

What is a thinking environment, and why is it important?

A learning conversation with Rebecca Norton

Summary of content with timings

- 0.40 Thank you Rebecca for bringing to my attention Nancy Kline's various, and truly compelling books.
- 1.45 This today, is about issues around *using* the lessons from the 'Time to think' books and ideas.
- 2.05 In a thinking environment, people are given, very unusually the space and the time to think.
- 2.20 Are we ever given time to think without being interrupted or respectful reflection before a response?
- 2.50 For most of us not interrupting is a very deliberate, conscious process, it doesn't come naturally.
- 3.05 This whole difficult, hugely rewarding process is a discipline more than a learned skill.
- 3.20 In our enthusiasm to agree, and build on what has been said, we disrupt the thinking of others.
- 3.40 We distract and show our lack of giving space to think non verbally too particularly in facial gestures.
- 4.10 'Time to think' was published in 1999, it's been around a while, and is getting a lot of new fans.
- 5.20 Twenty years ago we weren't talking about mental health or wellbeing, this may prompt new interest.
- 5.40 Being supported, listen to, and shown respect will have a positive impact on feelings of wellbeing.
- 6.45 The first words in 'Time to think: 'Everything we do depends for its quality on the thinking we do first'.
- 6.55 This is a very bold, categorical statement, and I tell you what, it's a very true statement.
- 7.10 Being given time to think means we can air concerns, explore options, and make better decisions.
- 7.30 How many great ideas never get heard, because they get any time or space amidst all the noise?
- 7.55 Thinking before speaking can be transactional, in conversation, or a pattern of embedded behaviour.
- 7.55 Am I now thinking of what you just said, or will I say what I was thinking when you were speaking?
- 8.05 Will I think about what you just said, and maybe jettison what I might have, to build on your words?
- 8.25 In meetings, speaking the millisecond after someone has finished shows no listening took place.
- 8.40 It's very obvious when you haven't listened to somebody.
- 9.05 Just because somebody isn't talking, doesn't mean there isn't something going on.
- 9.20 Judging when to give 'purposeful silence' the thinking time needed without distraction, is a skill.
- 9.50 There aren't many things in 40 years in the 'learning business' that has had this much impact on me.
- 10.35 This is about respect: What people have on their mind, and say should be shown to be important.
- 11.05 Our wellbeing is helped when we are given the respectful, interested space to talk things through.
- 11.50 This is not about therapy sessions, this is for me, about hard-edged business effectiveness.

- 12.45 Nancy Kline quotes Charles Handy: 'How can I know what I think until I hear myself speak?'.
13.15 These are very carefully and deliberately selected, words, they are chosen for impact.
13.15 Handy knew that until we slow down fleeting (then lost) thoughts, and articulate them lose all value.
13.45 A skilled coach will often reflect back what a client has just said, often to their surprise.
14.40 I was told decades ago to read out loud what you've written to hear words that identify corrections.
15.15 Let's not kid ourselves that everything we think has been retained and understood by ourselves.
15.35 When we speak what we think it slows us down processes more effectively, and explicitly articulates.
15.55 If you genuinely get the full contribution of a whole team, just think how powerful that could be.
16.20 Some people think they run participative meetings, typically they don't, they are dominated by a few.
16.35 We need to invite full, unhurried contributions, listening for real when they are prompted to speak.
16.50 It's hard to say 'I know what I think what do you think?', and it's hard to listen to conflicting positions.
17.05 Nancy Kline says we should listen with interest, respect, and are you ready for this...fascination!
17.10 When have you seen in a workplace true signs of being fascinated by what someone else says?
17.35 This is surely why we employ different people in a team – to get the most from diverse thoughts.
18.10 Let's review briefly Nancy Kline's 10 components of a thinking environment.
18.30 One that sticks out for me is 'appreciation', Rebecca then gives example from her teacher training.
19.35 Appreciation must be authentic, even when done for the right reasons, it's often perceived as unreal.
19.45 What worries me is that too many are too far embedded in not doing any of this to give it a go.
20.15 To work in a team, this must be introduced sensitively, and maybe one or two elements at a time.
21.00 Let's talk about some of the pay-offs that are the outcomes of working in a thinking environment...
21.00 The six issues listed: More participation and contribution; greater engagement and motivation...
21.00 Retention and better use of talent; Better ideas, innovation and creativity; Higher quality decisions...
21.00 More positive workplaces, happier people. These are direct, measurable, operational issues.
22.10 The potential impact is massive, on productivity, relationships, customer service and a lot more.
22.35 I feel this is a big ask of everyone in all parts of a large organisation: It can work a team at a time.
24.50 There is no (real) argument against this, what is the argument against giving people time to think?
25.10 Barriers will be about ego management, feeling this is too hard, and the distrust of anything new.
25.50 Some see this as 'airy fairy' and it really isn't – that's why it must be implemented in a sensitive way.
27.20 It's about doing hard-edged practical things a lot better that then impacts directly on the bottom line.
27.30 Is this too much for individuals or organisations who have settled for acceptable under-performance?

- 28.20 If current less than best performance is felt to be acceptable why take the risk of trying to be better?
- 28.30 A risk-averse culture will not be prepared to try something new – whatever the potential pay-offs.
- 29.20 Sometimes we throw words like ‘resilience’ and ‘persistence’ around like we know what they mean.
- 29.50 I fear key people who set the tone will give up on this before it is embedded and makes a difference.
- 30.05 You can’t just try this once or twice, then decide it doesn’t work.
- 30.20 Maybe implementation works best with an individual team manager of the one team at a time.
- 31.20 To make this work requires an effort most organisations are not prepared to make.
- 31.30 If you are able to do what others have tried, and given up upon, then you have an edge to exploit.
- 31.40 ‘If you can do what others don’t, you will get results that others won’t’...cheesy, and very true!

View the video at my YouTube channel – link from website homepage below.

Listen at my Podcast: ‘The learning ear’ – also accessible from my website homepage.

www.andrewgibbons.co.uk

andrew@andrewgibbons.co.uk

www.thelearninggear.org