

Make time to think



By [Alon Raiz](#)

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In her authoritative book, *Time to Think*, author Nancy Kline talks about the importance of creating time to think. During a period, such as the one in which we currently find ourselves, the intensity levels are higher, the number of decisions we're making is greater, and the system shock is creating what seems to be one crisis after another.



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There literally seems to be no time – not even a few minutes – in which to just sit down and think. In a system shock, we are forced to make more decisions with less information and in less time than ever before, and these decisions tend to be tactical decisions with very few focused on the medium- and long-term prospects of our businesses. This, by the way, is completely understandable and the right thing to do.

However, during the process of a system shock, there comes a point where it is important for us to lift our heads and look beyond day-to-day tactical responses and, at the very least, to move towards a medium-term perspective.

To use the analogy of a ship in stormy seas, the first phase when entering a storm is to ensure that everything is battened down, the hatches are locked, there are no leaks and everyone is manning their positions. As wave after wave breaks over the bow, it's important for the captain to position the ship in such a way that the least amount of damage will occur. This is generally done by pointing the bow directly into the waves.

As the storm starts to subside and the intensity of the waves reduces, the captain needs to ensure the ship isn't now heading for a dangerous rocky outcrop. In other words, at some point, you have to look beyond the pounding waves and to where your ship is now heading. If you carry on drifting in the direction you've been moving during the storm, the ship may

land up on the rocks and that will sink your ship just as surely as the storm could have.

Prepare for the future

The business equivalent to seeing beyond the immediate waves crashing over your bow and against the hull is thinking time. As the intensity of decision making starts to subside along with the number of decisions you have to make, it's important to use that time to start analysing and thinking about where your ship (business) is heading.

In business, there is the concept that your strategy needs to relate to your vision as well as your internal and external contexts. Decision making should be carried out as a function of where you want to go, while considering your actual internal and external environment and situation.



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The Covid-19 storm has most likely fundamentally changed your internal and external contexts. For example, your staff complement and market conditions will be significantly different now.

To continue with the storm metaphor, your current position may be 200 nautical miles from where you were before Covid-19 with your ship pointing in a completely different direction. Therefore, the strategic decisions and plans you made prior to the lockdown will more than likely be invalid now and you will need to formulate new strategies.

What is very important to say at this point is that the storm is not over yet. The waves and tide – albeit to a perceived lesser extent (I believe that there is way more pain in the system that will still need to translate) – are still influencing the direction and position of your business ship.

We now need time to think and plan our way out of our current position, to ask ourselves if our vision is still valid and to start reformulating a new plan and strategy. All this requires the discipline to make time to think. While this may sound simple, it's very difficult for most entrepreneurs to actually do.

Every business is unique

Bear in mind that everyone is different so you should adapt the formula I share below to suit your own context and personal preferences.

First, find a comfortable chair in a quite place in your home or office (preferably in front of your “war room” wall on which you have stuck all your sticky notes relating to resources, opportunities and questions). Make sure you have a pen and piece of paper handy. Try to choose a time of day when you are least likely to be disturbed. (I usually do this in the

evening with a cup of tea or a glass of wine.)

Start off by standing up and scanning the exploded resources you have diligently been sticking up. Allow your eyes to wander slowly over each resource so that it enters your subconscious. Do the same for all the sticky notes you have placed under the heading of opportunities. Finally read through your big questions sticky notes.

After going through all the notes, sit down and start trying to answer your big questions. You should allow your mind to wander. Allow it to eject all obvious thoughts. After around ten minutes of wandering, focus your attention on one of your big questions.



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Ask yourself the question mentally and allow your mind to wander again. It's natural for your mind to go to all sorts of places. The important thing is to bring it back to your question. Your mind will either wander back to where it was before or it will start a new nodal thought. Try to elicit at least three nodal thoughts and then let your mind toggle between all three as you continue thinking. Your mind will land up focusing on one of these thoughts, choosing the one that is most pertinent.

Remember, you need to continually corral your thoughts on how to solve the problem back to your business resources and the opportunities you have identified. The trick is to triangulate the three aspects: the opportunities give your thoughts direction; the resources show you what you have to work with; and the big question creates a destination.

Effectively, you're working (thinking) with a collection of if-then statements, i.e. if this happens then that will (most probably) happen and, as a consequence, then that and then that will happen. You have to follow the path diligently because there will be more than one "then that will happen". When we talk about time to think in a crisis, we are really talking about considering each of these paths and the probabilities of them actually occurring.

However, you cannot simply think. You also need to write down your thoughts in order to explore them further, create an action list and then, of course, take action. You may come up with as few as two or three actions or as many as 20. By actioning your list, you will effectively change the direction of your ship (business) so that it points towards the opportunities you have formulated during the system shock.

Thinking is for the mind what exercise is for the body. Everyone knows that you need to make time to look after your body, to go to the gym, exercise, etc. The benefits are a better quality of life. And that is true. But taking time to think, and think properly, looks after your business and the benefits are better decisions that result in a more successful business. Take time out to exercise and take time out to think!

ABOUT ALLON RAIZ

Allon Raiz is the CEO of Raizcorp. In 2008, Raiz was selected as a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum, and in 2011 he was appointed for the first time as a member of the Global Agenda Council on Fostering Entrepreneurship. Following a series of entrepreneurship master classes delivered at Oxford University in 2014, 2015 and 2016, Raiz has been recognised as the Entrepreneur-in-Residence at the University of Oxford's Saïd Business School.

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