



## Help for the "Think About It!" Worksheet

This worksheet is designed to help identify assumptions when you are trying to solve a problem or understand a situation.

At the top is a description of the situation: what is the problem you're trying to solve, for example troubleshooting something that isn't working; or what is the situation you need to clarify, for example trying to understand why someone thinks the way they do, or making a decision about the future.

The first key to this worksheet is the question in the middle: **"What do I know for certain?"**

When you ask this question, you will end up with information you do know for certain and other things you don't know. Write down everything you identify (in either category) in the columns on the sheet. If you are wondering how you can determine if you know something "for certain", ask yourself if you would bet \$1000 on it. If not, you don't know it for certain.

The clues to your understanding the situation and/or solving the problem are in the "What I don't know" column. This is where you will identify things that you thought you knew, but that in fact you were assuming. You will also likely identify questions you need to answer in order to better understand the situation. Within a few minutes of starting to use the worksheet, you will likely have identified several avenues to explore from this column.

The column in the middle labelled "What I was assuming or ignoring" should theoretically be empty, as you either know something or you don't know it. On the other hand, as you ask the key question you will likely identify assumptions that you are pretty sure are true, but that you don't know for certain. These may have a low probability of leading you to a solution; but if they are truly assumptions you don't want to ignore them, or put them in the "What I know for certain" column unless you truly know for certain. The example I commonly use is that if I am setting up a projector in a room and I can't get the projector to work but the lights are on in the room, it is probably a fairly safe assumption that the electricity in the room is working. But unless I have verified for certain that the particular outlet I am using has electricity, then I don't know for certain. Thinking about "What I was ignoring" can be particularly valuable when trying to understand what someone else is thinking or why they make the decisions they do.

This illustrates the second valuable characteristic of the worksheet: it encourages you to write things down. Since the human brain can only hold 7 to 10 pieces of information simultaneously, once you exceed that number you have to start dropping things off. In most complex or wicked problems, there is more than 10 pieces of information.

Finally at the bottom the "What I have learned" space is useful to solidify your knowledge after you have solved the problem. You may want to save this for future reference or it may just be that the act of writing it down cements it in your memory. The "Who needs to know this" box is designed to help you increase your organizational intelligence by sharing the things you have learned with your fellow employees.

If you have any questions, or for other tools and articles on effective decision-making, please visit our website at [www.DecisionAdvancement.com](http://www.DecisionAdvancement.com) or feel free to contact me at 416-567-9540 or [rp@decisionadvancement.com](mailto:rp@decisionadvancement.com).

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