

This is the day to *empathize* with others:

Empathize

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Empathize with Others

Uncover Your Ignorance
Notice Contradictions
Be Fair, Not Selfish
Stick to Your Purpose
Be Clear
Be Relevant
Question, Question, Question
Think Through Implications
Control Your Emotions
Control Your Desires
Be Reasonable
Show Mercy
Think for Yourself
Don't Be a Top Dog
Don't Be an Underdog
Don't Be a Worry Wart
Stop Blaming Your Parents
Critique the News Media
See Through Politicians
Be a Citizen of the World
Notice Media Garbage
Make Your Mark
Educate Yourself
Figure Out Where to Go

Be on the lookout for opportunities to empathize. Look for examples of empathetic *behavior* in others. Practice being empathetic. For example, whenever someone takes a position with which you disagree, state in your own words what you think the person is saying. Then ask the person whether you have accurately stated her or his position. Notice the extent to which others empathize with you. See whether there is a difference between what they say (“I understand”) and what their behavior possibly implies (that they aren’t really listening to you). Ask someone who is disagreeing with you to state what he or she understands you to be saying. Notice when people distort what is being said to keep from changing their views or giving up something in their interest. Notice when you do the same. By exercising intellectual empathy, you understand others more fully, expand your knowledge of your own ignorance, and gain deeper insight into your own mind.

Day One:

Learn to Empathize with Others

Intellectual empathy requires us to think within the viewpoints of others, especially those we think are wrong. This is difficult until we recognize how often we have been wrong in the past and others have been right. Those who think differently from us sometimes possess truths we have not yet discovered. Practice in thinking within others' viewpoints is crucial to your development as a thinker. Good thinkers value thinking within opposing viewpoints. They recognize that many truths can be acquired only when they try other ways of thinking. They value gaining new insights and expanding their views. They appreciate new ways of seeing the world. They do not assume that their perspective is the most reasonable one. They are willing to engage in dialog to understand other perspectives. They do not fear ideas and beliefs they do not understand or have never considered. They are ready to abandon beliefs they have passionately held when those beliefs are shown to be false or misleading.

Strategies for empathizing with others:

1. During a disagreement with someone, switch roles. Tell the person, "I will speak from your viewpoint for ten minutes if you will speak from mine. This way perhaps we can understand one another better." Afterward, each of you should correct the other's representation of your position: "The part of my position you don't understand is...."
2. During a discussion, summarize what another person is saying using this structure: "What I understand you to be saying is.... Is this correct?"
3. When reading, say to yourself what you think the author is saying. Explain it to someone else. Recheck the text for accuracy. This enables you to assess your understanding of an author's viewpoint. Only when you are sure you understand a viewpoint are you in a position to disagree (or agree) with it.

**"HE WHO LIVES IN IGNORANCE OF OTHERS LIVES IN
IGNORANCE OF HIMSELF."**

—ANONYMOUS

This is the day to *discover your ignorance:* Discover Your Ignorance Discover Your Ignorance

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Be on the lookout for intellectual arrogance, the tendency to confidently assert as true what you do not in fact know to be true. Try to discover the limitations and biases of your sources of information. Question those who speak with authority. Question the information they use in their arguments, the information they ignore, the information they distort. Question what you read and see in the media. Notice the confidence with which The News is asserted. Question the sources that “produce” the news. Whenever you feel inclined to make a bold statement, stop and ask how much you really know about what you’re asserting.

Day Two:

Develop Knowledge of Your Ignorance

Most of us assume that whatever we believe must be right. Though we were taught much of what we believe before we could critically analyze our beliefs, we nevertheless defend our beliefs as *the truth*. Good thinkers know this is absurd.

When you actively focus on uncovering your ignorance, you realize that you are often wrong. You look for opportunities to test your ideas for soundness. You recognize that much of what people believe is based on prejudice, bias, half-truths, and sometimes even superstition. You routinely question your beliefs. Your beliefs do not control you; you control your beliefs. You develop intellectual humility—awareness of the extent of your ignorance.

Intellectual humility is the disposition to distinguish, at any given moment and in any given situation, between what you know and what you don't. People disposed toward intellectual humility recognize the natural tendency of the mind to think it knows more than it does, to see itself as right when the evidence proves otherwise. They routinely think within alternative viewpoints, making sure they are accurately representing those viewpoints. They enter other viewpoints to understand them, rather than to dismiss them.

Socrates, an early Greek philosopher and teacher (c. 470–399 B.C.), was a living model of intellectual humility. Consider:

“Socrates philosophized by joining in a discussion with another person who thought he knew what justice, courage, or the like was. Under Socrates’ questioning it became clear that neither [of the two] knew, and they cooperated in a new effort, Socrates making interrogatory suggestions that were accepted or rejected by his friend. They failed to solve the problem, but, now conscious of their lack of knowledge, agreed to continue the search whenever possible (p. 483).”³

³ Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1972.

“Profoundly sensible of the inconsistencies of his own thoughts and words and actions, and shrewdly suspecting that the like inconsistencies were to be found in other men, he was careful always to place himself upon the standpoint of ignorance and to invite others to join him there, in order that, proving all things, he and they might hold fast to that which is good (p. 332).”⁴

People with intellectual humility (and they are rare) understand that there is far more that they will *never* know than they will *ever* know. They continually seek to learn more, to develop their intellectual abilities and expand their knowledge base, always with a healthy awareness of the limits of their knowledge.

Strategies for developing intellectual humility:

1. When you cannot find sufficient evidence that *proves* your belief to be true, begin by saying: “I may be wrong, but what I think is...” or “Up to this point I have believed...” or “Based on my limited knowledge in this area, I would say...”.
2. Notice when you argue for beliefs without evidence to justify them. Recognize why you are doing this.
3. Actively question beliefs that seem obviously true to you, especially deeply held beliefs such as religious, cultural, or political beliefs.
4. Find alternative sources of information that represent viewpoints you have never considered.
5. Don't be afraid to “explore” new beliefs, and hence to be open to new insights.
6. Make a list of everything you absolutely know about someone you think you know well. Then make a list of things you think are true about that person, but that you cannot be absolutely sure about. Then make a list of things you do not know about that person. Then, if you can trust the person, show him or her your list to see how accurate you are. What insights emerge for you after you get feedback on such lists?

⁴ Encyclopedia Britannica, Eleventh Edition, 1911.

Questions you might ask to identify weaknesses in your thinking:

- What do I really know (about myself, about this or that situation, about another person, about my nation, about what is going on in the world)?
- To what extent do my prejudices or biases influence my thinking?
- To what extent have I been indoctrinated into beliefs that might be false?
- How do the beliefs I have accepted uncritically keep me from seeing things as they are?
- Do I ever think outside the box (of my culture, nation, religion...)?
- How knowledgeable am I about alternative belief systems?
- How have my beliefs been shaped by the time period in which I was born, by the place in which I was raised, by my parents' beliefs, by my spouse's beliefs, by my religion, culture, politics, and so on?

**“WILLINGNESS TO BE TAUGHT WHAT WE DO NOT KNOW
IS THE SURE PLEDGE OF GROWTH BOTH IN
KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM.”**

—BLAIR

This is the day for *integrity:* Don't Be a Hypocrite Don't Be a Hypocrite

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Be on the lookout for contradictions or hypocrisy in your behavior and the behavior of others. Catch yourself using double standards. Notice when others do. Because hypocrisy is a natural human tendency, theoretically this should be easy. Look closely at what people say they believe. Compare this with what their behavior implies. Dig out inconsistencies in your thinking and behavior. Notice when you profess a belief, and then act in contradiction to that belief. Notice how you justify or rationalize inconsistencies in your behavior. Figure out the consequence of your hypocrisy. Does it enable you to get what you want without having to face the truth about yourself? Figure out the consequences of others' hypocrisy. However, if you don't see hypocrisy in yourself, look again and again and again.

Day Three:

Beware of Hypocrisy;

Notice Contradictions in Your Life

People are hypocritical in at least three ways. First, they tend to have higher standards for those with whom they disagree than they have for themselves or their friends. Second, they often fail to live in accordance with their professed beliefs. Third, they often fail to see contradictions in the behavior of people with high status.

Hypocrisy, then, is a state of mind unconcerned with honesty. It is often marked by unconscious contradictions and inconsistencies. Because the mind is naturally egocentric, it is naturally hypocritical. Yet at the same time, it can skillfully rationalize whatever it thinks and does. In other words, the human mind naturally wants to see itself in a positive light. The *appearance* of integrity is important to the egocentric mind. This is why, as humans, we actively hide our hypocrisy from ourselves and others. And although we expect others to adhere to much more rigid standards than the standards we impose on ourselves, we see ourselves as fair. Though we profess certain beliefs, we often fail to behave in accordance with those beliefs.

Only to the extent that our beliefs and actions are consistent, only when we say what we mean and mean what we say, do we have intellectual integrity.

When you resolve to live a life of integrity, you routinely examine your own inconsistencies and face them truthfully, without excuses. You want to know the truth about yourself. You want to know the truth in others. By facing your own hypocrisy, you begin to grow beyond it (while recognizing that you can never get full command of your hypocrisy because you can never get full command of your egocentricity). When you recognize it in others (especially those of status), they are less able to manipulate you.

Strategies for reducing hypocrisy in yourself:

1. Begin to notice situations in which you expect more from others than you do from yourself. Pin down the areas of your greatest hypocrisy (these are usually areas in which you are emotionally involved). Do you expect more from your spouse than you do from yourself? From your coworkers? From your subordinates? From your children?

2. Make a list of beliefs that seem most important to you. Then identify situations in which your behavior is inconsistent with those beliefs (where you say one thing and do another). Realize that what you really believe is embedded in that which you do, not that which you say. What does your behavior tell you about yourself? (For example, you might say that you love someone while often failing to behave in accordance with his or her interests.)

Strategies for noticing hypocrisy in others:

1. Observe the people around you. Begin to analyze the extent to which they say one thing and do another. Compare their words to their deeds. For example, notice how often people claim to love someone they criticize behind the person's back. This is a common form of bad faith.
2. Think about the people you are closest to—your partner, spouse, children, or friends. To what extent can you identify hypocrisy or integrity in those relationships? To what extent do they say what they mean and mean what they say? What problems are caused by their hypocrisy?

**“WE ARE COMPANIONS IN HYPOCRISY.”
—WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS**

**This is the
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being selfish:*
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Be on the lookout for selfishness—in yourself and others. Notice how often people justify their selfishness. Notice how often they object to the selfishness of others. Look closely at the role of selfishness in your life. Note how hard it is to be fair to those you have been taught to consider “evil.” Note how difficult it is to identify your own unfair behavior (because the mind naturally hides what it doesn’t want to face).

Day Four:

Be Fair, Not Selfish

Human thinking is naturally self-serving or selfish. Selfishness is a *native*, not learned, human tendency (though it can be encouraged or discouraged by one's culture). Humans naturally tend to look out for "number one." Unfortunately, that often means we are unfair to persons "two" and "three."

You don't have to be selfish. It is possible to develop as a fair person and thinker. You can learn to give significant attention to the desires, needs, and rights of others. You need not "cheat yourself" to be fair.

When you think fair-mindedly, you consider the rights and needs of others as equivalent to your own. You forego the pursuit of your desires when fair play requires it. You learn how to overcome your selfishness. You learn how to step outside your point of view and into others' points of view. You value fair-mindedness as a personal characteristic worth pursuing.

Strategies for developing as a fair-minded thinker:

1. Recognize anew, every day, that you, like every other human, are *naturally* self-centered—that you, like every other human, are primarily interested in how the world and everything in it can serve you. Only by bringing this idea to the forefront of your thinking can you begin to get command of your selfishness and self-centered tendencies.
2. Be on the alert to catch yourself in the mental act of self-deception—for example, ignoring others' viewpoints. Remember that all humans engage in some self-deception. The exceptional persons are those who recognize this tendency in themselves and consistently work to take command of it.
3. Log each time you do something selfish. Try to see past the rationalizations your mind uses to justify its self-serving behavior. Write down in detail how and when you are selfish. Then write down the point of view of those who are affected by your selfishness. Consider how you can avoid such behavior in future similar situations. You might use the following format to log your selfish episodes:
 - a. Today I was selfish in the following way...

- b. My selfish (but unspoken) thinking was as follows... (Be as honest as possible. Do not allow your mind to get away with self-deception as you detail your thinking.)
 - c. My selfishness affected the following person or people in the following way(s)...
 - d. In the future, I can avoid being selfish or self-centered in a similar situation by thinking and behaving in the following rational ways...
4. Take every opportunity you can to think broadly about issues that involve multiple viewpoints. Assume that your mind will tend to favor whatever perspective you hold in any given situation. Force your mind, if necessary, to consider other relevant ways of looking at the issue or situation (and to represent those viewpoints accurately, rather than in a distorted way).

Questions you can ask to foster fairness in your thinking:

- Am I being fair to...right now?
- Am I putting my *desires* ahead of the *rights* and *needs* of others? If so, what precisely am I after, and whose rights or needs am I ignoring or violating?
- When I think about the way I live, how often do I put myself in others' shoes?
- Do I have a selfish interest in not seeing the truth in this situation? If I face the truth, will I have to change my behavior?
- Do I think broadly enough to be fair? How many alternative perspectives have I explored? What national, religious, political, ideological, and social points of view have I considered?
- In what types of situations do I tend to be selfish? With my spouse? My children? My friends? At work?

**“SELFISHNESS IS THAT DETESTABLE VICE
WHICH NO ONE WILL FORGIVE IN OTHERS,
AND NO ONE IS WITHOUT IN HIMSELF.”**

—H.W. BEECHER

This is the day to *target* *purposes:*

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Be on the lookout for goals, purposes, objectives, agendas. Figure out what you are after and how you are seeking it. Determine whether your various goals are interwoven and convergent or in conflict and mutually inconsistent. Determine whether your real purposes are different from your expressed purposes. Ask yourself whether you can admit your real purposes (in this or that part of your life). Figure out what your family members, associates, and friends are after. What are their real and most basic goals? To what extent are their lives undermined by contradictory drives and aims? To what extent can they admit their real purposes? Examine personal goals, professional goals, political goals, economic goals, national goals. Make a list of your important goals and see if you find inconsistencies in them.

Day Five:

Know Your Purpose

Thinking is always guided by human purposes. Everything you do is related to some purpose you have. Your purpose is whatever you are trying to accomplish. It is your goal or objective in any given situation or context.

Your thinking goes wrong when you aren't clear about your purpose, have unrealistic purposes, have contradictory purposes, or don't stick to your expressed purpose. Some goals are short-range and transitory; others are long-range and permanent. Some are primary. Some are secondary. Some represent your central mission in life. Others become means to other ends.

In human life, there is often a discrepancy between public (announced) goals and private (unspoken) goals. Thus, a politician's *announced* goal is usually to serve public need. The *real* goal is often to get elected, to serve ambition, and to satisfy greed.

It is important to examine the purposes that guide how you live. Which of them are you explicitly aware of? Which of them lie beneath the surface of your thinking? Which of them would you be unwilling to admit to? How many of them guide you to superficial actions? How many of them guide you to important ends? Which of them are you having difficulty accomplishing, and why?

It is also important to be able to assess others' purposes. Remembering that people's real purposes often contradict their stated purposes will enable you to see through façades and keep from being manipulated by others.

Questions you can ask to target purpose:

- What exactly is my purpose in this situation?
- What am I trying to accomplish?
- Is this purpose realistic?
- Is this goal ethically justified?
- What is my most important task right now?
- What is the first thing I need to do to accomplish my purpose?
- What is the agenda of my spouse, my children, my friends?

- How does my agenda differ from my spouse's, employee's, or supervisor's?
- Does my stated agenda differ from my actual one?
- Would I be willing to admit to my true purpose in this situation?
If not, why not?

“THERE IS NO ROAD TO SUCCESS BUT THROUGH A CLEAR STRONG PURPOSE. NOTHING CAN TAKE ITS PLACE. A PURPOSE UNDERLIES CHARACTER, CULTURE, POSITION, ATTAINMENT OF EVERY SORT.”

—T.T. MUNGER
