

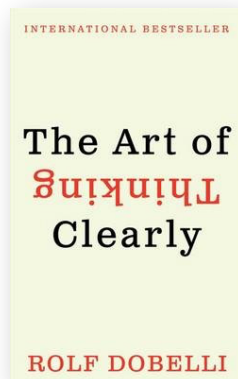


THE ART OF THINKING CLEARLY

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THE BOOK



The Art of Thinking Clearly

By Rolf Dobelli



INTRODUCTION

With *The Art of Thinking Clearly*, novelist and entrepreneur Rolf Dobelli gives you the rundown on how to always make the right decisions.

We all make little mistakes in the way we think every day. With Dobelli's advice, you can learn how to spot what he describes as "cognitive errors" and start thinking more clearly.

The Art of Thinking Clearly is an eye-opening look at human psychology and reasoning. It is essential reading for anyone who wants to avoid those cognitive errors and make better choices in all aspects of their lives.

Whether it's investing too much time in a pointless endeavour, continuing with an action you knew was bad for you or paying too much for something, you are making simple errors in your day-to-day thinking. In easy to digest, bite-sized chunks, Dobelli outlines 99 different types of errors and how to combat them.

With advice that relates back to everyday life, Dobelli's 99 short chapters are readable and engaging. *The Art of Thinking Clearly* includes thorough research and is incredibly helpful if you want to improve your way of thinking or simply learn more about the incredible human mind.



5 BEST QUOTES

"Assume that your worldview is not borne by the public. More than that: Do not assume that those who think differently are idiots. Before you distrust them, question your own assumptions."

"We are drunk on our own ideas. To sober up, take a step back every now and then and examine their quality in hindsight. Which of your ideas from the past ten years were truly outstanding? Exactly."

"The human brain seeks patterns and rules. In fact, it takes it one step further: If it finds no familiar patterns, it simply invents some."

"You have to stick within what I call your circle of competence. You have to know what you understand and what you don't understand. It's not terribly important how big the circle is. But it is terribly important that you know where the perimeter is."

"We prefer wrong information to no information."



8 BIG IDEAS

The Art of Thinking Clearly has 99 big ideas but here are eight of my favourite ones. :

1. ABANDON THE IRRATIONAL

Rolf Dobelli shares that we can all make huge leaps by abandoning irrationality. There is no need for fancy gadgets, cunning, new ideas or frantic hyperactivity, simply a stronger adherence to what's rational. By being more rational and thoughtful, we can avoid all the pitfalls of cognitive errors that come about from our faulty human brains. Evolution has trained our brains to think in ways that are no longer useful in a modern world. It is vital we all learn to understand these flaws in our thinking and to combat them with a more rational approach.

2. DON'T JUDGE DECISIONS BY THEIR OUTCOMES

Judge your decisions on their merits. Sometimes you may make the right decision but things still won't work out. This doesn't mean you were wrong. On the other hand, just because something worked out didn't mean the right decision was made. There may be any number of factors that contributed to the success of your day or a project you have been working on. Don't try to break down every single event into basic cause and effect. All events in life are complex and multifaceted!

3. YOU HAVE LESS CONTROL THAN YOU THINK

We tend to believe that we are in control of our destinies but by wearing your lucky underpants on exam day, or even pushing the button at a pedestrian crossing, you are overestimating your control over the world. Once you are aware of exactly what you can and can't control, you can stop wasting time and energy in trying to fight the inevitable. Change what you can and accept what you can't.

4. AVOID FALSE VALUES

Humans are not very good at accurately valuing things. We are fooled by the appearance of scarcity, by competition, and by sentimental implications among other problems. It is important to be aware of what something is actually worth and not just what it appears to be worth. A good example is property auctions. Many times people pay more than the value of an item because the price is driven up by competition and a desire to win. Just because someone else is willing to spend big does not mean that the item is any more valuable.



8 BIG IDEAS

5. ADMIT YOUR LIMITATIONS

Dobelli encourages living within your 'circle of competence'. This means understanding that you are not an expert on everything. You have a circle of your own expertise where you will know best. He reminds you that this circle may be a lot smaller than you expect. Once you understand your circle of competence, you will be clearer on the areas where your intuition will serve you best. In all other areas: be rational.

6. DON'T FOOL YOURSELF

One of the greatest failings of the human mind is cognitive dissonance. In a nutshell, this is our ability to reason that we made the right decision despite all the signs that we were wrong. It is the way that we find little reassurances that the way we want things to be is exactly how things are. The best-known example is Aesop's tale of The Fox and the Grapes. When a fox can't reach some tempting grapes on a high vine, he reasons that they were sour anyway. Against all logic, the fox convinced himself that the grapes were no good simply because he couldn't have them. While it is not wise to dwell on the grapes you can't have, it is also wrong to ignore logic and reason to make yourself feel better.

7. HOLD ONTO INTUITION

As we have seen with the 'circle of competence', there are times when you can resort to your intuition. Spending too much time on inconsequential decisions is more irrational than thinking them through. If a problem or decision is serious and may have significant consequences, this is the time to pull out your rational tool kit and work through the problem. If it is a small decision with little consequence, use your intuition and make a decision. For example: there is no need to spend 30 minutes assessing whether to order lasagna or bolognese! Choose the one you feel like and dedicate your time to more consequential matters.

8. 'VIA NEGATIVA'

When Michaelangelo was asked how he created his famous statue of David so perfectly, he replied, "It's simple, I removed everything that is not David." Rolf Dobelli advises you use this same technique, known as via negativa, or 'remove the negative'. He writes, "We cannot say what brings us success. We can pin down only what blocks or obliterates success." We should strive to remove obstacles so we can find our way. Cut away all that is unnecessary and counterproductive and you will discover the best path to your goal. In other words, eliminate the negative so the positive can be revealed.

**3 ACTION STEPS**

Here are three action steps to help in achieving more rational thinking from Rolf Dobelli:

1. BE RATIONAL

Make sure you are aware of the many ways that our brains let us down. Whenever you have a major decision to make, step back and walk it through rationally. Check that you aren't falling for any of the traps set by our own minds.

2. KNOW YOUR LIMITATIONS

Knowing your 'circle of competence' will let you know how much you know. You are not an expert on everything—no one is. When you are inside your circle of competence, you may be able to make more intuitive decisions based on your comprehensive knowledge. At other times, be rational.

3. KNOW WHEN TO USE YOUR INTUITION

Part of being rational is also knowing when to relax. Spending 30 minutes deciding which jumper to wear is not a sensible use of your time. Understanding when the consequences merit deep consideration or snap decision is key to thinking clearly.

**1 KEY TAKEAWAY**

The Art of Thinking Clearly is a message in rational thinking. Rolf Dobelli's lesson is to think clearly and rationally about the big decisions in your life.

Take the via negativa path and eliminate the negative until only the positive remains. Rather than seeking success, seek out whatever is blocking your success and remove it.

Approach problems with reason and rationality and understand your limitations. Don't try to change what is outside your reach or ability. Accept what you can't change and work on what you can.

Ultimately, over 99 steps, Dobelli gives this advice; for the big decisions that may have big consequences use reason and be as rational as you can. For the small decisions (like regular or diet Pepsi, sparkling or flat water) use your intuition. This means you can spend your time on what matters and stop wasting time on what doesn't.



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Read the full book

The Art of Thinking Clearly

by Rolf Dobelli

Rolf Dobelli names the mental traps that quietly bend our decisions, from confirmation bias to the sunk-cost trap. Once you can see a bias, you can catch it before it costs you. This summary picks out the sharpest few; the full book gives you all 99.

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