



DEEPER THINKING ADVANTAGE

A Practical Guide for
CHANGE  **MAKERS**

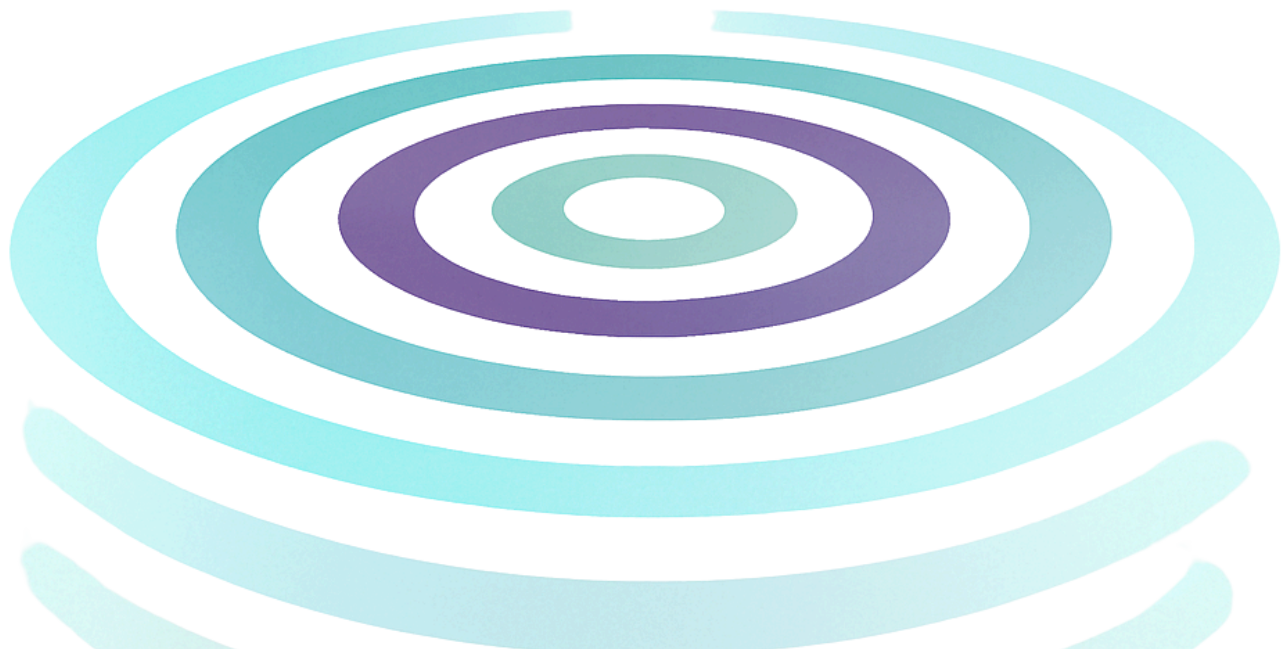




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If you're a leader feeling stuck in survival mode —you're not alone.

Katie Trowbridge has been there too.



She's worn the heels of a marketing manager, the flats of a teacher, and now the boots of a CEO on a mission to reimagine how we lead, learn, and connect.

Katie started her career climbing the corporate marketing ladder, armed with two master's degrees. After too many meetings and surface-level wins, she realized something was missing. She pivoted to education and found it: fearless curiosity, real connection, and courageous thinking.

Today, Katie is the author of several books, the creator of the CREATE Method, and a national speaker. She brings the wisdom of exceptional educators into boardrooms, conference stages, and leadership retreats across the country—equipping leaders to think harder, care more, and build cultures where creativity and critical thinking thrive.

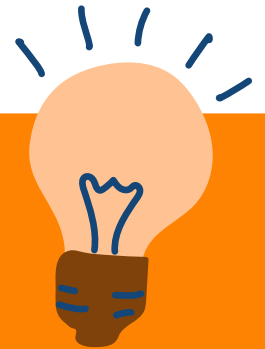



Katie Trowbridge
Author, Speaker, CEO



WHAT IS

DEEPER THINKING



curious thinking



A deep desire to learn, explore, and understand. Curiosity drives us to ask questions, seek answers, and push our knowledge boundaries. It's the spark that ignites learning, discovery, and innovation.

creative thinking

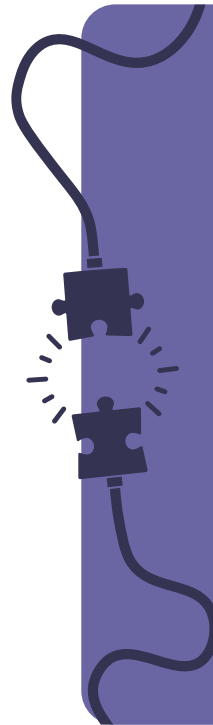
The ability to generate new ideas, approach problems in unique ways, and envision possibilities that don't yet exist. It's about innovation, imagination, and exploring "what could be." Creative thinking often involves breaking out of conventional patterns and finding original solutions to challenges.

critical thinking



Critical thinking is the process of analyzing, evaluating, and questioning information or assumptions to make reasoned and well-informed decisions. It involves logic, evidence-based reasoning, and the ability to consider multiple viewpoints while identifying biases or gaps in knowledge.

connected thinking



The ability to approach interactions with an open mind, actively listening to and valuing diverse perspectives. It encompasses showing respect, demonstrating empathy, and fostering collaboration, creating meaningful relationships built on understanding.





CURIOSITY



CREATIVE
THINKING



**DEEPER
THINKING**

CONNECTION



CRITICAL
THINKING



SURFACE-LEVEL THINKING

The Foundation

Surface-level thinking is like skimming the surface of a pool—you get wet, but you're not diving in. Sure, you may be able to recall and recognize information, but that's usually where it ends. This kind of knowledge often relies on strategies like memorization and repetition. Let's be honest—how many of the math theorems are still fresh in your mind? Exactly.

While it's a starting point, surface-level thinking doesn't pack the punch needed to spark curiosity or fuel real cognitive and emotional growth. If we don't move past this level, we risk getting stuck, missing out on the chance to fully engage with the world in dynamic and meaningful ways.

CHANGE THE WAY YOU WORK

Surface thinking skims the surface.
You learn facts but miss depth.

- Ask one open-ended question a day.
- Explore a new idea each week.
- List three takeaways at the end of each month.



SHALLOW THINKING



Connecting the Dots

Shallow Thinking: The Illusion of Understanding


Shallow thinking lives just below the surface. It's where we begin to connect dots, linking facts to basic ideas and applying what we know, but usually in straightforward, familiar ways. Maybe it's delivering a polished presentation, following a step-by-step process, or checking every box on a to-do list. It feels productive. It looks impressive. But often, the insight fades just as quickly as the task ends.

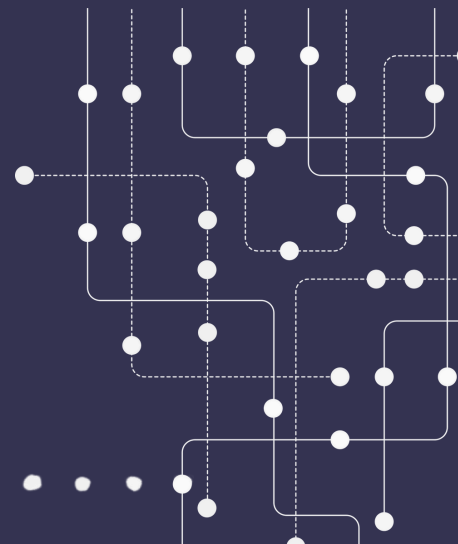
That's the hallmark of shallow thinking: performance without depth. We focus on doing rather than understanding. We stay within the boundaries of what's expected, relying on routines and templates instead of engaging with complexity or nuance. It's safe. It's efficient. But it rarely leads to lasting growth.

And here's the challenge: shallow thinking won't prepare us for the messiness of real life. It doesn't help us make thoughtful decisions, navigate uncertainty, or solve meaningful problems. When we linger here, we stay busy—but not better.

CHANGE THE WAY YOU WORK

Shallow thinking links ideas in simple ways. Those links fade fast.

- Pair ideas with fun comparisons.
 - Blend two concepts into a quick story.
 - Draw web-style idea maps.
- 



DEEP THINKING

The Ultimate Goal

Deep thinking is where real insight begins. It's about examining ideas, making connections, and applying what you know in ways that are meaningful and far-reaching. It's where creative and critical thinking work together to unlock true understanding.

Ask someone, "What is gravity?"

A **surface response** might be, "It's what makes things fall."

A **shallow thinker** might say, "It's Earth's force of attraction—9.8 meters per second squared."

But someone **thinking deeply**? They'll explore how gravity shapes the universe, affects time, influences design and technology, and raises questions we haven't even answered yet. They look beyond the obvious. They stretch the idea until it reveals something new.

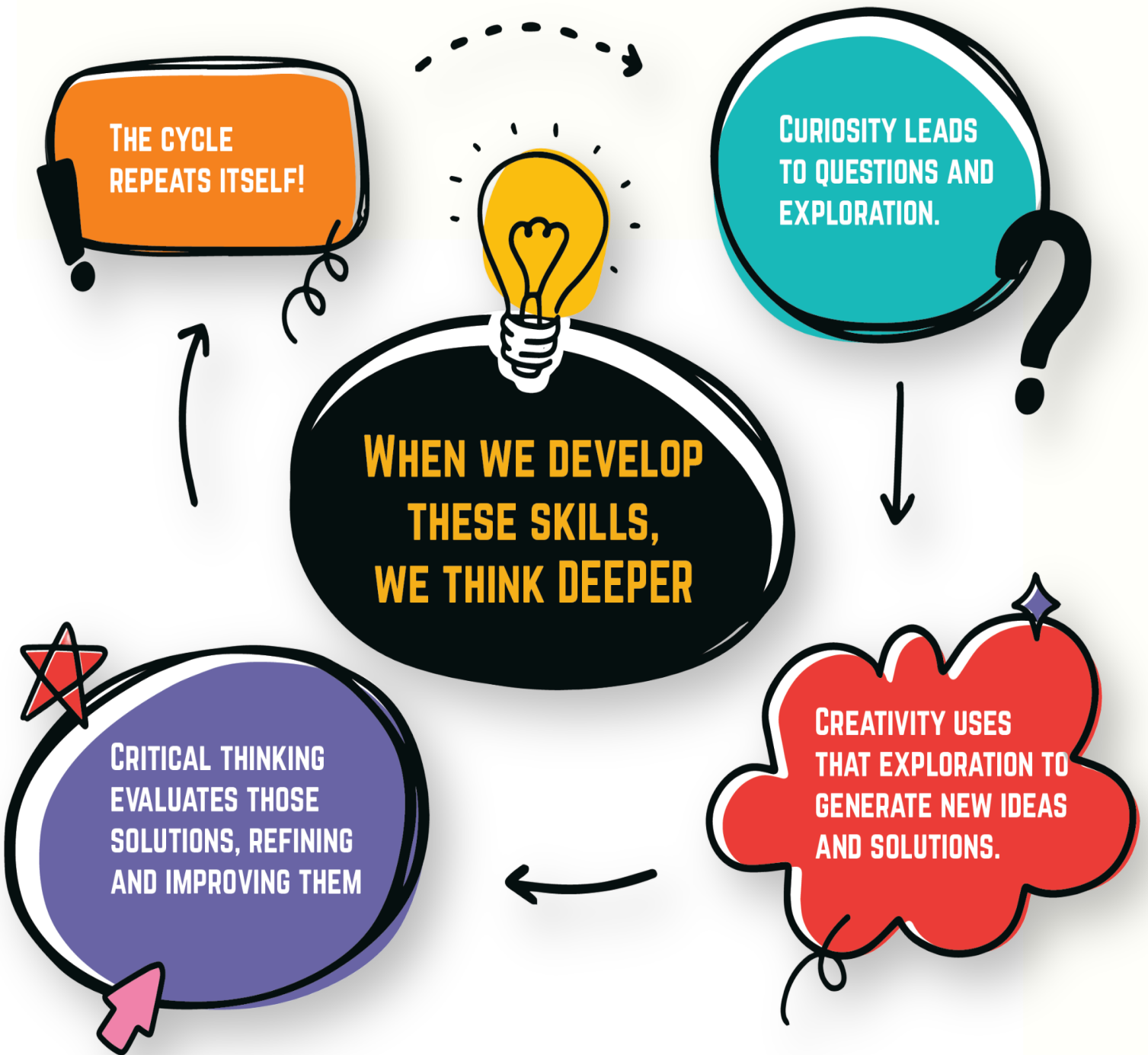
That's the power of deep thinking. It doesn't just help you know more—it helps you understand more. It leads to better decisions, more creative solutions, and a stronger sense of meaning in what you do and how you live

CHANGE THE WAY YOU WORK

Deep thinking turns facts into insight. It sparks new questions.

- Ask only "what if" questions.
- Build mini-ventures from sparks.
- Pitch from other viewpoints.
- Spotlight bold creations.





Creating a THINKING Environment for DEPTH

When we are encouraged to ask questions and take the lead in their own discoveries, we shift from being passengers to being drivers. Inquiry-based learning—whether it’s designing science experiments or digging deep into a piece of literature—pushes them beyond simply soaking up information to actively applying it.

This kind of thinking shapes us into thoughtful citizens ready to engage with the world in meaningful ways.



CHARACTERISTICS OF THINKING LEVELS



Surface Thinking

Focuses on recall and recognition.

Short-term understanding.

Answers question "when" and "where."

Limits creativity.

Repetition and Memorization.

Shallow Thinking

Connects facts with limited application.

Medium effort required.

Answers questions without asking.

Some creativity.

Collaborative.

Deep Thinking

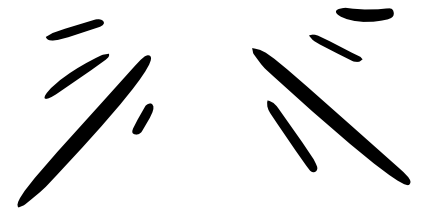
Encourages analysis and synthesis.

Arduous, requiring time and patience.

Answers "why" and "how."

High levels of creativity.

Expansive, as opposed to linear.





Deeper Thinking in LEADERSHIP

Expert business leaders can bring deeper thinking to life by using critical thinking to test their biggest assumptions—ask “what if?” and assign someone to play devil’s advocate on every key decision.

Tap into connection by gathering teams from product, finance, and customer support, listening to every viewpoint, and building a clear, shared plan. Keep curiosity alive with “discovery sessions” where anyone can pitch new ideas—and celebrate the best questions as much as the best answers.

Finally, spark creative thinking with short innovation sprints. Empower small teams to prototype bold concepts in safe, low-risk settings and learn fast from any failures.

By weaving these four habits into your daily routines, meetings, and goals, you’ll not only solve today’s challenges but also build a team that can adapt and thrive in whatever comes next.





Surface-Level Leadership

- Relies on established rules and protocols.
- Effective for managing routine tasks.
- Limited adaptability in dynamic environments.

Shallow-Level Leadership

- Connects immediate challenges to practical solutions.
- Useful for short-term planning and predictable problems.
- Lacks depth for addressing complex, long-term issues.


Deep-Level Leadership


- Synthesizes diverse perspectives and data.
- Innovates and adapts to unforeseen challenges.
- Inspires teams through a vision grounded in critical analysis and creativity.

Fostering Leadership Through Deeper Thinking.

- Encourage Reflection: Leaders who regularly evaluate their decisions grow in self-awareness and adaptability.
- Promote Collaboration: Engaging in diverse team discussions deepens understanding and fosters innovative thinking.
- Cultivate Inquiry: Asking “why” and “how” promotes strategic foresight, essential for leadership growth.

By integrating these thinking levels into leadership development, educators and organizations can nurture leaders equipped to thrive in an ever-changing world





Deeper Thinking in EDUCATION

When students are encouraged to ask questions and take the lead in their own discoveries, they shift from being passengers in their education to being drivers. Inquiry-based learning, designing science experiments or digging deep into a piece of literature, pushes them beyond simply soaking up information to actively applying it. This kind of learning doesn't just set students up for academic success; it shapes them into thoughtful, informed citizens ready to engage with the world in meaningful ways.





Surface-Level Teaching.

- Relies on established rules and protocols.
- Effective for managing routine tasks.
- Limited adaptability in dynamic environments.

Shallow-Level Teaching.

- Connects immediate challenges to practical solutions.
- Useful for short-term planning and predictable problems.
- Lacks depth for addressing complex, long-term issues.

Deep-Level Teaching.

- Synthesizes diverse perspectives and data.
- Innovates and adapts to unforeseen challenges.
- Inspires teams through a vision grounded in critical analysis and creativity.

Fostering Learning Through Deeper Thinking.

- Build habits of journaling, peer observation, and self-assessment so leaders continually refine their approach.
- Create learning communities where teachers and administrators challenge one another's assumptions and co-design innovative solutions.
- Ask "Why are we teaching this way?" and "How might we do it differently?" to spark strategic foresight and transformative change.

By integrating these thinking levels into leadership development, educators and organizations can nurture leaders equipped to thrive in an ever-changing world



EXPLORING LEVELS OF THINKING

The Impact on Education

The knowledge students absorb goes way beyond facts and figures—it's the key to unlocking their ability to be curious, think creatively and critically, and ultimately make connections. This allows them to tackle tricky problems and handle life's endless plot twists.

By exploring the differences between surface, shallow, and deep thinking, educators can uncover fresh, transformative strategies to truly light up K-12 classrooms.

Here's the best part: this isn't just classroom talk. It's about how we lead, learn, and even those "aha" moments that pop up during family dinner conversations. It's all connected, and it's all about leveling up how we grow together!



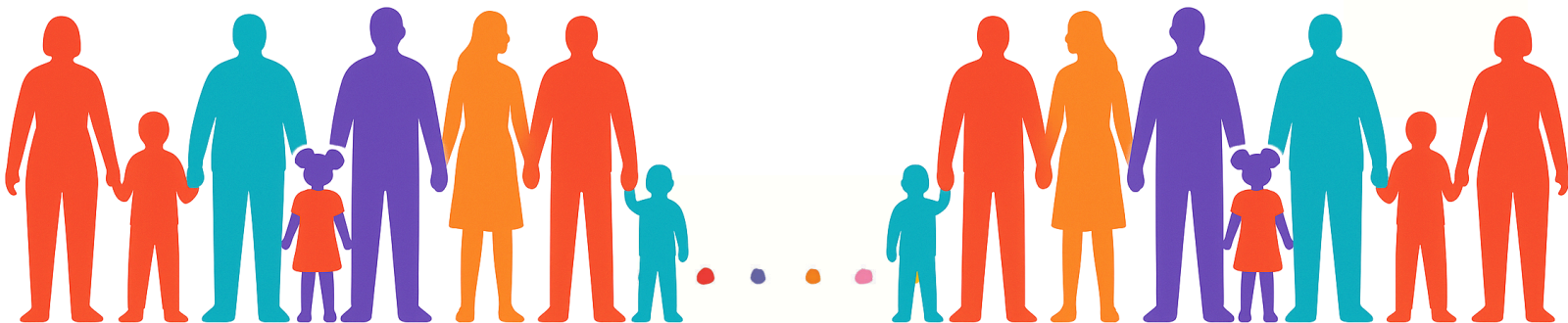


Deeper Thinking in FAMILIES

Learning doesn't end when the work day ends –families play a huge role in reinforcing and building on these levels of understanding. Here's how surface, shallow, and deep learning can show up right at home:

Surface-Level Thinking at Home

- Examples: Helping children memorize multiplication tables or learn the alphabet.
- Activities: Practice with flashcards, reciting facts, or repeating simple tasks like spelling words.
- Impact: Builds foundational knowledge but requires follow-up to avoid knowledge loss.





Shallow-Level Thinking at Home

- Examples: Encouraging children to connect concepts, such as using basic math in cooking or explaining why plants need sunlight.
- Activities: Role-playing scenarios (e.g., playing “store” to teach counting money), simple experiments, or storytelling to explain concepts.
- Impact: Helps children see practical applications, fostering curiosity and engagement.

Deep-Level Thinking at Home

- Examples: Encouraging children to question and explore topics like climate change, ethical dilemmas, or engineering projects.
- Activities: Collaborative problem-solving (e.g., building a model or designing a game), family debates on real-world issues, or in-depth research on topics of interest.
- Impact: Develops critical thinking, creativity, and resilience by allowing children to explore complexity and create meaningful connections.

By aligning family activities with these levels of thinking, parents and caregivers can reinforce classroom lessons while fostering a love for inquiry and growth.





CONCLUSION

The Deeper Thinking Advantage equips us all— professionals, parents, and leaders—with the tools to face new challenges with curiosity, confidence, and creativity. It's not just about learning facts; it's about building the resilience, adaptability, and bold thinking needed to thrive in an unpredictable world and shape a future we believe in.



By intentionally using surface, shallow, and deep thinking at the right times, we create vibrant, engaging environments where we don't just increase our knowledge base but also grow into curious, creative and critical thinkers ready to navigate life's complexities.

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