



## ***Disruptive Times Demand Disruptive Thinking***

*Written by Susan Topping Gauthier, Partner-Owner*

One of my favorite quotes from a contemporary master of business success reads “*Embrace reality and deal with it.*” As with many such words of wisdom, it is easier said than done.

The author is Ray Dalio, and the quotation is a chapter heading in his book *Principles* (Simon and Schuster, ©2017). *CIO Magazine* refers to Dalio as “the Steve Jobs of investing” pointing to his acclaim for building the largest hedge fund in the world<sup>1</sup>. His book is a compilation of unconventional principles in life and in work that he says he learned over a lifetime of making a lot of mistakes and spending a lot of time reflecting on them. In other words, Dalio is someone who took on his personal experience of reality and sought to bring his best thinking to bear on the matter at hand.

Similarly, we find that great leaders are both willing and able to take on their personal experience of reality. They can un-collapse the human phenomenon of what Dalio identifies as one’s emotional-based lower-level decision-making from the higher-level logical-based brain function. Humans have the capability to shift their thinking by shifting their thoughts and how they are related to those thoughts and corresponding emotions. As he writes on page 250, ‘When you do all this with radical open-mindedness, you will become more aware not just of what you’re seeing, but what

you're not seeing and what others, perhaps are.”

I often use the term “intellectual gymnastics” to describe what it might be like to challenge and stretch one’s familiar and often preferred trains of thought, especially applied in everyday management and problem-solving. One’s personal experience of taking on their own personal perception of reality with the aim of challenging and stretching what is natural and familiar, necessitates a disruption—it’s not called a Comfort Zone for nothing!

Here are 5 ways you can challenge yourself to practice thinking newly:

1. Embrace getting comfortable outside your comfort zone by learning something new.
2. Be willing to discover the unexamined enormity of your blind spots by listening to someone share a different point of view than yours and looking for its validity.
3. Select a real-life, on-the-job issue or dilemma worth tackling and invent 3 possible solutions and vet your new thinking with 3 subject-matter-experts, then move forward with the best.
4. When you notice you are “trusting your instincts”—be willing to suspend your beliefs long enough to un-conceal another possible interpretation or solution, then choose.
5. Practice taking actions that ‘break up’ your status quo by asking “What if?” then acting newly: *What if I took a different route to the office? What if I listened fully before replying or criticizing? What if I started and ended my meetings on time? What if I stopped making myself or others wrong by not re-acting passive aggressively (or not re-acting sarcastically, or not re-acting irritated, etc.)*

The times we are living in are like none other in all of human history. There is no “going back” to the former (a.k.a. familiar) ways of business. The new normal demands leaders lead and manage their teams with new thinking, new speaking, new listening and new actions.

As Dalio points out: *“Don’t get hung up on your views of how things ‘should’ be because you will miss out on learning how they really are.”*

Let us know-- How will you practice disruptive thinking?

<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bridgewater\\_Associates](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bridgewater_Associates)