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Big-picture thinking can benefit any person in any profession. When a CEO tells an employee that the ongoing relationship with the customer is more important than the sale of an individual product, he or she is reminding them of the big picture. When two parents are fed up with potty training, poor grades, or fender-benders, they need to think “big-picture” and remind themselves that the current difficult time is only a temporary season. Big-picture thinking brings wholeness and maturity to a person’s thinking. It brings perspective. It’s like making the frame of a picture bigger, and in the process expanding not only what you see, but what you are able to do.

Spend time with big-picture thinkers, and you will find that they:

1) *Learn Continually.* Big-picture thinkers are never satisfied with what they already know. They are always visiting new places, reading new books, meeting new people, learning new skills. And because of that practice, they often are able to connect the unconnected. They are lifelong learners.

To help yourself maintain a learner’s attitude, spend a few moments every morning thinking about your learning opportunities for the day. As you review your calendar and to-do list--knowing whom you will meet that day, what you will read, which meetings you will attend--note where you are most likely to learn something. Then mentally cue yourself to look attentively

for something that will allow you to improve yourself in that situation. This thorough examination of your day will help you to keep learning.

2) *Listen Intentionally.* An excellent way to broaden your experience is to listen to someone who has expertise in an area where you don’t. Ask questions to learn and understand. But in order to learn and grow, you must know what questions to ask and how to apply those answers to your life. Listening teaches you much more than talking.

When you meet with people, it’s good to have an agenda so that you can learn. It’s a great way to partner with people who can do things you can’t. Big-picture thinkers recognize that they don’t know a lot of things. They frequently ask penetrating questions to enlarge their understanding and thinking. If you want to become a better big-picture thinker, then become a good listener.

3) *Look Expansively.* Writer Henry David Thoreau wrote, “Many an object is not seen, though it falls within the range of our visual ray, because it does not come within the range of our intellectual ray.” Human beings habitually see their own world first. Quite often people become consumed with the trivial issues they perceive as problems for themselves. But those perceived problems zap their attention to the point they become oblivious to the clouds rolling in that are about to rain down bigger and real problems on their family, business, or organization. Big-picture thinkers realize there is

a world out there besides their own, and they make an effort to get outside of themselves and see other people’s worlds through their eyes. It’s hard to see the picture while inside the frame. To see how others see, you must first find out how they think. Becoming a good listener certainly helps with that. So does getting over your personal agenda and trying to take the other person’s perspective.

4) *Live Completely.* French essayist Michel Eyquem de Montaigne wrote, “The value of life lies not in the length of days, but in the use we make of them; a man may live long yet live very little.” The truth is that you can spend your life any way you want, but you can spend it only once. Becoming a big-picture thinker can help you to live with wholeness, to live a very fulfilling life. People who see the big picture expand their experience because they expand their world. As a result, they accomplish more than narrow-minded people. And they experience fewer unwanted surprises, too, because they are more likely to see the many components involved in any given situation: issues, people, relationships, timing, and values. They are also, therefore, usually more tolerant of other people and their thinking.

If you want to be a big-picture thinker, try employing these four actions I recommend. If you do, there’s a great chance you’ll become more enlightened by and appreciative of this vast and great world we live in.

~ The End ~