alternatives. So, a lot of intelligent people get trapped in poor ideas because if you can defend a point of view well, you never see any need to listen to anyone else or to think of alternatives. ”

Not surprisingly, this led to a discussion about politics and the need for some new thinking.

“ The notion that one party has all the wisdom and the other is filled with idiots is so childish. Increasingly, the public is going to put much more pressure on being constructive and not on how good you are at saying the other guys are idiots – things will change.”

I was looking forward to my conversation with the controversial Dr. Henry Kissinger, the ultimate power broker. His actions are always controversial but there is no doubting the man’s genius, nor his concern that, increasingly, experience and a sense of history, don’t count for much in the age of live, 24 hour news.

“We have broadened our knowledge, but we have shortened our perspective.”

He too is troubled by how technology is changing political thinking. In the trademark hushed, conspiratorial tone that makes you strain to listen, Kissinger declares there’s been a sea change.

“Slogans have become more important than substance. People used to ask me what to think. Now they ask me what to say. It’s a different attitude.”

“We have a system of thinking that is fine in a stable world, meaning the future is like the past. But when we’ve got change, thinking in the past is an inadequate way to describe the future.”  
(who is this? HK?)

\*\*\*\*\*

That's exactly the concern that sparked an invitation to Professor and thinker, Thomas Homer Dixon, author of *The Ingenuity Gap: How Will We Solve The Problems of the Future*. He explores, through fascinating facts and powerful argument, the need for some radical new thinking that will enable us to persist – to survive. For example, the hammering of the environment that the developed world's lifestyle imposes will not be solved by more money or technology. In our conversation, he made the point vividly. Did you know, he asked, that the largest man-made project in the world is not the Great Wall or the Pyramids but rather a garbage dump on Staten Island that covers an area of nine square kilometers?

"The problems are getting harder – more complex – things are happening faster and so we need to supply the ideas faster. My argument is that sometimes the supply of ingenuity doesn't keep up with the rising requirement – that we can't solve our problems fast enough. But once we realize we can pull our problem apart into two parts, we can start to work on both sides of it. Normally we just think about running faster and faster – delivering more technologies and better and more complicated institutions and markets. But part of it is to think seriously about slowing the world down a bit and trying to reduce this relentless pace at which we make the world more complex and faster. At the moment it's as if we've got the accelerator nailed to the floor."

Move to embracing change or.....taking resp.??

"Many of these new technologies are creating a "winner-take-all" economy, and, gradually, what we are seeing are these gaps between the rich and the poorest elements in society and the middle class." thd

"The most predictable thing about the future is that it is completely unpredictable. Things happen that we won't expect and we won't have anticipated – I call this the problem of "unknown unknowns". What we need to focus on fundamentally is whether we want a world in the future where we are fragmented into a million discreet worlds, where people are not really thinking of each other as human beings; or whether there is some sense of collective identity. We don't have a clue whether we're going to have institutions or large nation states in the future to solve the problems that we have, but before all of that we have to have some kind of shared identity as a foundation"

The problem, Homer Dixon explained, is that humans seem able to adjust to dirty air, crowded streets, disease, poverty, war or stress. And such "adjusting" leads us to exploit the future, without considering the consequences. That's the crucial "gap" in our thinking.

Stephen Jay Gould is an eminent paleontologist at Harvard University, an evolutionary scientist and Darwinian and author of many books including *"Dinosaur in a Haystack"* He too believes that technology is not the answer to solving our problems.

“Evolutionists usually think of “success” in terms of persistence. And it’s not clear that our big brains are conferring much persistence upon us. In fact we are just as likely to blow ourselves up or poison our earth by virtue of this instrument in our head. The creatures who live for a long time – the real success stories – are bacteria, not people.”

?? But others like Edward O. Wilson: Renowned entomologist, scientist, environmentalist – latest book is called *Consilience*. Pulitzer Prize winner remain more optimistic.

“Intelligence means what you can learn. We are the really the first species ever able to self-examine, think into the future and take control of ourselves and our environment.”

?? The good news is that, unlike IQ, which is stable through life and doesn't change from childhood, EQ or emotional intelligence tends to increase through every decade of life. You can learn it at any point in life. As Daniel Goleman says, you have to trust your gut feeling, along with everything else you know.

“Self-awareness is the fundamental of all emotional intelligence. It all starts there.”

Homer Dixon’s hope is the unique human capacity for metaphor -- that our ability to see patterns in vastly different things - will provide the ingenuity we need because brains, technology or even self-interest are obviously not enough.

And despite our reverence for consistency, the smart mind often does house opposing views. At the very least, as the cliché goes, the surest indication of a mediocre mind is the belief that everything can be explained. Dr. John Polanyi won the Nobel Prize thirty years after his key discoveries in chemistry.

“There are contexts in which two and two is not equal to four. Everything needs examining and re-examining. Moving over here and taking a look from a new angle and seeing something that hasn’t been seen before -- those are the moments that really matter.”

So how do inspire new thinking?

In 1997 when I was invited to attend the Nobel Prize lectures and ceremonies in Stockholm, Sweden, I discovered that new thinking is often shunned before its discovered and rewarded. This was my first visit to the homeland of my ancestors but I found it very familiar, very Canadian –except of course for the darkness. As a northern country, December means there are only a few only a few precious hours of daylight. But the event was itself enlightening. Dr. Stanley Prusiner had spent a lifetime trying to convince colleagues there was a third way – beyond germs and virus - to transmit disease. And this form, which he called prions, was he

believed the culprit in mad cow disease. He had been dismissed as heretic by many in his profession but revenge was sweet as the most prestigious honour in the world was bestowed. When I finally had a chance to interview him several years later, we talked about the difficulty of a life of discovery and whether he believed he was a smarter thinker.

“I don’t have an exceptional mind...if I had been more creative and more intelligent I would have found another problem that was easier, but since I wasn’t creative enough, I just hung in there because I wanted an answer.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Well, the world is glad he persevered but for many there is neither time nor money to pursue that new idea, unless of course you’re the richest man in the world. Microsoft mogul Bill Gates does what he calls “think weeks” several times a year just to boost his creativity and to “catch up.” But he also adds: “I don’t think the way we think is changing, but I think that we have a lot more ability to find things that engage us.”

His advice is to surround yourself with smart people.

“My motivation was always about building a cool product, working with smart people, solving the tough problems and then going out and seeing how people are using it – what are they like, what would they like to have us make better and so we have a lot left to do.”

Scott Paterson is the Chair and CEO of Yorkton Securities, one of the largest independent investment houses on Bay Street. He made his first million when he was barely old enough to shave. (and he owes it all to his grandmother who on his 14<sup>th</sup> birthday, gave him five shares of Abitibi Price .It changed his life.

“From that day forward I was passionate about being involved in the capitol market.” He’s also learned that smart doesn’t always win.)

"A lot of it is gut instinct. I spend a lot of time with kids who come out of MBA schools and tell them "You know, this is not a science. You’ve learned a lot of skills, but really, this is an art and at the end of the day it is the people. I am the kind of manager that would bet on a smart manager and a bad product rather a good product and a bad manager any day of the week."

Betting on smart people and knowing that creativity is collaborative is the advice from Oscar winning composer Marvin Hamlisch.

**“I always feel that if I’m the stupidest person at the table, amongst the creators, I’m very happy. Give me creators who are really brilliant and they bring me up.”**

Everyone was just a little intimidated as Hamlich, who has composed songs like *The Way We Were* and *The Goodbye Girl* made his way into the studio for a rehearsal on the rented piano. Many a lesser talent had fussed and fumed about the less than perfect conditions for performing, the substandard equipment and darkened studio laced with dozens of potentially lethal cables. But with a broad smile he charged into the studio, slid onto the piano bench, hit three key chords, and pronounced that every thing was “just fine”. Then, which is almost unheard of with stars, he thanked everyone for their time and trouble. Ten, maybe 20 seconds, start to finish. Watching the way his mind work is mesmerizing, knowing that he has a heart is reassuring.

“If you get complacent, then you’re not going up on the ladder. I don’t mean the ladder of success – I mean the ladder of creative achievement. My ego works this way and I hear it in my father’s voice: “You know Marvin, God blessed you. He gave you this gift. Now what you do with it is up to you.”

Well in the course of our interview he put it to good use. In exchange for a simple tuna sandwich from the cafeteria, he composed a whole new theme song for our programme right on the spot, no charge.

A scientific discovery, a song, an act of kindness or even a great meal all are creative acts. “*Food, perfectly conceived, is beautiful and worth crying over,*” says Julia Child, the grande dame of the culinary world. But becoming a smarter thinking chef means using both sides of the brain.

“If you have the recipe in your head and can improvise, then you’re a real cook. Creativity with no practical knowledge doesn’t work.”

When we use a phrase like creative we tend to think of the artist –the painter, the songwriter, the novelist. So what do the creative have to say about thinking smarter?

\*\*\*\*\*

“People think of fiction writers as intellectuals. They’re not. It is not a highly intellectual activity. I was take little bits and pieces of the cloth rag from the rag bin in my own mind and sew them together.” E.L. Doctorow

\*\*\*\*\*

"I've never spent more than an hour and a half writing one song. I think the muses visit you from time to time - you have to realize when that's happening, work with the moment, capture the moment, get the machines running, get it on tape and move on." Burton Cummings

\*\*\*\*\*

If not the muses, perhaps it's just the luck of gods as to whether we become smarter thinkers. The late Dr. Michael Smith was Canada's most distinguished bio-chemist and won a Nobel Prize in 1993 smiled, as he confessed:

"I'm not that smart...but there are a few things I'm good at. I was good at chemistry and physics and math and hopeless at Literature and language.... – it's just an accident of the miracle of what our individual brains are."

But despite the eloquence of all these great thinkers it is still from the mouths of babes that genius often flows. And one of the smartest people I've ever met was five at the time. Experienced? No. Wise? Yes.

Musical prodigy Wesley Chu was writing his own compositions and performing on public stages when he needed a box to help him climb up on the stool. He has an IQ of 165 and he loves to play the piano. When I asked him how he memorizes all the songs and music he performs, Wesley answered:

"I don't memorize. I put it in my heart and, when I need it, I just open up my heart."

\*\*\*\*\*

#### **IN THE MARGINS:**

*"There's data and then there's information and then there's substance. The added value is context and perspective."* Peter Jennings

*"Sometimes you can have all the facts, but you come to the wrong conclusion."* Frank McKenna

*"I always have taught my children to consider the source."* Anna Qindlen



*"We are an animal that loves order, that loves complexity, that needs frameworks."* A.S. Byatt

*"Earth is the alien planet for me. I feel like I'm using science fiction as a huge set of oven mitts to get a grip on the red-hot present."* sci-fi superstar William Gibson, the man who invented the word cyberspace

*"I'm not a cynic, I'm a skeptic. I won't put things down before I understand them, but I'm a skeptic in that I won't embrace them before I understand them either."* Neil Peart

Timothy Ferris, the author of *"State of the Universe"* and many other books is a Professor of Journalism and leading science writer.

*"If you want to understand the world and us, you have to understand the big picture. And I've never found a limit to it."*

*"Intelligence means what you can learn. "All we need to know is how to improve one organ", he said, tapping himself on the head."* E.O. Wilson

*"You can't really say that the smartest person is going to do the best. Sometimes it's a matter of how you take advantage of your luck."* Dr. Tak Mak, who discovered the key to the immune system.

*"Wisdom is the ability to distinguish between ideas."* Umberto Eco

*"Barbra Streisand doesn't sing from her IQ. She sings from her soul."* Diane Dupuy

*"I'm not predicting anything. I just want you to watch CNN through a different lens."* William Gibson

*"If you are ready to pay attention to something, you are much more likely to find it wonderful."* Wallace Shawn

*"Doors are open and we should go through them."* Dr. John Polanyi

*“Out of personal intellectual greed, I love to know the answers.”* Timothy Ferris

*“I have a tremendous amount of flexibility. I just have to plan for my flexibility.”*

*“If I had to choose between beauty and function, I think it would have to be function. Things have to work.”* Martha Stewart

If I find myself confronted by the beauty of nature and moved in some deep way by that, that is liable to end up in a song. **Bruce Cockburn**

\*\*\*\*\*

For many of those that I’ve spoken with over the years, such self-awareness is hard to achieve but key to becoming a smarter thinker. For some live in the bubble or cocoon that money or fame creates. They are often surrounded by those who believe it is their role to flatter the boss – the star – or the famous person. Some survive this experience because their own moral compass was set at an early age. I suppose, it’s hard for all of us to be truly honest, even with ourselves, about ourselves. But in the darkest hours just before dawn or when you catch your own reflection in the mirror, it’s hard not to see through the first few layers of protective persona.