

Thinking About Thinking

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The business world is full of traps. Just ask the metalcasting facilities that continue to shut their doors at a rate of about one per week (the average over the past several years). Suppliers also are damaged when metalcasters close. Every now and then, one is forced out of business, a penalty for thinking of themselves as a casting industry supplier rather than as a supplier to industry.

A trap that businesses often fall into is assuming they don't need to pay attention in order to "think better." Tim Hurson, author of *Think Better*, disagrees.

I suspect you believe you can think just fine (thank you very much, Mr. Hurson). In fact, I'm with you in considering myself a successful thinker. After all, my firm is still a supplier to metalcasters, despite the wrenching turmoil within our industry this century. But reading *Think Better* got me thinking about my thinking.

Why should any of us think our thinking is inadequate? To answer this question properly, all of us need to lift our noses from the grindstone, step back, take a deep breath and ponder this question with all the unhurried clear-headedness we can muster.

And if you believe the premise that, on some topics, the things you think you know are incorrect, you're in good position to benefit from *Think Better*.

My local bookstore has books in many categories. I have found it a great place to shop for ideas. One can do this simply by reading books' tables of contents.

What struck me on a recent trip was the number of books in a new category, all fathered by a seminal book titled *Everything You Know Is Wrong*. The result has been a whole generation of books with titles like *Everything You Know About (Pick a Topic) Is Wrong*. Soon, this series of books will be as extensive as the *Complete Idiot's Guide to (Pick a Topic)* and the *(Pick a Topic) for Dummies* sections. This category of books is now being aggressively supplemented on an expanding shelf with sprightly titles from behavioral economists and Nobel Laureates that challenge the assumption that most of us are pretty good thinkers and decision makers.

There's really no point in telling you how good a book *Think Better* is unless you buy into this trend. However, if you know

that what you got here won't get you there (to paraphrase another recent book), if you suspect your core competence conceals a potentially fatal knowledge gap, or if the last time you went with your gut on a decision earned you nothing but heartburn, *Think Better* should be at the top of your reading list.

For those metalcasters struggling to help their company overcome seemingly insurmountable problems, there may well be no better book than *Think Better*. The book (subtitled *Your Company's Future Depends on It... And So Does Yours*) provides a six-step process to improving your company:

1. identify what's going on;
2. determine what defines success;
3. determine the question;
4. generate answers;
5. forge a solution;
6. align needed resources to get the job done.

The process sounds logical—and it is—but the genius of Hurson's techniques is the exhaustive manner in which he teaches you how to focus on each step. His guidance demonstrates how to make the right kind of lists, ask the right kinds of questions and choose the right kind of answers.

Hurson's process is designed to prevent the human tendency to leap to (incorrect) conclusions, be misguided by our (no-longer-valid) past experiences, defer to the boss (when he or she should be vigorously challenged), and seek shortcuts around arduous components of the process of thinking better (for which there are hundreds of plausible excuses). *Think Better* argues for validating that one is asking the right questions and exhausting a full range of options versus only a few.

However, just because Hurson's steps are easy to understand doesn't mean they are not sophisticated. He's coped with nearly every possible mistake a company can make when plotting survival strategies and overcome each of them successfully. Unfortunately, a great many metalcasting facilities can't say the same. *Think Better* can definitely help your company "generate fresh solutions to tough business problems," if that item happens to be on your to-do list.

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