

Application Guide

THE POWER OF KNOWING WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW WITH ADAM GRANT



BOTTOM LINE:

In an ever-changing world, it is essential to ask questions, maintain an open mind, remain flexible, and be willing to re-examine our positions and decisions based on the new information we discover.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- I. People often get stuck thinking too much like preachers, prosecutors, or politicians when trying to communicate and make decisions. A more effective approach is to think like a scientist.
 - A. **Preacher Mode:** Trying to proselytize one's own views
 - B. **Prosecutor Mode:** Attacking somebody else's views
 - C. **Politician Mode:** Only listening to someone when they have the same views and agree with one another
 - D. **Scientist Mode:** Asking questions, remaining open-minded and flexible to changing direction in the face of new information
- II. How to think like a scientist:
 - A. Don't let your ideas become part of your identity.
 - B. Have the humility to know what you don't know.
 - C. Have the curiosity to seek out new knowledge. It's hard to get good answers if we don't ask questions in the first place.
 - D. Be as motivated to search for reasons you might be wrong as you are to find out why you must be right.
- III. What blocks us from being open-minded to something new?
 - A. Feeling a threat to intelligence: *"If I admit I was wrong, I might not be as smart as I thought I was."*
 - B. Feeling a threat to image: *"Other people will think I'm incompetent or a bad decision-maker."*
 - C. Feeling a threat to integrity: *"If I change my mind, I will look like a hypocrite."*
 - D. Feeling a threat of exclusion: *"If I abandon the belief that the people around me share, I will no longer be accepted."*
- IV. Three ways to move into scientist mode:
 - A. **Build a challenge network:** a group of thoughtful critics you trust to hold up a mirror so you can see your own blindspots more clearly.
 1. They tell you the unpleasant truths over the comforting lies.
 2. It's important to be receptive to this feedback so you don't deter your network from being honest with you. Honesty can determine loyalty.
 - B. **Base your identity on your values, not your opinions.**
 1. People form their identity based on what they believe is true, but it should be grounded in what they think is important.
 2. Who you are should be about the principles you stand for, not the views you hold.
 - a. This helps you interact with people you intensely disagree with.
 - b. Shared values are common ground and can solve problems and end arguments.
 - C. **Engage in mental time travel.**

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1. People get stuck in their beliefs and opinions because they assume they will never change, but things we believed hundreds of years ago we find ridiculous now (e.g. the earth is flat).
2. There is almost no opinion or belief that is set in stone and can't change in the face of new information.

V. How to become more of a scientist and less of a critic:

- A. Get out of binary bias: the tendency to take a complex person or issue and oversimplify it into two categories such as right vs. wrong or good vs. evil.
- B. The world is full of shades of gray, and people who agree with one portion of an issue may disagree with another. Make it a goal to view disagreement not as two sides of a coin, but looking through many lenses of a prism.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR TEAM DISCUSSION

1. What is your biggest trap when it comes to communicating what you think? (preacher, prosecutor, or politician)?
2. What would you say holds you back most from being willing to change your mind about something you believe in?
3. Can you think of a time when you were presented with new information about something you were working on? What did you do with that information? Did it impact your company in any way?
4. Thinking about your team as a whole, what is one way you could collectively improve the way you think about your products and/or organization?

RESOURCES MENTIONED

1. [Think Again](#) by Adam Grant
2. [Originals](#) by Adam Grant
3. [Give and Take](#) by Adam Grant