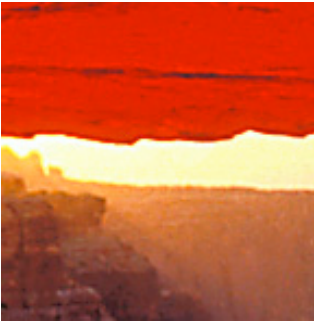


# Working With An Insight State of Mind



As far as insight is concerned, understanding my state of mind is the first thing I notice when I interact with others. When I'm thinking and acting clearly, instead of grinding along, I know I will be more productive in the conversation or meeting. During the interaction, I can make adjustments on the fly that would not have been possible for me before learning about insight. In the past, I didn't even realize I was in the "grinding away" mode because once you're in that spiral, it just escalates on its own. Now, I'm aware of my state of mind, and I can adjust. Or, at least, I know where I am and whether it's appropriate to stay there.

In general, I find I'm a lot more calm and centered. I pay much more attention to the conversation I'm in, which lets me appreciate both the way it's evolving and the individual statements made. As a result, I also sense in others a greater awareness of the content and meaning of the conversation. I'm simply having different, and better, interactions with people.

A good example might be my monthly staff meetings. We have about five people on the phone and about five people in the room for this five-hour meeting that starts at lunch and runs until the end of the day. In the past, we would start discussing a topic and grind away at it, frequently getting off-agenda and off-time. I realize I was responsible for much of that distraction, because I would take the conversation in a thousand different directions. Now, I manage the meeting more effectively. When I recognize the meeting is off track, I stop it. If I sense the meeting is productive, I don't worry as much about the agenda timing. This shift in my perspective has been very, very helpful.

Incredibly, we were accustomed to wasting huge amounts of time in our meetings. Now, by realizing we're not getting anywhere on a topic, we move on to something else. In fact, I find myself adjusting the agenda to make sure the stuff I think is going to be a bit of a grind goes towards the end. That allows us to do as much as we can when we're fresh, and stop when we realize we need to stop. We see a huge increase in productivity from this shift. The ability to refocus on other important things when you know you're getting nowhere on a particular subject has been very valuable. We can tell when we're truly making progress. If we're just spinning in a circle, we stop and do something else. Later, we're able to come back to the sticky issue when there's more time.

The discipline of giving myself quiet time to think has also been important. Understanding that I need some actual "think time" for critical issues is truly valuable. I can think calmly about them instead of rushing to a particular solution because of a deadline. And the calm thinking does result in pretty decent, big insights for me, particularly from a business perspective. For example, we were trying to look at a product introduction that has a timeline attached to it because of regulatory constraints. For a long time, we didn't see that we built ourselves into a box around those regulatory issues. We were so boxed in, we felt there was no way we could introduce this product before a certain date, and that date was always getting further away because of the various things that tend to slow down regulatory timelines. Whenever we sat down to talk about the situation and explore opportunities to move faster, we constantly faced this regulatory brick wall. We couldn't see a way around it – all because of the way we were thinking.

When I finally stepped away from that wall and looked at the situation in a different light, I was able to come up with an insight that allowed us the potential to launch the

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product a year before we thought we could. And it meant only a slight twist on our original plan. In essence, if we used an existing approved component, we could launch the product immediately. We could follow up with a re-launch as a “new and improved version,” once the regulatory work was complete. So we are now going to be able to put this product in the hands of our customers a year ahead of schedule. Then, we'll get a full-blown launch of the product on the timeline we first proposed. When we defined the problem as the regulatory issue, the problem wasn't solvable. We weren't going to speed up the regulatory process, and we kept hitting that wall. We were so focused on that one factor, we weren't able to see the broader range of actions we might be able to take that would get us to the same place. Ultimately, we discovered another way our customers could touch, feel, and experience our product a year early, without hitting the regulatory wall. As soon as we "redesigned the problem," it was solvable.

*For me, insights usually come when I'm not working on the problem in question.*

I've learned many important things about insight, but one stands out. For me, insights usually come when I'm not working on the problem in question. I'm not consciously sitting here at my desk or in a meeting working on it. Insights usually come not so much “out of the blue,” but when I'm working on something else. They just pop in, the significant ones, for sure. The harder I think about the problem, the less chance I'll have an insight. For me, insight happens when I'm not thinking hard and I'm relaxed and calm. Of course, I have to start by framing up the problem, thinking about it enough to understand the issue. But my insights don't come when I'm sitting down and working really hard on the problem. When I start to grind, it's a clear signal I'd better stop thinking.

I get insights much more frequently now, to the point where I don't even think of them as insights and say to myself, "Oh, there's another insight." The big ones — "Wow, that can be solved! And I just figured out how." — I do notice and probably since I wasn't even thinking about the particular problem, the insight comes off as a big event. But I've also realized I'm having a lot of little insights all the time because there are lots of little things I'm working on, as well. I suspect my frame of mind is "right" a lot more frequently: I'm calm and not grinding away, so I get lots of answers.

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*Dave Morris is currently the Commercial Leader for the U.S. Urban Pest Management business at Dow AgroSciences, as well as the Global Business Leader for two products used in this space. He has been with the company for 26 years and held various positions in sales and marketing, as well as diverse roles in Human Resources, Six Sigma implementation and MRP II Process implementation. Dave has a B.S. in Entomology/Plant Pathology from University of Delaware and an M.S. in Entomology from Virginia Tech.*

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