

Shifting Thought



As a trained psychologist insight was always something I wanted my clients to have and I became aware of this quite early in my professional career. But then I started to see that insight is a much bigger phenomenon than what I learned as a psychologist. It may sound funny coming from someone with my background, but I didn't really understand how important thinking is in a person's world. In psychology they don't really teach you about the nature of thought, they just try to help you come up with ways of helping people change their current thinking. They don't teach you that thinking is the most powerful factor in how a person experiences life.

Even after 22 years of working in psychology I had not realized this for myself. There is a school of psychology called constructivism that points towards this area, but it doesn't get to the real essence of the idea. After being introduced to the principles that underlie our work with insight, I realized that I'm living in a world of my own thinking and that when my thinking changes the world begins to look different.

I was always interested in having solutions to the problems I was facing but I didn't realize that what I was really looking for was new thought. New thoughts change the way I experience myself and the world. As I began to understand the nature of insight and where it comes from, I stopped looking for ideas about how to get the world to change. Instead, I realized that new thoughts would change the way I see the world. This might not sound that unusual, but for me it was a revelation. I realized that I shouldn't be looking for solutions to problems, but rather new ways of seeing things, new ways of thinking.

Once they learned about the nature and power of insights, my clients started having them precipitously and both they and I started achieving remarkable results.

One of the immediate and most enduring benefits of this insight is that I actually began to enjoy my work. At the time I was burned out, tired, and getting mediocre results, but now I saw my job quite differently. I understood that my role was to help clients learn the importance of insights rather than to help them search for one specific idea. Once they learned about the nature and power of insights, my clients started having them precipitously and both they and I started achieving remarkable results. In addition, my stress level dropped because I wasn't trying to figure everything out. When there was something I did not understand, I would relax and look for an insight and if one didn't arrive I would stay relaxed about not receiving one. I soon developed a faith that insights would come over time and eventually I would see what I needed to see.

A lovely thing happened next—something I didn't realize needed to happen. I was able to come off my high horse as an expert. Medical training, psychiatric training, psychological training is all focused on pathology and how to fix pathology in patients or clients. An unwitting byproduct of this training is that you come off thinking you're an expert because you have read a lot of books. You end up with the idea that you understand the problems of humanity and as the expert you will now treat the problem sitting in front of you. As I started to understand insight I also started to realize that it doesn't matter what the problems are because everybody has access to wisdom capable of producing the insights that they themselves need. This relieved me from having to be an expert. I had no idea how invested I was in being an expert and how much that was getting in the way of my rapport and human connection with my clients, qualities that are actually frowned upon in psychological training.

I began to recognize that rapport and human connection is really what clients need first, and only once this has been established can they trust you with trying to help



them. When I began work as a consultant in business I started to realize even more, how crucial that human connection is and how destructive arrogance is. Without this understanding my transition from psychology to consulting would have been much more difficult. Of course every once in a while I slip into the “I’m the expert” routine; it gets in the way and then I notice it. It’s always good to remember that it’s not my insights that matter—it’s my clients’.

Since I’ve learned more about insight, I’m able to enjoy being in the unknown.

I could discuss plenty of examples of how insights have replaced negative thought habits, but when I step back from this topic I notice that all of this habitual poor thinking is an attempt to deal with being nervous about the unknown. Worry, anxiety, judging, complaining, generating fear, and being too busy in my head, are all examples of poor thought habits I’ve developed over the years to help deal with difficult situations where an outcome is unknown. Unfortunately, all of these thought habits create stress. Since I’ve learned more about insight, I’m able to enjoy being in the unknown. Now I can enjoy not knowing what is going to happen with a particular problem, I can enjoy not knowing how a conversation is going to go with someone who is challenging or defensive. I still find myself getting anxious or concerned about things from time to time but I quickly catch myself and then enjoy the process of wondering what the best solution is for this particular problem. Sometimes I wonder whether the problem will even exist after I have an insight. It is enjoyable to think of what simple and elegant solution might come to mind.

I think that my orientation toward life has become far more enjoyable and far more productive now that I don’t spend as many cycles grinding on things that aren’t working or spending emotional energy on things that bring my spirits down. It’s almost like living a different life. I may feel stressed about things just as often as before, but now this feeling lasts for a few seconds or minutes instead of a few hours or days. If my life was 98% stress then, it’s 2% stress now and 98% a feeling of what’s good or makes sense.

Here’s a powerful example of insight for me that is just a few weeks old. I’ve known for quite some time now that when I have an insight it changes the way that I see and or feel about the world. With an insight, my personal experience of reality changes. Knowing this over time has helped me orient my life towards having ongoing insights instead of worrying about strategies and plans. Lately however, something interesting has been happening. I feel like I’m relaxing into a deeper state of mind. It used to be that in my personal context — family, images of myself, work and experiences — I would always live hoping I would have insights so that personal life would be more comfortable or so that I would be more successful.

I’m now finding my way to a place where I think insights come from and it’s pulling my whole experience of life to another level. Instead of my personal life benefitting from insight, I’m finding myself relaxing into where insights come from and my whole life seems to be changing before my eyes. Before, Ken was the reference point and when insights would come along, the dominant perspective was ‘How well did Ken do at getting the insight?’ Or, ‘How good was it for Ken?’ Now, Ken is less relevant and the primary question is not if it was good for me. I wouldn’t say that my personal world has become irrelevant but it’s changing and becoming softer, easier, richer, sharper, and filled with greater energy. It’s hard to explain.

My friend Leslie said to me the other day, “You know Ken, when you connect with the spiritual it pulls you into a different reality.” I didn’t quite know what she meant by that, but it seems when I let go of what I know and get into an insight state of mind, I notice that the way I was thinking about the world across the board doesn’t really make



sense anymore. Relaxing without all that thinking going on seems like a much nicer place to live.

In this state of mind everything I experience used to look like an insight in the old frame of reference. My wife looks more beautiful to me and that changes our whole relationship. My son looks like more of a miracle and a blessing than I could ever have imagined. My business partners are delightful, and represent wonderful opportunities that I'm grateful to have in my life. Also, what we might accomplish together has suddenly expanded. With my clients, I can only imagine the dozens of insights they would immediately have if they were to experience the shift in thinking that I have.

© 2008

Ken Manning, Ph.D. graduated from Brown University and The University of Massachusetts, Amherst with degrees in psychology. He spent 10 years in sales and marketing prior to his 23 years as an executive coach, consultant, trainer and licensed psychologist. Currently Ken is also an adjunct faculty member for the Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology and on the staff of their Graduate Executive Coaching Program.

1 508 788 9890

www.insightmanagementpartners.com



Insight Management Partners, Inc.