

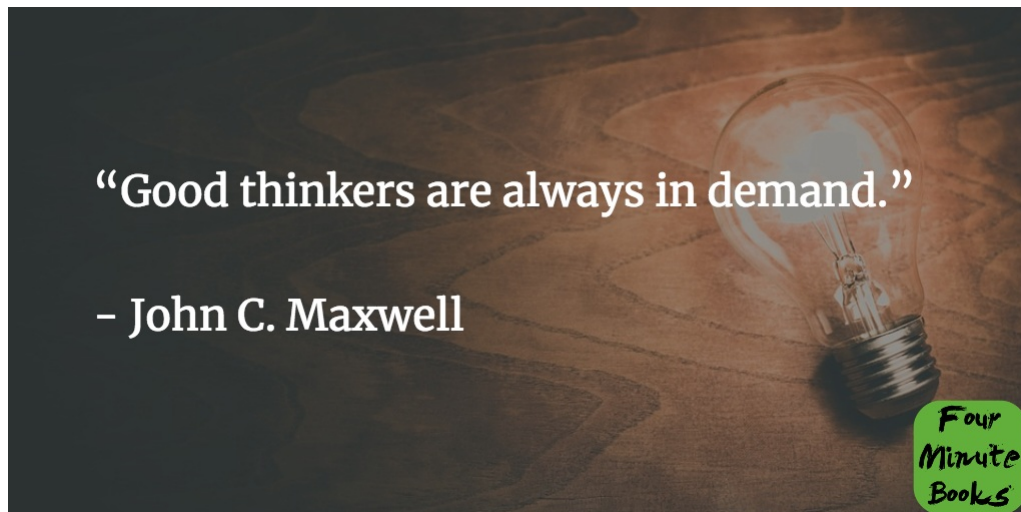
How Successful People Think Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *How Successful People Think* lays out eleven specific ways of thinking you can practice to live a better, happier, more successful life.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



I always struggle with books using chains of logic like ‘successful people do X -> do X and you will be successful too.’ Most of the time, the habit or activity in question was only one small part of everything that person did. Sometimes, they’re even habits they likely acquired to deal with their success *after* they had it, not before. The truth is you can find examples of successful people for every habit *and* its polar opposite.

So when John C. Maxwell asserts that “all successful people think alike,” I cringe a little. But he does have a point when it comes to thinking at all. That, they sure do, as opposed to most folks, who just live day to day, month to month, paycheck to paycheck. Still, it’s just one of his many books on leadership and success, so don’t treat *How Successful People Think* as a checklist of habits to pick up.

While it outlines eleven specific kinds of thinking – big-picture, focused, creative, realistic, strategic, possibility, reflective, popular, shared, unselfish, and bottom-line – its main message is to look at thinking itself as an activity that can stand on its own.

That said, here are 3 of those particular types of thinking to help you start exploring:

1. Before you start your day, consider which items on your calendar will be your biggest chances to learn.
2. A very simple way to practice being creative is to list more possible choices when making a decision.
3. If someone wrote your obituary for tomorrow’s paper, what would it say about your contributions to society?

Regardless of their degrees of success, let's learn something from good thinkers about how to use your mind!

Lesson 1: Look for learning opportunities in your schedule each day.

I can't help but laugh when people are freaking out about insular events, like missing the deadline for their tuition payment in college. I'm not mean, I just see the big picture. Usually, I use this to try and help my friends calm down. "Look, they only put up a deadline so people wouldn't forget it altogether. Nothing is going to happen, you can just pay it a couple days late."

What's more, even if it meant getting kicked out of school, there are so many more things you could do, like enrolling in a different school or program, suing your way back in, or, just abandoning college altogether. And while I think about the big picture a little too often and doubt my own plans, most people lack this awareness.

If you're someone who gets stressed out by rather small problems like that, maybe John's tactic can help you. **Before you begin your day, look at all appointments on your calendar, and think about which ones will be the biggest learning opportunities.** By preparing for the most important events each day, you remain open to finding new ways of doing things, changing direction, and be reminded that there's more to life than your little, 24-h plan.

John used this to be on high alert when he had dinner with an NFL coach, for example. He thought of lots of questions beforehand and left the table full of new ideas and inspiration.

Lesson 2: The easiest way to practice creative thinking is to come up with more options for a decision.

Each year, the message seems to become louder: you have to be creative to do work that's valuable. But to a lot of people "be creative" sounds like a hard and abstract task. But being creative isn't limited to writing, painting, and singing.

Every time you make a decision, you have to engage in creative thinking. Even adding just one more option to your roster of possible choices is a creative act.

For example, take the task of buying cereal. Most of us have our favorite brand, so we run straight to aisle seven and grab a box of Cinnamon Toast Crunch. But what if you considered a new option? As soon as you start to wonder what Cocoa Puffs taste like, how crunchy they might be, and why they turn the milk a brown color, you're thinking creatively!

I know our school system has us wired to believe there's only one answer to each question, but that's not the case. Instead of looking for the one, the *only* option, think about how you can find the best out of many. That's what creative people do.

Lesson 3: Imagine you found your own obituary in tomorrow's newspaper. What would it say about how you treated others?

Many young people don't read newspapers anymore, but just imagine opening tomorrow's edition of your local tabloid only to find an article titled "*The merchant of death is dead*" in the obituary section – and it's about you. That's what happened to Alfred Nobel, a famous Swedish inventor in the late 1800s. The reporter had confused him with his brother, thus writing about how the inventor of dynamite had finally been 'blown away.'

Faced with the ugly truth about how people would remember him if he died soon, Nobel decided to do something a little more, well, noble. In his will, he postulated that over 90% of his vast fortune be used to award prizes to the brightest minds in several scientific, literary, and academic fields. That's how the Nobel Prize was born.

What's the lesson? **Sometimes, the best way to make our own problems go away is to focus on the problems of others.** By contributing to something bigger than ourselves, we practice unselfish thinking. For example, yesterday, I spent all day helping my sister move. I didn't get any work done, but I had a great night's sleep, because I knew I had done something useful.

You can do this in small and in big ways, but it always works.

My personal take-aways

The one caveat I have about this book is the one I gave at the beginning. Don't use it as a checklist, but as an occasional source of inspiration and making thinking itself a habit. Even if all *How Successful People Think* does is get you to set aside a few minutes of your time to practice thinking as a standalone activity, it will have been well worth the read.

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What else can you learn from the blinks?

- What to do when your optimism prevents you from taking action
- How Merck and Company changed the pharmaceutical industry
- Why thinking for yourself is risky, but conventional wisdom might be even worse
- How to stay open to ideas from outside your usual circle of trusted advisors

Who would I recommend the *How Successful People Think* summary to?

The 18 year old car salesman, who lives weekend to weekend, the 65 year old business owner coming to the end of his career, and anyone who hasn't thought about next year lately.