

# Climbing Out of the Box Thinking

## (Learning to Adapt in an Ever-changing Environment)

By Gary L. Arnold  
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### Climbing Outside the Box

So how do you begin to “Think Outside the Box?” As in any goal setting program there are three basic steps:

- First step: Clearly define your goal.  
Your target is to be able to “Think Outside the Box.”
- Second Step: Understanding where you are at the present time in relationship to your goal.  
You have to determine what your boxes are and what happened that got you into them.
- Final Step: Implement the steps to achieve your goal.  
Learn and apply the basic techniques of “Thinking Outside the Box.”

### What Box are you in?

Have you ever thought of what the proverbial box is made of that you are supposed to “Think Outside Of?” What are its walls, its lid, what does it contain? There are at least two boxes we need to be concerned with, our Personal Box and our Organizational Box. This is like being in a box within a box.

**So, what is your Personal Box made of?** This really depends on each of you. But basically the walls of your Personal Box are made of experiences, perceptions, environment, behaviors and numerous other things, depending on your stage of life. Even though these are structured to hold up the walls, they actually support the lid, which represents your beliefs. These beliefs are what guide you in your decision making process. If the lid or your beliefs keep you from believing you can “Think Outside the Box,” then it’s like Henry Ford said, “Whether you think you can or think you can’t, you are usually right.”

To fully achieve ‘Out of the Box Thinking’ you have to begin by analyzing what got you into the box in the first place. Once you determine that, you can begin to work on opening the lid when you are ready.

Your Organizational Box can be explained in much the same way as the Personal Box except with different terms for the walls and lid. The walls of an Organizational Box are made of processes, procedures, systems and numerous other company functions. The lid to this box is similar to the Personal Box lid except the Organizational Box lid is actually made of the company culture. Not the desired culture, but the actual existing attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of all employees in the organization. Quite often we hear, “Think out of the box!!! Help my employees ‘Think Outside the Box.’” But in reality the company culture will inhibit “Out of the Box Thinking” because of the need to be secure.

The Organizational Box is made of organizational functions. And these functions come from assumptions. In other words, the company has a process which it has implemented. The process has been proven to work, so it is “assumed” that it will work again. And it does, until conditions in the company change. These conditions can be external or internal and usually causes a variation in the

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process, which leads to a reactive need to “Think Outside the Box.” We get comfortable assuming our box walls will work since they always have in the past, but they now restrict creativity.

This type of thinking can be either proactive or reactive. If we wait until the perceived need arises before trying to implement “Out of the Box Thinking” then we are forcing ourselves into another box. If we have a true Continuous Improvement Program within our organization, then we will have a proactive way of thinking. Continuous Improvement relies on “Out of the Box Thinking” to help the organization move forward in this ever changing business world.

### Basic Techniques of Getting Out of the Box

Our brains are divided into two halves: left brain and right brain. The left brain processes information in an analytical and sequential way, looking first at the pieces then putting them together to get the whole. The right brain is visual and processes information in an intuitive and simultaneous way, looking first at the whole picture then the individual details.

The right half of our brain is the “creative” side. It is able to think of the “what ifs” without worrying about the details. Basically, our right brain thinks of an idea and leaves the left brain to figure out how to make it come into reality.

So we have to focus on allowing our right brain to operate without the left side trying to figure out how to achieve the goal before the idea can be fully understood.

In this article we will focus on the four steps to Climbing Out of our “Personal Box.”

Step 1: Remove the barriers

Step 2: Realize it’s okay to “Think Outside the box.”

Step 3: View the world from a different perspective.

Step 4: Get your Creative Juices flowing.

### Step 1: Basic Barrier Removal

Besides your walls and lids, which add structure to your lives and jobs, there are other barriers you must overcome to be outside the box. There are three basic barriers discussed in this paper.

The first is the “Oh Nos” that you encounter every day. This is the negative person who is always saying why something won’t work. Sometimes even before you have the chance to explain the concept fully, they are “shooting it down.”

The second is the “Yea, Buts” you encounter. They are much like the “Oh Nos” except they try to lead you into thinking there is a better way to do something. “Yea Buts” are those who are in brainstorming sessions that try to lead the discussion down a path that suits them best.

The third, and quite possibly the most dangerous barrier, is the “I’m Comfortable.” You get so comfortable in what you’ve achieved that it is a challenge to leave behind the perceived “balance” you have set up. You become your own “Oh Nos” and “Yea, Buts” that you begin to validate why you shouldn’t change. You begin to close the lid on your own box. As the saying goes, “Sometimes we are our own worst enemies.”

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### **Step 2: Realize it's ok to Think Outside the Box.**

What were you told when you were growing up about coloring pictures? The number one rule was: "Color within the lines!!!" The papers you brought home from school with the coloring outside the lines may have been put up on the refrigerator for a couple of days but is quickly taken down or moved to the side. But the pictures with color within the lines always took a place of prominence, and are frequently saved to this day. Society needs structure and somehow learning to color within the lines helps us to follow the rules, but it is easy to learn to follow the rules and not question them. This in turn blinds you to the fact that your box can be opened. Again, we are our own worst enemies.

### **Step 3: Start looking at the world through a different pair of glasses.**

When you look at the world, a situation, or even a person with a different perspective, your mind starts to open up. The challenging part in this step is to "detach" from yourself and "place" you in another "world." This is a mental game utilized while "role playing" in workshops. It is important to attempt to become and think like someone else to consider what they may believe. Try watching a television news commentary that you disagree with without judging the agenda while listening to the content. If you can do this then you are on your way to "Thinking Outside the Box."

### **Step 4: Getting those creative juices flowing.**

We've looked at the basic "Barrier Removal." Realized it's ok to "Think Outside the Box." We've started looking at the world through a different pair of glasses and now it's time to start doing things that will help us achieve our goal of climbing out of the box.

Here are some everyday opportunities that can juice you up:

- When a new ideas enters your head, (and it will), write it down and thank yourself for having it. (Yes, it works.)
- Share these ideas with other positive creative people. Yes, they will start being around you more often.
- Associate with positive people. (We are realizing the Oh No's and the Yea Buts around us.)
- Change the sequence of some of the standard things you do in your personal life. Shaving, brushing teeth, combing hair, etc.
- Tie your shoes differently.
- Remove the word "but" from your vocabulary.
- Become a more positive person.
- Take a different route to work.
- Brush your teeth with the opposite hand

**The above steps are focusing on your "Personal Boxes". A future article will focus more in-depth on the "Organizational Boxes" and how to at least lift the lid to see the outside world.**

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### **Bringing it together.**

I was proud of myself a few months back when I learned the value of Facebook. (Not up to Twitter yet.) It is a great tool to get in touch with friends who you haven't seen or spoken with for 40 years. As it usually happens, when we are "getting full of ourselves," something comes along to help us back to reality and put us back in perspective. My Uncle Jim is in his 80's. We have kept in touch with each other through email over the past 10 years. (Yes, when I received his first email it was another jolt back to reality.) Early one morning when I was on Facebook, I received a "Friends Request." I clicked to open it, guess who it was? Yep, Uncle Jim. He thought it would be a great way for all of us relatives to be able to keep in touch with each other. I can only hope to be like Uncle Jim in 30 years. Just imagine what great tools will be out there then. It will only happen if we "Think Outside the Box."