

THINK AGAIN: The Power of Knowing What You Don't Know

Adam Grant · Viking, 2021

CORE THESIS

- ▶ In a rapidly changing world, the ability to **rethink and unlearn** matters more than raw intelligence
- ▶ We default to Preacher, Prosecutor, or Politician modes — we must learn to think like **Scientists**
- ▶ Anchor your identity in **flexibility, not consistency** — treat beliefs as hypotheses, not truths
- ▶ "If knowledge is power, knowing what you don't know is wisdom"

FOUR THINKING MODES

- Preacher**
 Delivers sermons to protect sacred beliefs. Changing mind = moral weakness.
- Prosecutor**
 Marshals arguments to prove others wrong. Being persuaded = defeat.
- Politician**
 Campaigns for approval. Flip-flops based on audience, ignores inconvenient facts.
- Scientist**
 Tests hypotheses with evidence. Changing mind = intellectual integrity.

RETHINKING VS. OVERCONFIDENCE

- RETHINKING CYCLE**
 Humility → Doubt → Curiosity → Discovery ↻
- OVERCONFIDENCE CYCLE**
 Pride → Conviction → Bias → Validation ↻
- ▶ Scientific thinking favors humility over pride, doubt over certainty, curiosity over closure
- ▶ BlackBerry's fall: Mike Lazaridis was trapped in overconfidence — pride in keyboard → conviction → confirmation bias → validation from fans

CONFIDENT HUMILITY

- ▶ **Armchair Quarterback**: Confidence > Competence — blind to own limitations (Dunning-Kruger)
- ▶ **Impostor Syndrome**: Competence > Confidence — can fuel harder work, smarter strategy, better learning
- ▶ **Sweet Spot**: Trust your ability to *learn* while doubting your current knowledge
- ▶ Define identity by **values** (integrity, growth) not **opinions** — this preserves flexibility to update beliefs
- ▶ Joy of being wrong: Daniel Kahneman's eyes lit up when proven wrong — "the only way I feel sure I've learned anything"

MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

- ▶ Developed by Miller & Rollnick: we rarely *motivate* others to change — help them find their **own motivation**
- ▶ **4 techniques**: Open-ended questions, reflective listening, affirming desire/ability to change, summarizing
- ▶ Listen for "change talk" vs. "sustain talk" — pick up the golden thread and pull it
- ▶ **Vaccine Whisperers**: Dr. Gagneur's single MI conversation → 9% higher vaccination 2 years later → Quebec scaled province-wide
- ▶ Be a **guide**, not a leader or follower — effective in 75% of 1,000+ controlled studies

PRACTICAL TECHNIQUES

- ▶ **Think like a scientist**: Treat strategies as theories, decisions as experiments, results as data
- ▶ **Ask "What evidence would change your mind?"** — opens dialogue or reveals closed minds
- ▶ **Steel-man, don't straw-man**: Engage the strongest version of the opposing argument
- ▶ **Use fewer, stronger arguments**: Multiple weak reasons trigger defenses; one cohesive line persuades
- ▶ **Argue about HOW, not WHY**: Exposes gaps in understanding and activates the rethinking cycle
- ▶ **Build a challenge network**: Surround yourself with thoughtful critics, not just cheerleaders

REAL-WORLD APPLICATIONS

- BlackBerry → iPhone**: Lazaridis refused to rethink the keyboard (50% → <1% share). Apple engineers convinced Jobs — who initially called phones "the dumbest idea" — by preserving Apple's DNA while innovating.
- Italian Startups**: Entrepreneurs trained in scientific thinking generated 47× more revenue (\$12K vs \$255) and pivoted their business models twice as often as the control group.
- Daryl Davis & the KKK**: A Black musician helped 200+ white supremacists leave hate groups — not by preaching, but by asking curious questions and listening. One Imperial Wizard shut down his chapter entirely.
- Wright Brothers**: Resolved their fiercest propeller dispute by switching from preaching "why" to exploring "how" — each argued the other's position, leading to the breakthrough dual-propeller design.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ★ **Intelligence ≠ rethinking ability** — the brightest can be worst at updating views
- ★ Replace conviction with **curious confidence** — express moderate certainty to invite dialogue
- ★ The **rethinking cycle** is your superpower: Humility → Doubt → Curiosity → Discovery
- ★ To open others' minds: **ask, listen, guide** — stop preaching, prosecuting, and politicking
- ★ Build **learning cultures**: Normalize "I was wrong" and reward rethinking over being right