

Time to Think

by Nancy Kline

The Thinking Environment

- Everything we do depends for its quality on the thinking we do first.
- Our thinking depends on the quality of our attention for each other.
- Thinking at its best is not just a cool act of celebration. It is also a thing of the heart.
- A Thinking Environment is the set of ten conditions under which human beings can think for themselves – with rigour, imagination, courage and grace.
- Listening of this calibre ignites the human mind.
- Between you and a wellspring of good ideas is a limiting assumption. The assumption can be removed with an Incisive Question.
- Incisive Questions increase the functional intelligence of human beings.
- A Thinking Environment is natural, but rare. It has been squeezed out of our lives and organisations by inferior ways of treating each other.

Organisations, families and relationships can become Thinking Environments again, where good ideas abound, actions follow and people flourish.

The Ten Components of a Thinking Environment

1. **Place.** Creating a physical environment that says back to people: “You matter”
2. **Equality.** Treating each other as thinking peers. Giving equal turns and attention. Keeping agreements and boundaries - confidentiality and safeguarding.
3. **Ease.** Offering freedom from rush or urgency.
4. **Attention.** Whole body rapport - Listening with respect, interest and fascination. NLP stool
5. **Feelings.** They are the gateway to good thinking allowing sufficient emotional release to restore thinking.
6. **Information.** Providing a full and accurate picture of reality
7. **Diversity.** Because of your similarity and difference the client is able to think well - not group think
8. **Encouragement.** Moving beyond competition.
9. **Incisive Questions.** Removing assumptions that limit ideas
10. **Appreciation.** Practising a five-to-one ratio of appreciation to criticism.

Some examples of incisive questions

You can identify your own assumptions and create your own Incisive Questions to remove them.

If you want to take action, but you are stuck; ask yourself, “what am I assuming here that is stopping me?” Listen to the answer, which might be, “I am assuming that I don’t deserve success here.” Then remove it: “If I knew that I do deserve success here, what would I do right now?”

If you want to feel better, ask yourself, for example. “What am I assuming that is making me feel down?” Note the answer: “I am assuming that I have no choice here, that I am powerless. Then remove it: “If I knew that I do have a choice here and am powerful in this situation, how would I feel?”

- If you knew that you are vital to this organisation’s success, how would you approach your work?
- If things could be exactly right for you in this situation, how would they have to change?
- If you were not to hold back in your life, what would you be doing?
- If you found out that someone you love very much is going to die tomorrow, what would you want to be sure to say to them today?
- If you could trust that your children would be fine, what would you do with the rest of your life?
- If you knew that you are beautiful, just as you are, what would change for you?
- If you knew that you are as intelligent as your bosses, how would you present yourself to them?
- If you were to become the chief executive, what problem would you solve first, and how would you do it?
- If a doctor told you that your life depended upon your changing the way you live, what would do first for yourself?
- If you trusted that your excellence would not put others in your shadow, what would your goals be?

Group Assumptions

If your team has run out of ideas, ask yourselves, “What might we be assuming here that is limiting our thinking on this issue?” And remember the answer which could be: “We are assuming that only the top people can think about this well enough.” Then remove it: “If we knew that we can think about this as well as anybody, perhaps even better, what would our ideas be now?”

In other words, notice the problem, find the limiting assumption and replace it with a freeing one. Incisive Questions get your mind fired up again. They are simple. Don’t make them complicated. They work because they cut to the core.

Meetings run as a Thinking Environment

A meeting run as a Thinking Environment is different. It produces better ideas in less time, provides the participants with courage to act and leaves the group feeling good about itself.

Giving everyone a turn increases the intelligence of groups.

Knowing they won't be interrupted frees people to think faster and say less.

Meetings are where the heart of an organisation beats. Organisational life flows from there.

Meeting guidelines

At the beginning.

- 1 Give everyone a turn to speak.
- 2 Ask everyone to say what is going well in their work, or in the group's work.

Throughout:

- 3 Give attention without interruption during open and even fiery discussion.
- 4 Ask Incisive Questions to reveal and remove assumptions that are limiting ideas.
- 5 Divide in Thinking Partnerships when thinking stalls and give each person five minutes to think out loud without interruption.
- 6 Go around intermittently to give everyone a turn to say what they think.
- 7 Permit also the sharing of truth and information.
- 8 Permit the expression of feeling.

At the end:

- 9 Ask everyone what they thought went well in the meeting and what they respect in each other.

Suggestions for 'Time to Think' (TTT) Meetings

- For issues that require important debate – use TTT as an agenda item where it is important to hear input from all (it is rarely the case where this isn't true).
- Format:
 - Individual round (no interruptions, full attention on speaker, timeframe 2mins)
 - open debate & uninhibited discussion (time – as determined)
 - 2nd individual round – revised thinking from all
 - appreciations of each other.
- Try this for family discussions with children / teens / in laws (equality of thinking, attention and appreciation provides powerful connections!)