

A GAME PLAN FOR DEVISING A GAME PLAN

We have put together a few ideas to stimulate your thought about a game plan. There is nothing magical about our ideas; no one of them is essential. Nevertheless, each represents a plausible point of attack, one way to begin to do something plausible to improve thinking in a regular way. Although you probably can't do all of these at the same time, we recommend an approach in which you experiment with all of them. You can add any others you find in this book or come up with yourself. After you familiarize yourself with some of the options, we explain how this game plan works.

1. Use "wasted" time. All humans waste some time. No one uses all of his or her time productively or even pleasurably. Sometimes we jump from one diversion to another without enjoying any of them or become irritated about matters beyond our control. Sometimes we fail to plan well, causing negative consequences that we easily could have avoided such as spending time unnecessarily trapped in traffic although we could have left a half hour earlier and avoided the rush. Sometimes we worry unproductively, spend time regretting what is past, or just stare blankly into space.

The key is that the time is "spent," and if we had thought about it and considered our options, we would not have deliberately spent our time in that way. So our idea is this: Take advantage of the time you normally waste by practicing good thinking during that interval. For example, instead of sitting in front of the TV at the end of the day, flicking from channel to channel in a vain search for a program worth watching, spend that time, or at least part of it, thinking back over your day and evaluating your strengths and weaknesses. You might ask yourself questions like these:

- When did I do my worst thinking today?
- When did I do my best thinking?
- What did I actually think about today?
- Did I figure out anything?
- Did I allow any negative thinking to frustrate me unnecessarily?
- If I had to repeat today, what would I do differently? Why?
- Did I do anything today to further my long-term goals?
- Did I act in accordance with my own expressed values?
- If I were to spend every day this way for 10 years, would I, at the end, have accomplished something worthy of that time?

Taking a little time with each question is important. It would be useful to review these questions periodically, perhaps weekly, to write your answers in a journal and, in so doing, keep a record of how your thinking is developing.

2. Handle a problem a day. At the beginning of each day (perhaps driving to work or going to school), choose a problem to work on when you have free moments. Figure out the logic of the problem by identifying its elements. Systematically think

through the questions: What exactly is the problem? How can I put it into words? What is the question? (See Chapter 10 for a template you might use.)

3. Internalize intellectual standards. Each week, study and act on your thinking *one* of the universal intellectual standards presented in this book. Focus one week on clarity, the next on accuracy, and so on. For example, focusing on *clarity* for the week, try to notice when you are being unclear in communicating with others. Notice when others are unclear in what they say. When you read, notice whether you are clear about what you are reading. When you write a paragraph for class, ask yourself whether you are clear about what you are trying to say and in conveying your thoughts in writing.

In doing this, you will practice four techniques of clarification: (1) clarifying what you are saying with some consideration given to your audience, (2) elaborating on your meaning in other words, (3) giving examples of what you mean from experiences you have had, and (4) using analogies, pictures, or diagrams to illustrate what you mean. In clarifying your thoughts, you should state, elaborate, illustrate, and exemplify your points, and then ask others to do the same.

4. Keep an intellectual journal. Each week, write out a certain number of entries. Use the following format for each important event you write about:

- Describe only situations that are emotionally significant to you (what you care deeply about).
- Describe only one situation at a time.
- Describe (and keep this separate) how you behaved in the situation. Be specific and exact. (What did you say? What did you do? How did you feel?)
- Analyze, in the light of what you have written, what precisely caused the situation; dig beneath the surface.
- Assess the implications of your analysis. (What did you learn? What would you do differently if you could relive the situation?)

5. Practice intellectual strategies. Choose a strategy from Chapter 3 and practice it. While using that strategy, record your observations, including what you are learning about yourself and how you can use that learning to improve your thinking.

6. Reshape your character. Each month, choose one intellectual standard to focus on, focusing on how you can develop that trait in yourself. For example, concentrating on intellectual humility, begin to notice when you admit you are wrong. Notice when you refuse to admit you are wrong, even in the face of evidence that you are truly wrong. Notice when you become defensive. Notice when a person tries to point out a deficiency in your work or your thinking and your arrogance keeps you from learning, when you say to yourself, "I already know everything I need to know about this subject," or when you are as much as he does. Who does he think he is, forcing his opinions on