



Verdict Thinking vs. Let-It-Flow Thinking

S. M. Miller, Ph.D.

Many people when confronted by an issue, question, the unknown, leap to judgment. Yes-No presents as the choice; immediate judgment, decision, verdict is the response. The result is the situation is not examined, thought about, explored. The verdict stops thinking before the issue is investigated, mulled over, explored in possibly several directions. Creativity is blocked—an answer, a verdict of yes-no, dominates and ends the process of exploration.

Verdict thinking can be the mode of operation for true believers, the comfortable in their comfortable thinking, those who have been discouraged from confidence in their ability to think for themselves, the intellectually lazy... That is—most of us.

I am aware of this outlook because I am often accused of asking too many questions rather than offering an immediate verdict, my opinion, on a suggested way of thinking. Of course, asking questions can be a put-down way, trying to show that a suggested way of thinking is inappropriate, ineffective, undesirable. But questions can be a way of letting ideas flow, be generated, extended, modified, lead to additional ways of thinking, opening up rather than closing down possible creativity.

Let-it-flow thinking is not common, little encouraged in educational institutions and even less promoted in most employment and political activities. Much of verdict thinking is based on what are regarded as formulas—if a recommendation seems out of sync with the formula in that field, then immediately reject it. That outlook saves time and blocks discomfort (e.g., pushed to revise or reject one of our reliable, intellectually easing outlooks).

How to promote let-it-flow thinking? Make clear that your raising of a question is an exploration, not a way of refuting a proposition (e.g., “I’m not clear on how that proposal would deal with this issue” rather than “That proposal wouldn’t deal with this issue.” Or, “If we assume that your proposal would work, what should we be thinking about a follow-up step?” Or, “Does that way of thinking challenge some of our assumptions?”).

Important in moving beyond verdict thinking is the gaining of enjoyment in exploration. Why should geographical exploration (e.g., tourism) be enjoyable and idea, intellectual, political exploration be regarded as a no-no?

