

# How To Think Outside The Box

Contributed by Steve Gillman  
Tuesday, 17 March 2009

A look at what the 'box' is and how to think outside the box.

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You hear that to be more creative you need to think outside the box, but what is the box? It is your normal ways of thinking, and all the hidden assumptions you make. Imagine actually living in a box, and knowing the outside world only through the pictures and descriptions written on those four walls. Even the best pictures and most accurate descriptions couldn't encompass the totality of the world outside, so you would have all sorts of assumptions about the world that might not be too useful or true.

{bot\_wrgoogle}This metaphor is great one for understanding how limited our thinking can be, and it suggests an obvious solution as well. Your thinking and assumptions are like those pictures and descriptions, and they form the "walls" of your box, limiting what you can see or know about the world. The solution? Stop looking at them and get outside the box! Here is one of the best ways to do that.

## The Best Way To Get Outside The Box

Perhaps the best way to get out of your habitual thought patterns and have some new and creative ideas is to identify the assumptions you are making and challenge them. This is a powerful way to deal with everything from personal to business to artistic problems and issues. Let's look at some simple examples.

Suppose a young single man wants to buy a house, but he doesn't seem to be able to. He doesn't have the money saved for a down payment. Also, he can barely make his rent and a house will cost more per month than that. He is ready to give up when he decides to try thinking outside the box. Specifically, he remembers an article he read about identifying and challenging one's assumptions, so he tries that.

He starts by explaining to a friend why he thinks he can't buy a house. There are no more zero-down mortgages lately and he has no money saved. He doesn't even have enough extra income to save a down payment. His job doesn't pay enough to cover the costs of owning a home. "I may just have to wait a few years until I get a better job," he says. He clarifies this into the following list, even though he sees some of them not as assumptions, but as reality:

1. A down payment is necessary.
2. I have nothing for a down payment.
3. I can't save money for a down payment at this time.
4. My job has to pay enough to cover all the expenses of owning a home.

With the help of his friend, he challenges these assumptions one-by-one. Is a down payment really necessary? Maybe there are government programs that can help. Does he really have no down payment? His friend points out that he can use the money in his retirement account, and even avoid the usual tax penalty since he is a first-time home buyer. He also has some things he could sell to raise money. Can't save? If he worked overtime it could all go towards savings.

The problem of income seems irresolvable at first. He has been looking for a better job, he says. His friend points out that the idea of needing a better job is just another assumption. That makes him think about starting a business on weekends, but he doesn't hold out much hope for that. Then he again returns to the assumption that his job has to pay for the house. What if this wasn't true? What if something else or someone else helped pay for it?

That's when he remembers a friend of his who rented out rooms in his house. He got \$400 per room per month. Looked at this way, a house might be far cheaper than renting. Working with this and the other ideas, he is soon in a new home and in better financial shape than ever.

You can see how assumptions create a "box" that is tough to get out of. Argue about how to save Social Security and you might not notice the assumption that it's worth saving, rather than scrapping it in favor of something better. Assume that motorcycles need wheels and you'll never invent the first "motorskimobile" for use in snow. You need to both identify and challenge your assumptions to think out of the box.

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