

# How Self Awareness Leads To Better Brainpower

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{bot\_wrgoogle}But we also have to consider the content and patterns of those thoughts. Calm the busy mind and you may observe things more clearly, concentrate better, and think more efficiently - but not necessarily more effectively. A perfectly tuned and efficient car can still take you to the wrong destination, after all. Self awareness starts with this meditative observation of the "chatter" in your mind, but for more powerful thinking you have to look deeper, to see what influences are working there unnoticed.

## Common Biases That Prevent Effective Thinking

Suppose a scientist is studying the effects of various deficiencies in humans. One day he reads a research paper which hypothesizes that decreased copper levels in men contribute to criminal behavior. It's a new and interesting idea in his field, but he dismisses the idea quickly, noting that the study primarily shows just a correlation, which doesn't prove causation (there is a higher rate of copper deficiency among violent offenders in prison).

Now, let's suppose that he would ordinarily look into such an intriguing idea more closely. Correlation does give reason to look for causation, after all, especially on something as important as the possible link of a nutritional deficiency to criminal behavior. Why might he have reacted differently in this case, and without even knowing that he had done so? There are several common biases that may have been operating on an unconscious level in him.

First, he might have had a bad experience with the author of the study. Without a doubt we tend to have more difficulty giving credence to ideas that come from people (or newspapers or television news) we dislike. This is what can be referred to as a "source bias." If you want to test this phenomenon, find a great quote by a popular person and see how many people agree with it. Then tell another group that it's a quote from Adolph Hitler and see how many from that group think it's a great idea.

Second, he may be biased by his philosophy. In this case, he might strongly believe that people are entirely responsible for their actions. Our minds are powerful at a deep level, and quickly see if a given idea doesn't fit our existing beliefs, even if we do not note that consciously. As a result, this scientist might immediately discount any possibilities which contradict his "mental framework" or personal philosophy. We might call this a "philosophical bias." We can ignore even the best evidence if something challenges our basic belief system, and a lack of self awareness makes this an "invisible" habit.

Third, there is the basic "ego bias," which makes it harder for people to accept an idea they didn't come up with or have any involvement with (or more generally to have a hard time thinking in ways that challenge one's ideas about himself). Had he considered the idea of a deficiency increasing the chances of criminal behavior before, he might have loved that research paper (but that, in turn, could be an example of "confirmation bias," which leads us to believe those things which confirm our previous beliefs). If he had argued for something that contradicted the copper deficiency previously, it is easy to see that he might discount it's value. He would have to drop or alter his own idea in that case, and ego often prevent this, even among good scientists.

These are just three of the many common biases which can affect our thinking. The solution? Self awareness through self observation. It is difficult to correct a problem which we do not see and acknowledge, right? So for the highest level

of brainpower, we have to watch our own thoughts and notice the patterns and reactions.

For example, if the scientist in our story above was in the habit of self observation, he might have noticed that his dismissal of the new idea was more of a reaction than a reasoned response. This could have lead him to investigate whether he was reacting to his dislike of the author (source bias), or if the idea was unconsciously felt as an attack on his basic philosophy (philosophical bias), and therefore rejected. He might have even discovered a pattern in himself of ignoring ideas and evidence that he didn't originate or have previous involvement with (ego bias).

How to get in the habit of self observation, and therefore increase one's self awareness, which then leads to the possibility of more effective thinking, is a topic for another article. But seeing the need to do so is a good start.

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