

# Exploring Leadership

## PROBLEM SOLVING: INDEPENDENT THINKING

Regurgitating the thoughts of others is not quality thinking. Ineffective thinking leads to ineffective or even disastrous decisions and actions in our personal and working lives. Independent thinking is the ability to come up with original ideas and interpretations or to validate thinking that aligns with conventional thought. Independent thinking is having the confidence to draw on your own innate intelligence and depend on your own judgment. It's having your own views and values to guide you, rather than someone else's. If you don't think for yourself, others just might try and do it for you!

### CONVERSATION STARTER:

Have you ever seen a story in the news asked, "What were they thinking?!" Or maybe your own parents have asked you that question after a decision you made. Maybe the more important question to ask is "How were you thinking?" Do you think for yourself, or do you let others do it for you?

There are plenty of people out there who will happily tell you what to think, who want to direct and control you, and make decisions for you. If you're not thinking for yourself, you might also not be speaking for yourself. Others might step in and speak for you or interpret you in a way you didn't intend.

If you're not thinking for yourself or sharing your unique thinking then you're probably not contributing the value you have to offer nor feeling fully satisfied or engaged. When you don't have a voice, others can assume your opinion isn't valuable. So, let's find out how much of an Independent Thinker you are.

## EXPLORATION ACTIVITIES:

### FACILITATOR TIP:

- Make it clear that participants will not have to share their test results, so they can be truthful when they answer the questions.

- Handout the Independent Thinking Test (Appendix) & pencils.
- Give 8-10 minutes to have participants respond to the questions and total their responses.

### KEY OBJECTIVES:

- Identify aspects of independent thinking.
- Evaluate the capacity for independent thinking.

### WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- Copies of the Independent Thinking Test see Appendix
- Pens/Pencils



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What do the questions on which you marked 1 or 2 have in common? Can you identify a particular element of independent thinking that you struggle with?
- What do the questions on which you marked 4 or 5 have in common? In what element of independent thinking are you strong?
- When you answered the questions, what decisions and events in your life were you thinking of? Do you think your answers would be different if you thought of different ones?
- Do you think this test is a legitimate measure of your independent thinking? Why or why not?

## APPLICATION DISCUSSION:

- Describe a time in your life when you did not think for yourself and explain why. Under what circumstances are you willing to let others think for you? Why?
- Why is it important for people to think independently?
- How can you practice to develop your independent thinking skills?



## CONCLUSION:

Being able to think independently opens up a wealth of potential knowledge. It enables you to become more discerning about the things you hear, see and believe and helps you question values and assumptions. Learning to think independently now will help you in the future. For example in times of social pressure, choosing what degree to pursue or what to eat when you are living on your own. Independent thinking also hones your personal skills on many other levels, including the building of confidence in your ability to stand up for your beliefs. Think for yourself.

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## REFERENCES

- <https://www.aspey.com/blog-posts/2018/8/15/are-you-an-independent-thinker>
- <https://simplicable.com/en/independent-thinking>
- <https://www.docpotter.com/thifor-test.html>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPyPM25boh0>



# APPENDIX

## Independent Thinking Test

Think of how you make decisions and form opinions. Rate each item on a scale of 1-5 for how often the statement is true of you. 1 = *rarely like you* and 5 = *usually like you*. There are no "correct" responses. Simply answer the way that best describes how you usually feel and act.

- \_\_\_1. I listen actively and attentively.
- \_\_\_2. I consider several points of view before I make a decision.
- \_\_\_3. I seek alternative explanations.
- \_\_\_4. I respect others' religious beliefs.
- \_\_\_5. I openly question what I see and hear.
- \_\_\_6. I like to know what I am talking about before I start talking.
- \_\_\_7. I don't let emotions affect my decisions.
- \_\_\_8. I examine the evidence.
- \_\_\_9. I am skeptical of what people in authority say.
- \_\_\_10. I trust my instincts.
- \_\_\_11. I do what makes sense, not just obey laws.
- \_\_\_12. I always tell the truth.
- \_\_\_13. I do what I say I will do.
- \_\_\_14. I follow my conscience.
- \_\_\_15. I speak up when people in authority do wrong.
- \_\_\_16. I don't make excuses when I act badly.
- \_\_\_17. I always consider the consequences.
- \_\_\_18. I explore religious views different from my own.
- \_\_\_19. I state unpopular opinions.
- \_\_\_20. I speak up when someone is inappropriate.

----- Total

20-40: Others Think for You -- You give into other's pressures because you don't know what you want. When you sort out what matters most to you, you will be stronger. Take time to explore what really matters to you and how you see things.

41-60: Potential Independent Thinker -- You have the potential to think independently. Exercise your mental muscles by deciding your opinion on issues. Begin by gathering diverse information then weigh the pros and cons.

61-80: Promising Independent Thinker -- Your critical thinking skills are good. You avoid stereotypes and question experts and authorities. It's important to remind yourself to use your analytical skills. Look for opportunities to practice everyday.

81-100: Outstanding Independent Thinker

Your ability to think for yourself is outstanding. You are good at seeing scams and avoiding them. Be careful not to become complacent by being alert to your unquestioned assumptions.