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Common problem-solving traps and how to avoid them

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Overthinking will only complicate a task, instead come up with a solution and begin to test it



Overthinking a problem, leaping to solutions and self-censoring your ideas are three common thought traps that might be avoided with simple techniques.

The first, overthinking, is unhelpful because it complicates the original problem. Instead we should come up with an early solution, stop thinking it through and start testing it instead. An important part of this is to work out the assumptions we have made in order for the solution to work, then to test them.



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“Pick the most worrisome assumptions because they are the ones that will defeat you,” says Matthew May, author of *Winning the Brain Game*. Once you have tested your assumptions, more planning can be done.

Leaping to solutions is common when brainstorming and makes for unoriginal ideas. Mr May’s remedy is to inject an extra step into the process before starting to come up with solutions. This step is to **challenge the problem** being posed by trying to look at it in different ways using “why”, “what if” and “how”. Then brainstorm the two best questions.

Self-censoring kills good ideas before they can be aired. Make yourself more objective about them by distancing yourself from them, says Mr May. This could include writing down what you think about your idea in the third person. “It makes you a more objective observer,” he says.

Trisha Scudder, founder of Executive Coaching Group in the US, says that the way we think is set during childhood, but a crisis, or a process such as therapy, can transform our thinking.

Once you are aware of how your thinking has become stuck and the cost this has attached to it, you can work on changing it.

Boost your online profile

The best way to manage your **digital footprint** is to post useful and interesting content, says Guy Kawasaki, entrepreneur and co-author of *The Art of Social Media*. Searches by employers or clients should reveal an online presence that reflects well on you but rather than worrying about any downsides, you should focus on the positive ways you can position yourself with your posts, he says.