



MEMBER UPDATE

ReFresh

January 26, 2022



This week...

Do You have an Open Mind?

“Those who can’t change their minds can’t change anything.” – George Bernard Shaw

Someone who demonstrates open-mindedness is receptive to a wide variety of ideas, arguments, and information. The capability to think openly is essential to critical and rational thinking. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines ‘open mind’ as: a willingness to listen to or accept different ideas or opinions.

People who are not open to other ideas and perspectives are challenged to see all the factors contributing to a problem and, therefore, may not be able to come up with effective solutions. However, being able to revise outdated or incorrect beliefs is an important part of learning and personal growth.

Why is it not Easy to be Open-Minded?

Being open-minded can be challenging. When you are open to new ideas it is possible to experience cognitive dissonance, the phenomenon that occurs when we learn new things that are in conflict with existing beliefs, which can be a confusing feeling to address. It doesn't help that ***our brains are wired to be closed minded***. For efficiency, our brains are constantly creating shortcuts, shutting off information pathways, and causing us to close our minds.

We must also contend with a natural tendency towards perception bias, where we look for information that affirms what we already think, as well as attribution error, where we blame behaviour on personality rather than circumstance. There are numerous mental obstacles that we must overcome, which cause us to stereotype, cling to first impressions, or make hasty, incomplete judgements about the people and world around us – all ***for the goal of saving mental energy!***

To maintain an open mind, ***we must strategically work at it***. Our brains may be wired against us, but we can change the way we think over time, so we can gain the benefits of being open-minded. When you are open, you have the ability to consider other perspectives and approach people with empathy, even when you disagree with them.

Of course, open-mindedness has its limits. You do not need to sympathize with every ideology, but trying to understand the factors that may have led someone to those ideas can be helpful in persuading them to challenge their own perception bias.

Characteristics of Open-Minded People

- Curious to hear what others think.
- Able to have their ideas challenged.
- Don't get angry when they are wrong.
- Show empathy for other people.
- Consider what other people are thinking.
- Humble about their own knowledge and expertise.
- Want to hear what other people have to say.
- Believe others have a right to share their beliefs and thoughts.

The Benefits of an Open Mind

Open-mindedness helps you:

Gain insight. Challenging your existing beliefs and considering new ideas can give you fresh insights about the world and teach you new things about yourself.

Have new experiences. Being open to other ideas can open you up to new experiences.

Achieve personal growth. Keeping an open mind can help you learn new things about the world and allow you to grow as a person.

Become mentally strong. New ideas and experiences can help you become a stronger, more vibrant person. Your experiences and knowledge continue to build on one another.

Feel more optimistic. Staying closed-minded often leads to a greater sense of negativity. Being open can help inspire a more optimistic attitude toward life and the future.

Learn new things. Pushing your boundaries and reaching out to people with different perspectives and experiences can help keep your mind fresh.

Opening your Mind

If you want to expand your observations, start paying close attention to your pre-existing beliefs and be intentional in how you can begin to expand your perspectives. Here are a few examples of how to do just that.

Fight the Confirmation Bias

A cognitive tendency known as confirmation bias can be one of the biggest roadblocks to open-mindedness. ***Confirmation bias involves paying more attention to things that confirm our existing beliefs,*** while simultaneously discounting evidence that challenges what we think.

Being aware of confirmation bias is one of the best ways to combat it; try taking a moment to consider how this bias may affect how you evaluate information. If it seems like you are readily accepting something because it supports your existing arguments, take time to consider some arguments that might challenge your ideas.

Ask Questions

It is important to be able to have trust and faith in your choices, but what may seem like your steadfast commitment to certain ideals might be a form of closed-mindedness.

Part of being open-minded involves being able to make personal inquiries. As you encounter new information, ask yourself a few questions:

- How much do you really know about the topic?
- How trustworthy is the source?
- Have you considered other ideas?
- Do you have any biases that might be influencing your thinking?

Give It Time

When you hear something you disagree with, your first instinct may be to shut down or seek to prove the other person wrong – often before you even have a chance to fully listen and consider all of the points. ***This is particularly challenging when you have a strong emotional response*** and you do not like what you have heard. You may act in the heat of the moment without taking the time to consider all aspects of the problem.

Instead, give yourself a brief period to consider the argument and evaluate the evidence; take a few moments to consider the following points before you respond:

- Are your arguments based upon multiple sources?
- Are you willing to reassess your opinion in the face of conflicting evidence?
- Will you hold on to your opinion even if the evidence discounts it?

Practice Intellectual Humility

Even if you are an expert on a topic, try to keep in mind that the brain is much more imperfect and imprecise than most of us realize. Research has shown, ***being knowledgeable about something can contribute to closed-mindedness.***

When people think that they are an authority on a topic, they are less willing to consider new information and ideas. This is an example of a cognitive bias known as the **Dunning-Kruger** effect which leads people to overestimate their own knowledge of a topic, making them blind to their own ignorance.

True experts tend to be humbler about their knowledge – they know that there's always more to learn.

Embrace the Opportunity to Learn

Being open-minded is powerful because you can gain knowledge and new perspectives, and improve different areas in your life, including your health and relationships. This trait may not come naturally, but we invite you to try some of these tips to improve your ability to be more open-minded.

Want to learn more?

Click here for [9 quick, fun exercises to enhance open-mindedness.](#)

Here's an assessment on how open-minded you are. I tried a few quizzes online but found [this one](#) to be informative and relevant.

To really dig deep – here is a [24 min podcast](#) on this subject with even more tips.

Sources

Fobes | [How To Keep An Open Mind](#)

MIA Online | [Ways Being Open-minded Can Change Your Life and Health for the Better](#)

Very Well Mind | [The Benefits of Being Open-Minded](#)