

# REALITY CHECK

CONTAMINATED THINKING OFTEN PREVENTS US FROM ACTING WITH CLARITY. **JAMIE SMART** EXPLAINS FIVE ROUTES TO BETTER RESULTS

## 1. SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS

We all want results, yet many of us struggle to achieve them. Or we get spectacular results in one area of life, while failing to attain even modest success in other, important areas. There are plenty of examples: the successful businessman who knows he needs to lose weight, but never seems to find the time; the manager who's passionate about becoming a consultant, but fears stepping away from the security of a full-time job; the executive who wants to leapfrog the competition, but can't find the right strategy.

In fact, your results may be closer than you think. We live in a material world and there are certain universal or material laws that cannot be violated. But all too often it is not material laws, but rather our beliefs, concepts and misunderstandings that place artificial limits on the results we produce and on the impact we have.

## 2. THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

The single-biggest barrier to progress and the cause of most



frustration, stuckness and suffering is an innocent and widespread misunderstanding about how our minds work. The human mind has an extraordinary job to do. Millions of bits of information arrive at our senses every second. Our minds process that data, combine it with information from our memory, and weave a coherent and stable perceptual reality that we experience as so real, we rarely question its validity.

The principle of thought refers to our innate capacity to generate a perceptual reality; an outer and inner world. So, you are always living in a thought-generated perceptual reality and experiencing it as an actual reality. When you feel irritated, it can seem like it's caused by whomever and whatever you're thinking about. When you feel grateful, it's easy to find things to be grateful for, or when you feel stressed, it often seems like the causes are outside you. In fact, the very situations or people who seem annoying or frustrating on one day can seem sweet or charming the next. That's because your feelings are giving you feedback on thought taking form in the moment, not whatever you're thinking about. Thinking and feeling are two sides of the same coin. For instance...

### 3. ELIMINATING ANXIETY AND FEAR OF CRITICISM

Small children often have a teddy bear or security blanket. If the child bonds with the teddy bear, it soon seems like the bear is a source of peace and security. But this is a trick of the mind – 100% of the feelings of peace and security

are generated from within the child. The toy is neutral. If the teddy gets left behind when the family goes on holiday, it seems like the absence of the bear is the source of the child's feelings of anxiety. But this, too, is a trick of the mind – 100% of the feelings are coming from within the child.

This example is uncontroversial, but how quickly do we change our tune when we substitute money, jobs or romantic partners? Or our future hopes, fears or uncertainties?

Everyone sometimes experiences feelings of insecurity, worry, anxiety or self-doubt. That's not the problem. The problem is that we sometimes believe our thoughts are letting us know about something other than thought – a reality.

Feelings are impersonal. Our feelings don't know anything about our past, our future, our circumstances, other people or what we're like. When we mistakenly believe our feelings are letting us know about something other than thought, we've slipped into misunderstanding and contaminated thinking.

When you're more closely aligned with reality, your innate capacities are fully available to you. You have a natural capacity for connection, insight and realisations.

### 4. WHEN ARE YOU A LEADER?

What are some of the times and situations in your life when you've shown up as a leader? I've asked this question to countless participants on workshops and programmes. At first, people protest

that they don't have any examples, but before long their leadership stories emerge: the teenage boy who saved his brother from choking; the intern whose stroke of insight saved a company tens of thousands of pounds; the young girl who stepped in when another child was being picked on. People often say: "I didn't think of that as being a leader; it just seemed obvious", but that statement reveals the essence of leadership.

When we're caught up in contaminated thinking, we look to others, trying to figure out what to do. When you let go of that thinking, your leadership qualities emerge effortlessly.

### 5. CLARITY AND PRODUCTIVITY

We all oscillate between periods of clarity and times when we get caught up in our thinking. Many of my clients appreciate The Clarity Productivity Quadrant. The *Zone of Resistance* isn't much fun. Nevertheless, we all end up there from time to time. We're not all 100% productive 100% of the time. You might like to reflect on the question: where do I believe my experience is coming from? When we're in the *Zone of Resistance*, it almost always seems like our feelings are letting us know about the future (fear of failure or criticism), other people or ourselves.

One way out is to jump into the *Zone of Uninspired Action*, which gives us activity, something to focus on. Your mind is a self-correcting system, so you're going to get fresh new thinking eventually. When you're taking action, it's surprising how

often new thinking turns up. When a person's in the *Zone of Uninspired Action*, there's sometimes a sense of strain, struggle and 'slogging away at it'. That's OK, though. You may even find yourself pausing and easing into a more reflective state of mind.

The *Zone of Reflection* is a powerful source of fresh new thinking, a zone of renewal and regeneration. Newton's theory of universal gravitation and Steve Jobs' insights about the future of the music business all came from moments when they weren't actively thinking about the matter at hand. There are countless contexts where people enter a reflective and contemplative state and are, from time to time, struck with insight that shows the way forward.

When that happens, it's time for inspired action. The *Zone of Inspired Action* is where you can't seem to put a foot wrong – where everything's falling into place and you feel guided and directed. Enjoy it when it comes, and stay in the game when it doesn't. When you take action, you can discover things that you're unlikely to stumble on in the privacy of your own head. You put your theories and ideas to the test and get direct feedback from an impartial agent: reality. 🍀

**Jamie Smart is an author, speaker and executive coach. The above article is taken from his book *The Little Book of Results* (Capstone, 2018)**

