

CHAPTER 5 – TUNNEL VISION

Tunnel vision is not seeing the big picture and only part of a project. It is a process that pulls leaders to focus on a particular outcome, and then to filter all evidence through the lens provided by that outcome. This causes concentration on a single idea to the exclusion of others - all information that supports the outcome is elevated in significance, while evidence inconsistent is discounted or overlooked. Tunnel vision can be detrimental to the strategy, engagement, and problem solving initiatives of any leader.

Leaders all have problems with tunnel vision. They sometimes think and operate linearly – one thing at a time – or get involved in projects and problems and forget to see what is going on around them. They often attend to who is making the most noise. Or they get into “crises mode” and focus on a problem until it is fixed - to the detriment of all other activities. They can focus too intently on a “people problem”, or even winning in some situations. Leaders can be so deep in the forest they can’t see the trees.

One of the authors was working with a non-union manufacturing division that was expanding. They were hiring workers from a nearby unionized company that had a major project scaling back. No one paid any attention to the number of union employees coming into one plant. The organization also had a routine bi-yearly employee climate survey; all leadership and management were apprised of the results. Over two years, employee satisfaction was steadily declining in issues highly related to unionization efforts: grievance procedures and arbitrary management. No one paid attention to the trend because production and finance were going well. Predictably, what happened was a serious unionization drive from the UAW that disrupted the plant for 6 months. The plant stayed non-union in the end, but all the effort needed to keep it non-union probably could have been averted if plant leadership had seen the trees, paid attention to the mix of new hires, and actually saw and attended to the survey trends. They handicapped themselves severely with tunneled vision.

We humans have extraordinary ability to efficiently and effectively multi-task.¹ Most of us can breathe, speak, think, analyze, move, and listen simultaneously without much conscious effort. We can do things on “automatic” while we think of and do other things. When we get into a crisis situation, we can instinctively dispense with trivial issues and focus on the immediate threat. The benefits of being able to focus our attention so narrowly during a crisis are obvious; however, they are precisely the things that cause tunneled vision. Leaders focusing like this in their busy work world can be self-handicapping. Priorities may get neglected. Possibilities may not be seen. Employees may be ignored.

IMPACT

CHAPTER TAKEAWAYS

- **Non-linear thought increases innovation.**
- **Understand the importance of prioritization.**
- **Learn how to pull out of procrastination.**
- **Don’t interact with people only to get what you want – transactional vision.**
- **Learn to juggle multiple projects rather than operate linearly.**

SELF-HANDICAPPING LEADERSHIP: The Behaviors Holding Back Employees, Managers, and Companies, and How To Overcome Them

Tunnel vision can cause failure through flawed procedures and the need to win. Go into any casino and watch people who play slot machines to see tunneled vision. An example of flawed procedures can be found in our criminal justice system. Mistaken eyewitness identifications are the most frequent cause of wrongful convictions. In some ways the criminal justice system both teaches and perpetuates tunnel vision.² Police officers may shift from investigation to interrogation once they become convinced of a suspect's guilt. Prosecutors may not objectively evaluate cases or may have flawed grand jury systems. Courts place procedural obstacles in the path of defendants rather than focusing on justice. Managerial tunnel vision, which is more prevalent than most of us realizes, can also have potentially devastating results.

The reliance on tunnel vision can also be influenced by marketing consultants & politicians presenting narrow information, overconfidence, and lack of time taken to see the bigger picture. Leaders often lack time for reflection and can place too much importance on one aspect of an event and fail to recognize other factors. This type of tunnel vision can lead to poor decision-making. When focusing on increasing quality, the focus on cost or access to the product or service may not be high. Often, consultants and marketing folks rely on the tunnel vision of leaders (and consumers) to focus attention on one thing and convince them of the necessity of that feature of a product or service. Politicians do the same: exaggerate the importance of particular issues and ignore others. These instances of tunnel vision can lead to mistakes in predicting future outcomes, buying equipment, engaging employees, and in any other decision activity.

Overconfidence is a perceptual distortion causing overestimates of one's own abilities. Overconfident leaders are less likely to imitate their peers, less likely to explore their environment, and more likely to act on their own private signals. Teams with some overconfident individuals can have an advantage in business; but these leaders have an uneven track record – they are wrong as often as right. Entrepreneurs' perceptions of starting a business may be distorted by overconfidence; risks are discounted, funding not secured, and the enterprise fails.

Linear thinking can doom any organization over time. As an example, consider the organization that hires mostly those referred by current employees. New employees with backgrounds that match the current employees accumulate without any thought given to the future direction of the organization. Project management can also get stuck in a rut with tunnel vision. Project managers have been trained in certain methodologies to manage projects and the strict adherence to these guidelines can cause linear thinking. They then start to frame all problems in a way that limits their ability to see the innovative solution.

When tunnel vision meets strategy, there are three types of leaders:³

- Those who focus inward on their own business and expect business today to be the same as tomorrow. They focus on making what they do even better.

SELF-HANDICAPPING LEADERSHIP: The Behaviors Holding Back Employees, Managers, and Companies, and How To Overcome Them

- Those who keep an extremely close eye on their competitors. When competitors make changes, they do too. Their customers focus on price as the product or service is the same as everyone else.
- Those who focus on the customers' underlying needs and wants and scan the world for ideas from other industries that they can adapt to satisfy those needs.

From a business strategy perspective, it is not uncommon to see the first two types stuck in a competitive stalemate - narrowed marketing efforts or digging in against a changing business climate. The third is obviously a better approach and is characterized by lack of tunnel vision. Every leader can self-handicap by narrowing sources of information or simply being too busy to attend to anything but what is screaming for his attention. Leaders can kill potentially good ideas too early or spend good money after bad with tunnel vision. When a leader fails to see or hear a variety of input about the environment in planning future actions, he is self-handicapping (and possibly killing the entire enterprise) with tunnel vision.

Tunnel vision can affect leaders at every level and in everything they do. For example, tunneled vision (as in seeing) can even lead to diminished hearing.⁴ Focusing on something intently with your eyes can lead to the audio cortex *turning down the volume*. And, tunneled hearing can, in the same way, lead to diminished vision. So, a person intently listening to a cell phone could have diminished vision. Strange but true - all leaders must watch out for tunnel vision in building strategy, working with projects, listening to employees, and driving home.

REAL ISSUES

Tunnel vision comes from the content of leaders' training/education, lack of training on analysis/conceptualization/systemic thinking, inflexibility and over-confidence, stress, lack of time, and personality issues. While excuses play into the lack of time issues, self-handicapping in this area is mostly behavioral. *Linear thinking*, the inability to "*juggle*" multiple projects, and letting failures in one project bog down other projects are typically skill issues. *Conceptual thinking* - problem solving in the abstract (devoid of operational detail) - takes practice and time and most leaders don't have the training to do it. When leaders don't think they can do a good job or fear failure, they often avoid starting (*procrastination*). Preparing "to do" lists, doing other more comfortable items, and doing easy things first are examples of procrastination. Some managers will *interact with people only to get what they want*. Sometimes this is just "using" behavior from a controlling leader but it may be introverted folks not feeling comfortable with interpersonal interaction. Introverts have a predisposition to close up and not offer vulnerability or opinions on possible problems.

With tunnel vision, the excuses usually started well before one became a leader. They are what led to choosing one education over another - causing part of one's tunnel vision. They led to not getting any training or education in decision analysis, research skills, or conceptual thinking - adding more potential sources of tunnel vision. Micromanagement set in long ago. And, so on. These things may make for a

focused individual contributor, so by the time one accepts a leadership position, these issues have already become obstacles to leadership.

Our training and education is always an issue because many managers come from specialized backgrounds. One of the authors is an industrial psychologist and sees people problems first; the other is business-finance and sees problems through the lens of money and strategy first. It is a good combination for co-authors but acting alone we may be worrisome. Because of training, a leader may see the world one way and not listen to others. We have heard leaders say, “that psychology stuff is not important;” yet, at the same time, they struggle with culture and engagement issues throughout their organization. That is self-handicapping through tunnel vision probably caused by their training.

Linear thinking is when a leader’s thoughts follow a step-by-step progression where a response to one step is required before another step is taken. *This* tunnel vision may be caused by the leader not seeing the big picture or from training (such as project management). Much of business relies on the concept of logic - math, statistics, and other areas that teach deductive reasoning – but this becomes a way of thinking that often precludes looking at the big picture or bouncing around among creative ideas. Consider tasks A, B, C, D, and E that are in your “to-do list.” These tasks are in that order because that is the order in which they came in. Now suppose that task ‘D’ is a critical item that your accounting department must have completed (by you) before they can proceed to process expense reports. Without thinking, “big-picture,” you may go through your to-do list in the order in which it exists. When this happens, the financial costs are obvious: lost productivity in your accounting department. The non-financial costs include the accounting department finding a way around your work or going to a superior about your tardiness on required reports. Leaders are constantly pulled to address the next item in line – the next meeting/appointment or the person yelling the loudest; so it is easy to fall into tunnel vision and neglect big picture thinking. In this case, it can be costly to a career.

Some managers often *act as if they don’t play on a larger team in an organization* or they act like they or their department is the center of the world, which is almost never true. Each of us is one small part of a larger operation. Another form of tunnel vision is *making or allowing employees to focus on the boss (management) instead of their customers* - creating a codependent work force. Codependent workers like to feel part of a larger organization, so they become very loyal to a boss or department. This means that they are looking in – the boss controlling the employees and the employees taking care of the boss. This prevents focus on customers and mission and can be devastating to an organization.

Tunnel vision is a common occurrence and it can be irritating to work for a leader who sticks rigidly to pre-existing concepts, rejects ideas before hearing the evidence, or can only deal with one issue per meeting.⁵ These tunneled behaviors may eventually push leaders into tyranny where they try to force other people to follow their preferred route through coercion and threats. This drives out better employees and bogs the organization down.

Seasoned leaders become accustomed to doing things their way.⁶ The line between supreme self-confidence and tunnel vision is very thin. Tunnel vision can lead to inflexibility and over-confidence

about relationships in a leader's inner circle. Subordinates need to understand tunnel vision and work to make sure the leader gets the information needed. Without these safeguards, experience, and an optimistic demeanor, leaders can sometimes go into "crisis mode" when there is no crisis present. Their behavior may seem irrational and they can be unapologetic about the way they treat other people. Their tunneled strategy can lead the organization down the wrong road.

WHAT TO DO

Making a conscious effort to scan the environment, asking, "*What am I missing?*" is the first step in dealing with tunnel vision.⁷ Being too quick to reject or gloss over other's ideas is to be avoided. One way out of this is to explore information from a variety of sources.⁸ Setting up Google Alerts, reading *Business Week*, and connecting with people who have different interests helps. A regular questioning habit asking "what" and "how" questions must be part of a leader's routine. Without time to fully consider all of the issues and implications, leaders can miss warning signs.

One would think those who enjoy the internet would move to less linear thinking. Before the internet, our research was limited to word of mouth referrals, advertising, the yellow pages, the library, and the newspaper. It was fairly linear. With the internet, many have learned to think faster, jump around, follow links, and see a bigger, more diverse world. Yet. Our own interests and our search engines can still enforce tunnel vision. So, part of the solution to avoiding tunnel vision is to be willing to jump around as you solve problems. Change search engines often and follow weird links.

Certain mindsets can create and perpetuate severe tunnel vision. Mindsets are mental attitudes or dispositions that predetermine a person's responses to and interpretations of situations.⁹ If a leader says, "that is not the way things are done around here", when faced with potential innovative solutions, his mindset drives his behavior and outcomes. In "Competing for the Future," Hamel and Prahalad¹⁰ describe an experiment that illustrates the power of mindsets. Several monkeys sit in a cage that has a bunch of bananas hanging from the ceiling accessible by a set of steps. Whenever the monkeys try to climb the steps to get to the bananas, they are blocked by a blast of cold water. After a few days the monkeys give up climbing the steps. The researchers then remove the water hose and replace one of the original monkeys with a new one. Seeing the bananas, the new monkey starts up the steps. What happens? The other monkeys being social creatures pull the new monkey down before it gets blasted with water. This happens again and again until the new monkey does not bother to go up for the bananas either. Eventually, if you keep adding new monkeys to the group, they will all learn the rule that, "You don't grab the bananas around here." In organizations, we know that simply as, "that is not the way things are done around here." Mindsets must be explored, their connection to outcomes understood, and changed. This is not easy across an organization – it is a communication culture issue.

Leaders often focus on what they are doing well today rather than future needs. It is too easy to slip into a mindset of, "my company is doing well today – I can ride this wave of success." Focusing too much on today's successes is a form of tunnel vision in a competitive market. Changing these mindsets is one of the strongest leverage points in an organization. Coca-Cola in 1997 when faced with limited growth

SELF-HANDICAPPING LEADERSHIP: The Behaviors Holding Back Employees, Managers, and Companies, and How To Overcome Them

options in a mature market shifted its mindset from “we sold 1 billion servings of soft drinks this year” to “we’ve got 47 billion servings of beverages yet to go” which was the number of worldwide beverage servings including bottled water, coffee and tea. Now they operate in many more beverage markets than before.

The key to influencing mindsets lies in making meaningful changes to the context in which you work. You probably act differently in church than at a sporting event. You haven’t changed, but the context has. Your mindset about the behavior that’s appropriate in each situation is different – this is “mindset shift.” There are several ways to influence people to shift mindsets - a *compelling story or vision*, *reinforcement of new skills*, and *role modeling*. Employees will often change their mindset if they understand what is being asked of them, they see some reward, and it makes sense. Employees change their behavior if they see their leaders behaving differently and it leads to good outcomes. Most of us know that role modeling is what leaders do to show employees the proper way to behave in organizations.

To avoid the handicap of tunnel vision, leaders need to:¹¹

- Have an awareness of everything that is happening in their area and beyond
- Be able to recall important information and utilize it at a later time
- Be proactive in their approach to leadership, not just be focused on the tasks at hand
- Have the ability to see what is on the horizon and recognize what is changing
- Have the ability to recognize red flags early
- Understand your mindsets and change them where required

DO YOU HAVE TUNNEL VISION?

SURVEY: Do I Practice Tunnel Vision or Not? (Y = Yes, N= No, DK = Don’t Know)

There are no right or wrong answers here, the more honest you are in answering, the better we can target tunnel vision.

_____ I frequently find myself trying to play catch-up with several tasks that could have been completed before “non-priority” tasks.

_____ I often think through all the possible scenarios of a situation before moving forward.

_____ I rarely think about the “big-picture”, I just handle emergencies.

_____ The task that I begin next is often dictated by how well I complete the preceding task.

_____ I seem to have an appreciation that they are playing on a larger team than their department.

_____ On a team, I focus on my piece of the responsibility very well.

_____ I am much better seeing the details than the big picture.

_____ When I get what I need from people I want to move on to the next problem.

_____ When faced with a number of tasks to complete, my prioritization skills suffer.

_____ I have a hard time juggling multiple projects.

SELF-HANDICAPPING LEADERSHIP: The Behaviors Holding Back Employees, Managers, and Companies, and How To Overcome Them

- _____ I like loyal employees.
- _____ When I discuss problems with my boss I don't tend to acknowledge his/her bigger problems.
- _____ My main motivation in approaching someone is often for a favor.
- _____ My conversations stay focused on the job requirements.
- _____ I don't always think things through.
- _____ The leaders in my area tend to staff their departments with yes-men and folks that don't speak up.
- _____ I focus on what is needed now over what is needed in the future.

Scores

12-17 Y's - You are greatly self-handicapping through tunnel vision

6 – 11 - You are inconsistent with tunnel vision

1 – 5 - You have only minor problems with tunnel vision

What was your degree of fudging on these questions? When not sure, did you round up to yes?

WHY DO YOU USE TUNNEL VISION?

Expediency

Attention and multi-tasking are some of the largest areas of research in psychology. Studies show that if there are many stimuli present, it is much easier to ignore the non-task related stimuli; but if there are few stimuli, the mind will perceive the irrelevant stimuli as well as the relevant.¹² Further studies show that younger people are able to perceive more stimuli, but are likely to process both relevant and irrelevant information, while older people process fewer stimuli, but usually process only relevant information. Some people can process multiple stimuli very well but this relies on one task becoming automatic due to "overlearning" the skill. Thus, older managers, especially where there is more experience with a task, may focus more intently. This may become habit, and when change occurs, all those tunnel vision habits can be self-handicapping.

Research¹³ has shown the promising potential of a debiasing tunnel vision through education. Professional accident investigators (experienced, older, lots of stimuli) tend to allocate accident causes to the worker rather than other factors. But, those who receive tunnel vision education seek a greater amount of information. The tunnel vision education does not have to be complex; viewing a slide show that defines tunnel vision, provides examples, and encourages participants to consider alternative hypotheses when investigating will suffice.

This research also shows that selective processing is a big driver of tunnel vision – which can be read either as laziness or as attribution error. Attribution error is placing too much emphasis on internal characteristics to explain someone's behavior, rather than considering external factors. In other words, the boss saying the work force is doing "X" because they are "millennials" (internal), rather than looking at what *he is doing* to cause "X" to be happening (external). There is no universally accepted explanation

for attribution error, but tunnel vision can be lessened with data-based consideration of multiple options (decision analysis).

Selective processing often is the norm for leaders and simply presenting multiple alternatives is not sufficient to prompt comparative processing. Without some education, and then a requirement for data-based comparison, many leaders may tunnel their investigations before choosing one solution. With tunnel vision, decision-making becomes a process of justifying the decision the leader has already made. Accordingly, it is critically important to consider evidence for multiple possibilities and evaluate them empirically. We suggest that decreasing the likelihood of tunnel vision requires some form of education on decision analysis and not just simply a strategy of increasing accountability or “trying harder” to have wider views.

What tunnel vision do you use because of expediency?

Avoidance

Many forms of tunnel vision – such as lack of conceptual thinking - take practice and time to overcome. It takes time and effort to think in new ways. This is one of the major steps in moving from management to leadership – systems thinking. Leaders who avoid this learning continue with tunnel vision. They fail to see the complexity of a system, the mix of people, finance, and operational problems, or the long-term implications of their work.¹⁴ Being engaged in one’s work will also increase the size of the picture one has (and reduce tunnel vision). Looking at the whole and not just its parts is not difficult if you ask questions. Finally, understanding that an outcome will have an impact on other people will help. All of these entail facing the issue and taking more time to avoid self-handicaps.

Tunnel vision can cause poor time management and vice versa. When we fall behind, we focus intently on how to get something done or we take the opposite approach and procrastinate. A person may feel overloaded and go from one crisis to another, which is stressful and demoralizing. Most of us know that we should use our time more effectively; people who have time management problems really have *priority* management problems. You only have 24 hours in a day no matter what you do; you can only maximize the use of it. Multitasking may help, but the key is to use more of those minutes on productive things rather than unproductive things. There is a fine line between the tunnel vision of too much focus on a narrow range and wasting time procrastinating. Both are caused by avoidance of work for some reason – fear of failure, boring tasks, burnout, etc.

What tunnel vision of yours comes from avoidance?

Apprehension

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Many types of tunnel vision, like focusing on something positive as the ship is sinking - are usually associated with fear. Procrastination can be caused by fear and can drive one to think that if he procrastinates long enough, his situation will magically improve. Unfortunately the reverse is usually true. As time goes by, fears grow larger, and the procrastination causes severe obstacles. In putting off today what can be done tomorrow, a leader is often allowing small fears to self-handicap his job and life.

Acting as if they don't play on a larger team in an organization is a form of self-centeredness. Managers complete work successfully by forming alliances, mastering the politics of the office, and understanding that those above see a bigger picture and must allocate resources accordingly. Low self-esteem can make a manager overestimate his importance or use self-importance to cover his fear of failure – or visa-versa. Both are self-handicapping.

Finally, focusing on what one is doing well today rather than future needs can be a form of apprehension – apprehension of the future. A great leader focuses on getting better, rather than continuing to be good.¹⁵ Many of us believe that our intelligence, our personality, our physical aptitudes, or our hard work got us where we are *and will keep us there*. As a result, we focus on goals that are all about maintaining our position, rather than developing and acquiring new skills and competencies for the next position. People whose goals are about getting better, rather than being good, take difficulty in stride, and appreciate the journey as much as the destination. And, they do not self-handicap. This goal formation is a bulwark of how self-handicapping starts or is avoided.

What tunnel vision of yours comes from apprehension?

Self-Deception

Obsessing over one concern, while neglecting other important concerns is tunnel vision. This can become “obsessive-compulsive.” When leaders obsess or focus too much, they need to change their frame or widen their focus. For example, Person A is an executive and obsessing about buying a particular expensive car and is having tunnel vision about the features of the car to the exclusion of most other things. It will be a big part of his status and the message he sends to clients. In a conversation with Person B, a friend less well-off and having problems with family finances, the issues of what features to get in this car is not critical. Person A has a hard time understanding why Person B will not pay attention or help him in his time of need; he thinks he has been abandoned to face this major problem alone. He is incredulous at Person B's attitude. But it is Person A's tunnel vision causing the problem, not Person B. This is self-handicapping and it is up to Person A to understand what he is doing, reframe, and tone down his tunneled obsession with this purchase. He can do so by getting at the root of the issue – his worry about his own status – and not letting that fear drive his behavior.

If you are or know a leader that takes employees for granted, thinks they are only there to achieve his own mission, and has tunnel vision for only his goals, understand that this is very disengaging and self-

handicapping. Overcoming this habit can be tricky. A leader may be thinking it is good to focus on being constructive and goal-oriented. Instead, his subordinates think he is seeing them as “dead meat.” By thinking the world revolves around him, he is putting big limits on his leadership. Employees don’t want to be in these situations and won’t respect leaders who do this.

Sometimes you need to make a decisive break from the past and the act of changing mindsets is a way of doing that. For instance, when bosses become controlling and abusive, they put all their employees into a fixed mindset - instead of attending to customers, everyone starts worrying about the bosses’ moods, being judged or being held accountable arbitrarily. Changing this mindset may entail firing the boss, but with that mindset turned around, the entire enterprise may be more customer-focused and productive.

How do leaders uncover shared mindsets and understand how they are linked to behavior? Mindsets lead to behaviors, which lead to practices with which lead to outcomes, so you have to work backward from poor outcomes to find the mindset driving the process. Because mindsets lie below what we can readily observe, they are seldom scrutinized. A technique called laddering¹⁶ (that closely resembles the five step approach that lean organizations use to get at the root causes of performance problems) can be used to start the process of changing mindsets. You work backward from the “bad” outcome to process, then to behavior, any reinforcement involved, and finally the mindset supporting all of it. Then, you determine what new mindset you need and change it. Shifting mindsets is a gradual process but tackling poor mindsets may be one of the easiest ways to change handicapping tunnel vision.

What tunnel vision may you be missing because of self-deception?

BEHAVIORS TO CHANGE

Linear Thinking

Recognize. Linear thinking is thinking directly along a straight path, almost wearing blinders to any diversions to the path. Early business models were built around the idea that people had to follow orders and a standard way of behaving was needed to build parts in a set order of steps. We now live in an increasingly "non-linear" age where problem solving is more dynamic, unpredictable, and competitive with less time to do it. Much of our world remains trapped in the linear paradigm; but, the non-linear thinker is *letting go, seeing what all the angles are, and if he gets lost, so be it*. It is a severe obstacle to effective leadership today.

Admit. Examine the extent to which you are a questioner; be on the lookout for questions¹⁷ you ask and the ones you fail to ask. Make sure your questions help solve your problems. Question the status quo; and whenever you are dealing with a complex problem, formulate the question you are trying to answer

SELF-HANDICAPPING LEADERSHIP: The Behaviors Holding Back Employees, Managers, and Companies, and How To Overcome Them

in several different ways. For team meetings, write questions out in advance for the most significant questions you think need to be addressed in a problem.

Juggling multiple projects and keeping them all in the air can't be done in linear thinking mode. The key to this is simple: organization and follow up. This book's second author, being a young guy, is into Excel, has perfect order in his computer files, uses iCloud and Dropbox, and has his iPad ready for note-taking. Find your tools, organize them, and use them to track your projects in a visual form. In your computer, organize folders and move appropriate items to the correct folder. Also arrange a historical order so you know the latest iteration of something.

Adjust. Non-linear thought increases performance because the leader using it is not so certain about the starting point for any logic process. One of the best places to go to practice non-linear thinking and memory expansion is www.lumosity.com. Get an account, check the sections you want to work on – linear and conceptual thinking are possibilities – and work through the exercises. You may think you are beyond this kind of nonsense, etc., but you will gain new skills. Another is prezi.com where you can make presentations that are not a linear slide show. They use pictures, into which you can zoom in and out. Get a subscription to *Scientific American Mind*, <http://www.scientificamerican.com/magazine/mind/> which is full of articles about how to be a better thinker. There are hundreds of books on thinking, creativity, or innovation. Every one of them will have some gem for you. For reviews of books in this area, check out <http://www.criticalthinking.org/>. They also have articles on better thinking.

One way to reduce linear thinking is to employ common thinking tools used in quality improvement such as brainstorming, the 5 why's and 5 how's technique, fishbone analysis, arrow diagrams, or affinity diagrams. Detailed instruction on these and more can be found at <http://asq.org/learn-about-quality/quality-tools.html>.

Key Behaviors. Below are Key Behaviors to help you get away from linear thinking:

1. See the world – particularly the problem – from different and multiple perspectives.
2. Reframe and search for as many alternative ways to view the problem, situation or environment. Write them down.
3. Take time to be more interested in the journey than the destination. Reject the traditional and use an arrow diagram (see ASQ website above). Explore unusual or illogical combinations.
4. Use more of the tools of Quality Improvement in your thinking - brainstorming, fishbone analysis, or affinity diagrams.
5. Look for how other people or industries think. Try to incorporate from these explorations.

Prioritization

SELF-HANDICAPPING LEADERSHIP: The Behaviors Holding Back Employees, Managers, and Companies, and How To Overcome Them

Recognize. By definition, when we prioritize, we direct our efforts to the most important or urgent task to be completed. As a leader, you need to get things done. But, acting without prioritizing is self-handicapping. The key to prioritizing is to have a “big picture” mindset as you look at your tasks.

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	<p>Quadrant 1 - Crises, Pressing Problems, Firefighting, Deadlines</p>	<p>Quadrant 2 - Prevention, Relationship Building, Recognizing Opportunities, Planning, Recreation</p>
Not Important	<p>Quadrant 3 - Interruptions, Phone, Mail & E-mail Reports, Meetings, Popular activities</p>	<p>Quadrant 4 - Trivia, Busy work, Mail, Email, Internet, Time wasters, Pleasant activities</p>

The above quadrants come from Stephen Covey and his “First Things First” time management concept matrix.¹⁸ Each quadrant has a combination of urgency and importance. Covey argues that people tend to spend too much time in Quadrant 3 (urgent but unimportant priorities) when they really should spend more effort on Quadrant 2 (not urgent but important priorities). Many of us get stuck in Quadrant 1 because of too little time in Quadrant 2. Covey suggests all of us experience tunnel vision in different ways and at different times; we neglect the important in favor of the urgent. Tunnel vision becomes dysfunctional whenever a pervasive pattern of obsession with a single concern such as urgency overshadows importance.

Admit. This matrix will help you think on a larger, non-tunnel scale, but it isn’t enough. One of the biggest problems new leaders face is that they continue thinking like a staff member, instead of a leader. They see the technical, but not the interconnections of technology, people, culture, organizational structure, etc. We need to look outward and upward when we prioritize our tasks. Not being proactive to reach out and discuss who needs what, and by when, will self-handicap not only you, but also others who are dependent on your output.

Adjust. If you focus your efforts on quadrant 2 by managing the important tasks before they become urgent, the quadrant 1 tasks will diminish in number and level of urgency. Quadrant 3 items are the trouble-makers – they will sneak up on you and appear to be urgent but they do not align with your goals. Limit your time in Quadrant 4, or the quadrant of waste – the more time you devote to time wasters, the less time you have for achieving goals.

Key Behaviors. The following are key behaviors to help you prioritize projects and tasks:¹⁹

1. Collect a list of all your tasks. Don’t worry about the order.
2. Identify urgent vs. important for each item (see definitions above).
3. Identify tasks that need immediate attention – by the end of the day - those that will have serious negative consequences if not done.
4. Of those labeled important, identify what carries the highest value to your business and organization. Focus on client projects before internal work.
5. Identify each task with the numbers from Covey’s table above.

SELF-HANDICAPPING LEADERSHIP: The Behaviors Holding Back Employees, Managers, and Companies, and How To Overcome Them

6. Order tasks by estimated effort. Start on whichever one in Quadrant 1 and then 2 you think will take the most effort to complete. But, if you feel like you can't focus on lengthier tasks first, finish up the shorter urgent tasks.
7. Be flexible and adaptable. Your priorities will change sometimes when you least expect them to.
8. Know when to cut. You probably can't get to everything on your list.

Procrastination

Recognize. We all have a tendency to procrastinate when we don't want to think through a tough problem or when we fear not doing well. We do this simply because we don't want to get out of our comfort zone and face the challenge; but it creates tunnel vision. The ERO Spiral starts with excuses here. Take some time out and have a detailed look at yourself—with no holds barred.²⁰ Look at the truth about your procrastination habits and break the cycle.

Admit. Part of dealing with procrastination is facing the fear driving it. What are you avoiding? There are the big fears, but there are lots of small, subtle fears²¹ and that is what often drives procrastination. Everything is hardest the first time. When things don't go your way, and they won't, shrug it off and try again. But don't put it off – that leads to cheating and hurry-up, sloppy work. If you're clinging to your comfort zone through procrastination, you are really hanging on to an idea that the world is supposed to be a safe, predictable place. That's an illusion.

Understand the benefits of failure²² and hedge your risk by creating a contingency plan. Even if your first option fails, you can maintain the status quo with a solid backup plan. The best way to reduce fear and build confidence is taking action. You will begin accumulating experience and knowledge, at least. Take the fear out of something by researching the potential outcomes (both good and bad) so you understand the risks.

Adjust. When procrastination starts to interfere with your work performance, you usually unconsciously know it's time to stop and get on with the task at hand.²³ First, *identify the challenge*. Write down the specific task you've been putting off. That helps you focus on it. Then, *pinpoint the underlying emotions*. This step helps you see the act of dragging your heels for what it truly is – The ERO Spiral. Try to *face the emotions and define your goal*. Your goal is your beacon to keep you on track and get beyond the emotions holding you back.

Key Behaviors. Here are Key Behaviors to use in avoiding procrastination:²⁴

1. Break the task down to lessen the sense of being overwhelmed. Then create a detailed timeline with specific deadlines.
2. Eliminate temptation to do something else by building in accountability and rewards for progress.
3. Finish the hard stuff first.
4. Identify your fear and excuses. Be brave and honest with yourself about the cost of continued inaction.

5. Eliminate your procrastination pit-stops. Get rid of the distractions that help you procrastinate.
6. Make your intentions public. This will add pressure, but for some of us, avoiding embarrassment is a great motivator.
7. Hang out with people who inspire you to take action. Picture Steve Jobs or Bill Gates as your coworkers.

Interacting with people only to get what we want

Recognize. We have all had the type of boss that talks to us nicely with great eye contact until he gets what he wants and then his eyes glaze over and he is eager for us to disappear. We are dead to him because he got the transaction done, and he has no interest in us as people. Is this you? The issue of interacting with people only until you get what you want from them is mostly a discussion of defeating your own dysfunctional behavior. We are talking about shutting off all caring about an employee when you have what you want.

The band, *Bullet For My Valentine*, in their song, *Alone*, may have worked for a boss (or known a girlfriend) like this because they wrote these lyrics:²⁵

“No more I'm taking this hatred from you
You make me feel dead when I'm talking to you
You'll take me for granted when I'm not around
So burn all your bridges 'cause I'm not going down

Admit. This sums up how some leaders behave and how their subordinates feel. Examine why you treat employees this way; if this comes from disrespect or control, you have larger issues to deal with, like micromanaging. Control freaks are so focused on their control, they act like this. Those of us who are introverted find it hard to interact with subordinates in empowering ways. Regardless of the reason, start by resisting the urge to judge or assume.²⁶ It is easier to offer someone compassion if you try to understand where they're coming from. Paying attention can be a form of endurance; it requires practice and training.²⁷

Adjust. When you listen to others, you validate their need to be acknowledged and understood. We all want to know that we matter, that we are important; and when we find someone who shows interest in what we have to say, we tend to like them. We are not asking you to pretend to be interested in subordinates in hopes of being liked, but rather to pay attention to your subordinates to respect them. They all have something to contribute and it is your job to align that to the mission. By definition, the leader has to hold his/her subordinates' needs in mind and de-emphasize his personal needs. A good manager is continually asking, “What can I do to empower my employees?” This question can nudge us out of our need to focus on the goal rather than the people. In addition to improving your personal and professional relationships, listening also helps to prevent misunderstandings and facilitates cooperation. Most importantly, it helps you avoid the kind of non-verbals that will really turn your coworkers against you.

Finally, it is easier to form a negative opinion of people when you're at a distance and you view them in the abstract. Leaders that don't know their subordinates names do this. If you don't know a coworker's story, it is easy to view them as objects. Discouraged or disengaged leaders can be wary about the whole idea of getting close and knowing people. This will cause the same phenomenon.

Key Behaviors. The following are Key Behaviors for being effective in this regard:²⁸

1. Shift your attention and focus on the speaker. Give them the impression that you're enthusiastic about talking to them – until the conversation is done.
2. Get out of your problems or planning ahead and listen to them. Ask open-ended questions about their interests.
3. Ask questions rather than tell. Be respectful of their opinions and how they feel.
4. Try active listening to shift focus: Repeat what they are saying in your head, summarize what you heard, and look for the message – their key words.
5. Give the impression that you are on the same team. Use words like “we, us, we're, our, and ourselves” to instantly build a bond.
6. Mimic the other personal facial expressions and body positions. Mirroring will allow you to feel what they are feeling.
7. Keep what you say short and to the point. When you go on and on about something, people tune you out.

Focusing On Your Current Success Rather Than The Future

Recognize. Success can breed failure by hindering learning.²⁹ Celebrating accomplishments is more fun than focusing on how we can grow; however, while celebration is warranted, don't celebrate too long – there is a *nerd in a garage* somewhere looking to dethrone you! Current success does not guarantee future success in any industry. There are always people looking to provide higher-benefit goods or services to customers at lower costs (adding value). Tunnel vision, by definition, puts blinders to innovation and focuses on the here and now. While having tunnel vision may not doom your team or company in the short run, it will almost certainly dim its future potential.

When leaders conclude that their talents or strategy are the reasons for success and give short shrift to the part that environmental factors and random events may have played in it, they commit *fundamental attribution error*. *Overconfidence bias* occurs when success increases their self-assurance and belief that they don't need to change anything. A third impediment is the *failure-to-ask-why syndrome*—the tendency not to investigate the causes of good performance systematically. This type of tunnel vision can be devastating.

SELF-HANDICAPPING LEADERSHIP: The Behaviors Holding Back Employees, Managers, and Companies, and How To Overcome Them

Admit. One of the things executives miss with this type of tunnel vision is *disruptive innovation*.³⁰ Disruptive innovation creates new markets and new customers by looking for a better value proposition. Disruptive innovation often looks like the creation of toys or gadgets when it begins – desktop computers started out something you purchased for your kids because of the low computing power. Folks with tunnel vision run the risk of not seeing these new markets emerge. Consider the following example: Google’s Chairman, Eric Schmidt said, “missing the rise of social media was the biggest mistake that he made.”³¹ Google initially paid little attention to Facebook but ended up locked in a battle for online and mobile advertising dollars with Facebook.

Adjust. Missing disruptive innovation is the result of not putting yourself in the shoes of your customers and looking for different ways to fill their needs and desires. The first step is to understand what *they want* out of your product and their *motivation* to purchase your product. Not what you *think* they want. Once you understand the motivation behind their purchasing your product, you can then tailor your product or service to better fit their needs or look for something that does. Ask what these customers want or need that they don’t know or acknowledge yet. That is what Apple did with iPods and iPhones. Understanding *disruptive innovation is knowing what the consumer wants, before the consumer knows he wants it*. Every leader needs to pay attention to the future in this very fast world. While steam and gasoline engine power doubled every 70 years, in the new age of computers and the Web, power is doubling every 2-3 years. *Celebrate your success, but know your future.*

Key Behaviors. Use the following worksheet to help explore your disruptive innovation:

What you do now?	What customers want?	What is their motivation to get it?	What are their similar future needs they do not know they want yet?	What is out there that may satisfy this need in the future?	What will you do about it?	How?

Key Behaviors to help you stop focusing on your success now and get your thinking into the future³² follow:

1. Set up a “vision” bulletin board for you (or your team). Clip articles or pictures and add them to an overall picture on the board to show what your customers want you or your product to look like in the future.

SELF-HANDICAPPING LEADERSHIP: The Behaviors Holding Back Employees, Managers, and Companies, and How To Overcome Them

2. Decide who they are and get the negative people out of your life. You become who you surround yourself by and negative people live their lives in the past. If you surround yourself with those who are focused on the past, you too will do the same.
3. Celebrate success but examine it. When a win is achieved, investigate what led to it with the same rigor and scrutiny it might apply to understanding the causes of failure. Hold “after-action reviews” like the military does after combat.
4. Watch your time horizons. When the time lag between an action and its consequences is short, it’s relatively easy to identify the causes of performance. In many cases, this cycle is too long for leaders to make all of the necessary connections.
5. Forget replication of success; experiment for the future. When things go well, our biggest concern is how to make sure we can repeat the success. Instead, dig into root causes of future success and build systems for that.

PERSONAL CHAPTER TAKEAWAYS

Action Plan – Tunnel Vision

Take a few minutes and complete this Action Plan about Tunnel Vision.

Tunnel Vision Self-Handicap	What is the Situation	Trigger	Impact on Others	What to Do/When
Changing your mindsets		<input type="checkbox"/> Expedient <input type="checkbox"/> Avoiding <input type="checkbox"/> Apprehension <input type="checkbox"/> Self-Deception		<input type="checkbox"/> Deliberate Action _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Self-efficacy _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Face it _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Look & Listen _____
Get beyond linear thinking		<input type="checkbox"/> Expedient <input type="checkbox"/> Avoiding <input type="checkbox"/> Apprehension <input type="checkbox"/> Self-Deception		<input type="checkbox"/> Deliberate Action _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Self-efficacy _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Face it _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Look & Listen _____
Learn to juggle projects		<input type="checkbox"/> Expedient <input type="checkbox"/> Avoiding <input type="checkbox"/> Apprehension <input type="checkbox"/> Self-Deception		<input type="checkbox"/> Deliberate Action _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Self-efficacy _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Face it _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Look & Listen _____
Think long-term.		<input type="checkbox"/> Expedient <input type="checkbox"/> Avoiding <input type="checkbox"/> Apprehension <input type="checkbox"/> Self-Deception		<input type="checkbox"/> Deliberate Action _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Self-efficacy _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Face it _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Look & Listen _____
View situations from different perspectives		<input type="checkbox"/> Expedient <input type="checkbox"/> Avoiding <input type="checkbox"/> Apprehension <input type="checkbox"/> Self-Deception		<input type="checkbox"/> Deliberate Action _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Self-efficacy _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Face it _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Look & Listen _____
Practice conceptual thinking		<input type="checkbox"/> Expedient <input type="checkbox"/> Avoiding <input type="checkbox"/> Apprehension		<input type="checkbox"/> Deliberate Action _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Self-efficacy _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Face it _____

SELF-HANDICAPPING LEADERSHIP: The Behaviors Holding Back Employees, Managers, and Companies, and How To Overcome Them

		___ Self-Deception		___ Look & Listen _____
Engage in “what-if” thinking		___ Expedient ___ Avoiding ___ Apprehension ___ Self-Deception		___ Deliberate Action _____ ___ Self-efficacy _____ ___ Face it _____ ___ Look & Listen _____
Create a map of the variables for a project and their interactions		___ Expedient ___ Avoiding ___ Apprehension ___ Self-Deception		___ Deliberate Action _____ ___ Self-efficacy _____ ___ Face it _____ ___ Look & Listen _____
Analyze group influences on your thinking		___ Expedient ___ Avoiding ___ Apprehension ___ Self-Deception		___ Deliberate Action _____ ___ Self-efficacy _____ ___ Face it _____ ___ Look & Listen _____
Choose a problem to work on when you have free moments		___ Expedient ___ Avoiding ___ Apprehension ___ Self-Deception		___ Deliberate Action _____ ___ Self-efficacy _____ ___ Face it _____ ___ Look & Listen _____
Better Prioritizing		___ Expedient ___ Avoiding ___ Apprehension ___ Self-Deception		___ Deliberate Action _____ ___ Self-efficacy _____ ___ Face it _____ ___ Look & Listen _____
Deal with procrastination		___ Expedient ___ Avoiding ___ Apprehension ___ Self-Deception		___ Deliberate Action _____ ___ Self-efficacy _____ ___ Face it _____ ___ Look & Listen _____
Ignoring people after you get your way		___ Expedient ___ Avoiding ___ Apprehension ___ Self-Deception		___ Deliberate Action _____ ___ Self-efficacy _____ ___ Face it _____ ___ Look & Listen _____
Understanding your place in the bigger picture		___ Expedient ___ Avoiding ___ Apprehension ___ Self-Deception		___ Deliberate Action _____ ___ Self-efficacy _____ ___ Face it _____ ___ Look & Listen _____
Employees focusing on you, not the customer		___ Expedient ___ Avoiding ___ Apprehension ___ Self-Deception		___ Deliberate Action _____ ___ Self-efficacy _____ ___ Face it _____ ___ Look & Listen _____

SELF-HANDICAPPING LEADERSHIP: The Behaviors Holding Back Employees, Managers, and Companies, and How To Overcome Them

Focusing on your current success not the future		___ Expedient ___ Avoiding ___ Apprehension ___ Self-Deception		___ Deliberate Action_____ ___ Self-efficacy_____ ___ Face it _____ ___ Look & Listen_____
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Baby Steps

Remember that baby steps can be a foundation for everything else. Achieving goals requires taking small steps first and success in baby steps reinforces success in subsequent steps.

The baby steps for this chapter are:

1. Use the ladder technique to examine a particular mindset’s hold on you.
2. Practice diagraming a problem to show you how complexity increases when you look at a problem different ways.
3. Explore the website *Mindtools.com*, create an account, and get started.

The Key Behaviors to use in diagraming your mindset are:

1. Start with determining your mindset toward one issue. Use the ladder technique and in the center list these things:
 - a. What is the challenge
 - b. How I deal with obstacles
 - c. How I view effort
 - d. How I handle criticism
 - e. How I view success of others.

2. Then on the left side, list what you do. Be honest. For example, let’s us use exercise³³:

I avoid exercise	The Challenge
When I have to, I give up	Obstacles
I think it is a waste/fruitless	Effort
I ignore it/am defensive	Criticism
I am jealous/threatened	Success of others

3. What you have is your current mindset toward exercise (and maybe losing weight). Now, on the right side, list what you think would be a better mindset. For example:

I avoid exercise	The Challenge	I seek/embrace it.
When I have to, I give up	Obstacles	I persist until successful
I think it is a waste/fruitless	Effort	I think it is the path to mastery
I ignore it/am defensive	Criticism	I learn from it/I take action
I am jealous/threatened	Success of others	I find lessons

SELF-HANDICAPPING LEADERSHIP: The Behaviors Holding Back Employees, Managers, and Companies, and How To Overcome Them

4. What mindsets need to be changed in your organization or life? How would you go about changing them?

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SELF-HANDICAPPING LEADERSHIP: The Behaviors Holding Back Employees, Managers, and Companies, and How To Overcome Them

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PERMISSIONS NEEDED:

Page 10-11, End Note 18 Covey Table