Foresight Skills Journal: Personal and Team

Instructions: Please **skim these five topics** and briefly answer any questions you like. Don't worry if any of this doesn't make total sense right now. We will discuss this in seminar. *Thank you!*

1. Future Feeling: Optimism, Pessimism, Realism

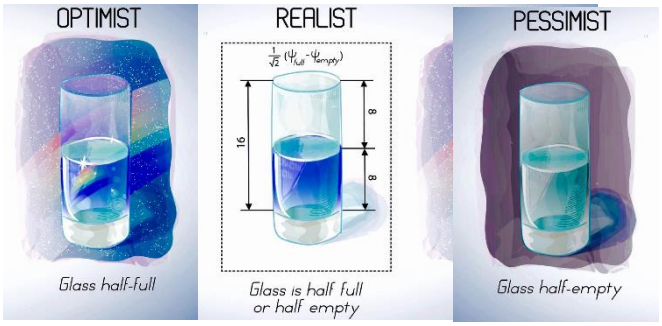
We all feel **future sentiment** in **two ways**:

a. **Strategic Optimism** (seeing and exploiting Advantages and Opportunities)

b. **Defensive Pessimism** (seeing and protecting against Disruptions and Risks)

We also **mix** these sentiments in a third state:

c. **Realism (actively contrasting both sentiments,** seeing "both halves of the glass", very close together in time.



Optimists can excel at foreseeing and **exploiting opportunity**.[1] **Pessimists** can excel at foreseeing and **preventing disaster**.[2] **Realists** can get **more of the right things done**.[3] Effective leaders **value** and provide **psychological safety** for all three sentiment states on their teams. They guard against **overoptimism**, with its **delusions** and **groupthink**, which can grow after **success**. They also guard against **overpessimism**, with its **negativity** and **inaction** (learned helplessness).[1] They learn to use **praise** and **criticism** (sentiment influence) in the **right ratios** for each context.

Question

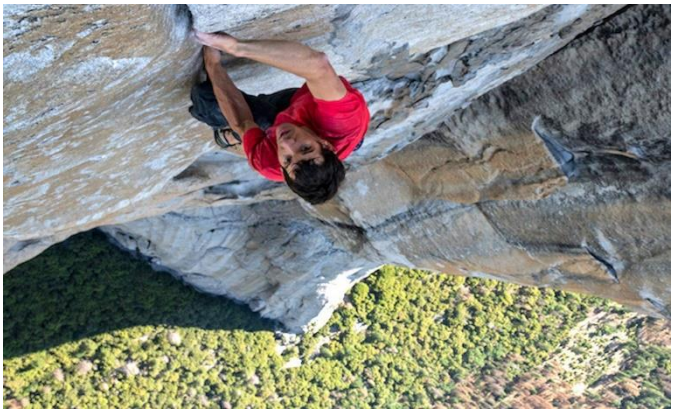
1A. Are you **personally** most often a **strategic optimist**, a **defensive pessimist**, or a **realist** (actively contrasting both)? How would you rank (1,2,3) the **time you spend** in each of these sentiment states in a typical week? How can you **balance all three** better?

Advantage Thinking (Strategic Optimism)	**Feeling "Positive"**	_____
Defensive Thinking (Defensive Pessimism)	**Feeling "Cautious"**	_____
Contrast Thinking (Realism)	**Feeling "Both"**	_____

GRASP Thinking: Completing Tough Tasks

Mental contrasting ("GRASP thinking") is a type of **realism** where we **first** think **optimistically** about a valuable **Goal,** then **defensively** about current **Reality** (distance from the goal) then **optimistically** about the **Advantages** we'll get when we achieve the goal, then **defensively** about the **Setbacks** (obstacles) we may face, and then make a simple mental **Plan**, with two things:

1. **Key resources** (mental, physical, network) that will help us **succeed** and
2. **If-then statements** regarding how to deal with potential **obstacles**.



We can climb any mountain one GRASP at a time.
Alex Honnold, *Free Solo*, 2018

We do most of this kind of thinking **on the fly**, in our heads.

Here's how **GRASP Thinking** works:

G. Conceive a worthy, tough **Goal** (Today-, short-, med-, long-term). Feel **good**.

R. Estimate the **Reality** (how far you, the team, or envir. is from the goal). Feel **bad**.

A. List some **Advantages** to having achieved the goal (optimism). Feel **good**.

S. Imagine likely **Setbacks** (defensive pessimism, ways you might fail). Feel **bad**.

P. Create a simple **Plan**, with at least one **key resource** and **if-then statement**. Feel **good**.

In extensive clinical studies, versus using no sentiment when making mental plans, or using optimism or pessimism alone, **GRASP thinking** greatly improves three things: [3]

1. **Foresight accuracy** (50-100% **less error** in predicting what you'll get done),
2. **Productivity** (30-150% **greater productivity** in a variety of timed tasks), and
3. **Motivation** to **persist**, even when faced with difficult obstacles.

Mnemonic: How do we **climb a mountain**? **"One GRASP at a time."**

Question

1B. For the next **1-3 minutes**, try **GRASP thinking** with one of **Today's (or this week's) more challenging personal tasks**. Ideally, pick a task of a type that you've previously had **some problems** with **starting**, **finishing, doing on time**, or **doing as well as you'd like**.

1. **G**oal (Pick something **worthy**, **difficult**, and **near-term**): (10-30 secs)

2. **R**eality (**How far** are you from finishing the task? How do you **measure** that?): (10-30 secs)

3. **A**dvantages (Optimistically, **what happens** when the task is achieved?): (10-30 secs)

4. **S**etbacks (Pessimistically and predictably, how might you **fail**?): (10-30 secs)

5. **P**lan (Include 1-2 "**key resources**" and 1-2 "**if-then**" **statements**): (20 secs to 1 min)

Which GRASP step(s) was/were **hardest** for you? How does GRASP **differ**, if at all, from what you **presently think and feel** when confronting **tough tasks and goals**? How might you **test** and **measure GRASP** effectiveness with yourself? With your team?

Question

1C. Describe a situation where **you personally** got into trouble by **underusing, overusing, or misusing** strategic optimism, defensive pessimism, or realism (contrasting)? Which of these (if any) could you **do better** with? In what context? What's your **personal improvement plan**?

Sentiment Management: Adjusting Our Optimism:Pessimism (O:P) Ratios

Emotional intelligence requires **knowing** and **influencing** our and others emotions toward more **accurate** and **productive** states of mind.[4] Our **O:P ratios** can either **support** or **work against** our **task contexts**. Consider the following **O:P ratios** and some of their **productive contexts**.[7]

O:P Ratio	Common Contexts
1:1	**Mental Contrasting**, **GRASP Thinking**; "Realism"[4]
2:1	**Advantage and Opportunity Assessment**; Strategic Optimism[7]
1:2	**Disruption and Risk Assessment**; Defensive Pessimism[7]
4:1	**Relationship Management**[5] and **Novel** Environments[6]
1:4	**Criticism** Production and **Crisis** Environments
8:1	**Selling and Visioning** (Seeing the "Better Future")
1:8	**Conflict States** (Actively Preventing Harms)

Question

1D. Do these **ratios** seem roughly correct for the contexts above? For example, does it feel right that in **relationship management**, you should typically strive to have **four optimistic thoughts** for every **pessimistic thought**? Is that the same as **saying four positive things** for every **critical thing**? Does it matter if it is your **spouse** vs. **employee**? For **8:1** O:P ratios, how can you prevent **manias** and **fantasies**? For **1:8** O:P ratios, how do you prevent **despair** or **panic**?

Leading Sentiment on Teams

Leaders can greatly influence team sentiment. They can empower their team to be **mindful** of and **verbal** about **Optimism:Pessimism thinking ratios**, and they can **shift their team's ratios** when they feel **counterproductive** (too optimistic or too pessimistic) for a context.

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1. To empower a team's **strategic optimists**, and counter **inflexibility** and **fear**, leaders can take a moment to do **Success Visioning (Stretch Goalsetting)**, asking: "How can we **achieve** this (desirable future). What would it **do for us**? What **steps** must we take?"
2. To empower their **defensive pessimists**, and deflate **groupthink** and **ego**, leaders can take a pause to do **Failure Visioning (Premortems)**, asking their team: "Imagine this high-value, high-profile project has **failed** or **greatly underperformed**. **How** did it happen? **Why**?"[6]
3. To empower their **realists**, leaders can do **Progress Checks (Status Checks) and GRASP thinking**, asking their team: "What is our **status** on goals? What should we be **optimistic** about? **Pessimistic** about? Do we need to **update** strategy? **Revise** our plan?"[7]

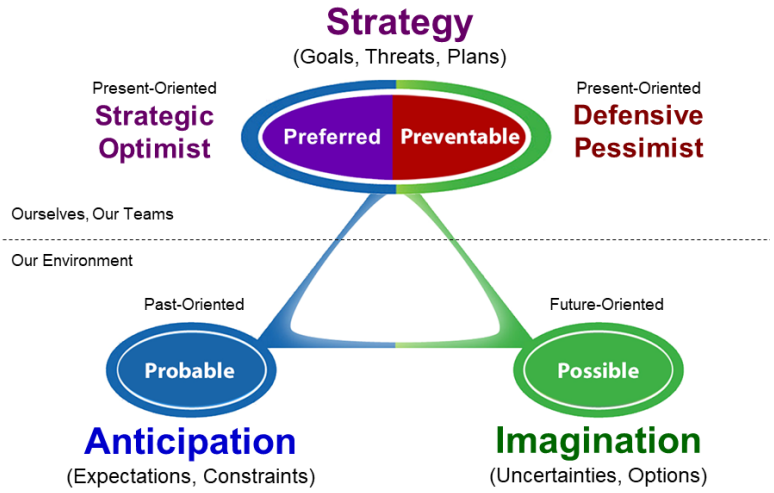
Question

1E. Describe a situation where **your team** or **another** got into trouble by **underusing, overusing, or misusing** strategic optimism, defensive pessimism, or realism (contrasting)? Which of these (if any) could your team **do better** with? In what context? What's your improvement **plan**?

2. Future Thinking: The Four Ps

We all **think** about the future in four key ways: **Probable, Possible, Preferred, and Preventable** futures. These are the **"Four Ps" of Foresight.** The better we use each, the better our **foresight, strategy and plans.** Various studies show it is often best to use them **in this order** as well.[16]

The **Foresight Pyramid** depicts **relationships** between these four thinking skills. The **base** of the pyramid is our **Probable** and **Possible** futures (**expected** *and* **uncertain** change). Most of this kind of change is in our **environment**.



The Foresight Pyramid

The Four Ps (and Three Skills) of Future Thinking

The **top** of the pyramid is our **Preferred** and **Preventable** futures (what we **want**, and what we should **avoid**). The pyramid reminds us that creating **good strategy** (**ways to get the Preferred and to avoid the Preventable)** is the **highest value activity** for teams, *and* that we can't create good strategy without first **working hard to anticipate the Probable** and **imagine the Possible** environment that is relevant to our goals.

Good leaders know that **many of us are biased** to prefer a **few** of these thinking types over others. They help their teams to **adjust** for that bias. **Past**-oriented thinkers like **Probable** futures. **Future**-oriented thinkers like to imagine **Possible** futures. **Strategic optimists** like **Preferred** futures. **Defensive pessimists** envision **Preventable** futures. Yet **all four** are vital to **strategy and plans.**[16]

Question

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2A. How would you rank (1,2,3,4) **your team's strengths** in these Four Future Thinking Types? Do you have **teammates** who rank #1 for each of them? Do you think your team uses **each** of these future thinking skills appropriately? Where could they **most improve**? How?

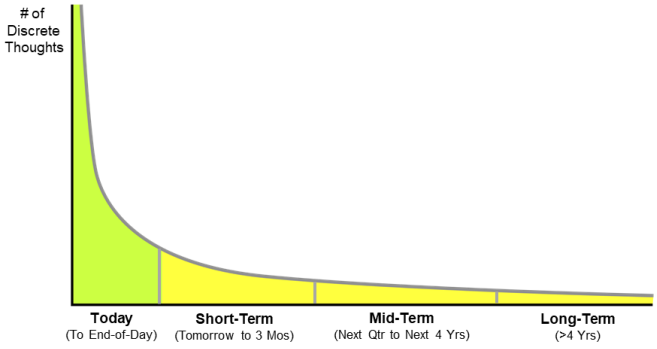
Anticipation Thinking (Expectations, Trends, Constraints) _____
Imaginative Thinking (Uncertainties, Options, Visions) _____
Positive Strategic Thinking (Advances, Opportunities, Goals) _____
Defensive Strategic Thinking (Risks, Threats, Blocks) _____

3. Future Horizons: Today's, Short-term, Mid-term, Long-term

We all **look** to the future using **four foresight horizons**. Each horizon is **far enough** from the others that it involves some **unique** kinds of **future thinking, planning and actions**. The **four horizons** are:

1. **Today's Foresight** (Now to **End-of-Day**)
2. **Short-term Foresight** (the **"T's":** Tomorrow to Three Mos)
3. **Mid-term Foresight** (the **"4's":** Next Quarter to 4 years)
4. **Long-term Foresight** (>4 years, your life, future gens)

The Power Law of Future Thinking (55:25:15:5)



Most future thinking is <24 hrs, and unconscious[1]

1. Benjamin Libet, *Mind Time: The Temporal Factor in Consciousness*, 2005.

Most of us think **far less frequently** about events further ahead in time. This is called the **Power Law of Future Thinking**. That means **Today's foresight** is where we can **improve** our foresight skills the **most** and the **fastest**.

Today's Foresight Tips

Today's foresight is the majority of our future thinking. It runs just the **next few seconds to the next few hours ahead**, and it is mostly **unconscious**, with inconsistent bouts of conscious reflection.[8] Getting more **deliberate, mindful,** and **visual** in **today's foresight** (now until the end of day) is the **easiest way** to get better at **short-term foresight** (tomorrow to the next three months). Our **feedback is far faster** with today's foresight, and we can meaningfully **improve** with every **honest review** of our **actions**. **Doing better** with **today's personal plans**, and using the **Eight Skills** on our **teams** (Topic 5), are where our ***greatest*** **impact and value** lies.[9]

Time and Schedule Awareness

Time is our **greatest resource**, and it is **fixed** and **predictable**. Do you know ***what time it is***, **all day**? Do you know what is **scheduled later today**? Tomorrow? Next week? Being **mindful of the time** (guessing it regularly), of your **schedule**, and of the **time until your next event** is one key to **today's foresight.**

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We all schedule events with others. Scheduling our own **solo time boxes** for **important tasks,** and thinking **schedule first, tasks second,** is the next level in today's foresight. We can do **GRASP thinking before each box,** and **be accountable** to staying **on task inside each box.** We can **be optimistic** at the **start** of a box (a mini-version of each **new day**) that we will get our **plan done**. **Reviewing** how we did after each box ends, vs. our **plan**, lets us **complete a Do loop** (Topic 4).

Commit to **schedule at least two solo task boxes each day**, to keep prioritization and schedule awareness skills sharp. **Preview** them the night before. Run your day **schedule-first**, and only **secondarily** use your **task list.**[10]

Question

3A. How would you grade yourself (A-D) on **time and schedule awareness** during the day? Do you schedule any time boxes **for your own tasks** every day? How many? Do you **review** how you did? How **often**? What **routines** have helped you **improve** these two awarenesses?

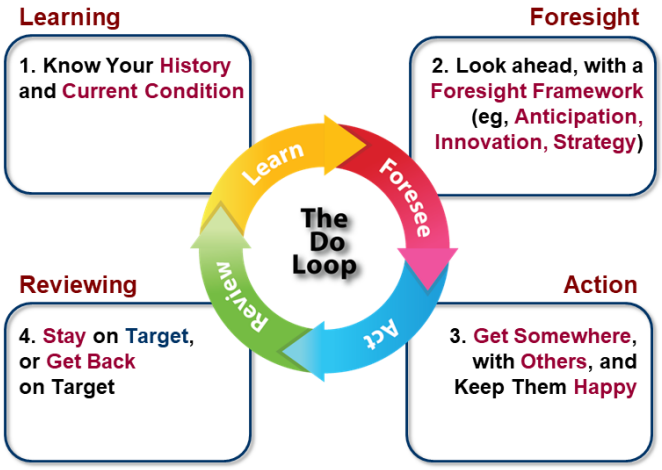
Time and Schedule Awareness (Grade A-D) _____

4. Personal Foresight and Action: The Do Loop

All of us use a **four step cycle (loop),** to survive. **Cognitive science** calls it the "perception-foresight-action" cycle[11]. We use this loop both unconsciously and consciously throughout our day to build our **competencies**. We call it the **"Do loop"**.

Here are the four steps:

Learning	Relevant Past & Present
Foresight	Future thinking (four types)
Action	Doing (three types)
Review	After-Action Feedback



Every time we **complete** one of these mental (Learning, Foresight) and physical (Action) loops, with **good feedback** (Review), and then start again with new Learning, we have a chance to grow our **competency** and **adaptiveness**.

Question

4A. Do you or your **team** tend to **underuse, overuse,** or **misuse** any of these steps in **specific contexts**? How would you **grade your team (A-D)** on each of the four steps, in general?

Learning Step _____ **Action Step** _____

Foresight Step _____ **Reviewing Step** _____

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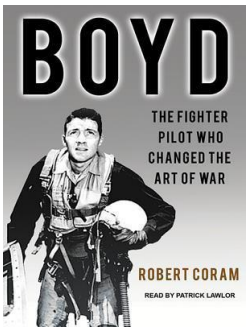
Give an example of a **workplace challenge** you've faced in relation to this **universal loop**:

The OODA Loop: A Competitive Do Loop



Air Force Col. **John Boyd** named this the **OODA loop (Observe=Review, Orient=Learning; Decide=Foresight; Act=Action;)**. The OODA loop is key to **survival** and **competitive dominance** in a **rapidly-changing threat environment**. Boyd said the **frequency**, **strength, and quality ("FSQ")** of our critical loops are the **key factors** determining performance.[12,13,14,15]

Question

4B. Have you seen the **OODA loop** before? What **strategies** might you employ with your team to improve the **frequency, strength and quality (FSQ)** of their **foresight-action loops**? What are the typical **time horizons** (minutes, hours, days, weeks, months) over which you **review** your team's **most critical loops**?

5. Team Foresight and Action: The Eight Skills

When **acting with others**, our **Do loop** expands to **Eight Skills** of **team foresight and action**. The first four are **Foresight Skills**, and the last four are **Action Skills**. The picture at right shows that the **Four Foresight Skills** use alternating divergent and convergent thinking. The **Four Action Skills** use translational, one-to-many, network, and cycle thinking. In our view, these **Eight Skills** are **key competencies** effective leaders must take responsibility for in adaptive organizations.[16]

Mnemonic: Does your team have a **"LAISEIRR focus"** on its **opportunities** and **challenges**?

1.	**Learning**	**Investigative** thinking (History & Current Status)	**Foresight Prep**
2.	**Anticipation**	**Probability** thinking (Expectations & Constraints)	**Foresight**
3.	**Innovation**	**Possibility** thinking (Ideas & Innovations)	**Foresight**
4.	**Strategy**	**Preference & Prevention** thinking (Goals & Threats)	**Foresight**
5.	**Execution**	**Production** thinking (Getting Somewhere)	**Action**
6.	**Influence**	**Market** thinking (Recruiting Others)	**Action**
7.	**Relating**	**Team** thinking (Sustaining Your Teams)	**Action**
8.	**Reviewing**	**Adjustment** thinking (Staying on Target)	**After-Action Review**

Questions

5A. Which **three** of these Eight Skills do you feel are **your best strengths**? How have they **helped you** in the past? In what contexts have you **overused**, **misused,** or **neglected** them? What have been their **"traps"**? Be prepared to **discuss this question with your team** in seminar.

5B. Which **two** of the Eight Skills seem **least natural**, **most ignored**, or **most challenging** to you? Has any weakness in these skills hurt you in the past? How so? Have you tried to **balance out** or improve **your** own or your **team's** weaker skills? How did that go? Have a **success/failure story** there to share? Be prepared to **discuss this question with your team** in seminar.

5C. Use **GRASP thinking** (Section 1) on the **Eight Skills**. What is a good **Goal** to **help your team improve** their use of **any or all of these skills** over the **next quarter**? How will you **measure** personal or team abilities in these skills today (**Reality**)? What **Advantages** might the team get from improving? What **Setbacks** (obstacles) are you likely to encounter? What **key resources** (coaches, routines, top cover) and **if-then statements** are in your improvement **Plan**?

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Summary Thoughts

For **personal** work, the **Four Steps** of our **Do Loops** are enough detail for most contexts. But when working with **teams**, we should pay attention to the **Eight Skills**, in many contexts.

We should also strive to apply the four steps and eight skills **proactively**, thinking **consciously** about them at the beginning and end of our **days** and our **time boxes**, and minimize being reactive to **"fears, fires, and fancies"** that continually threaten and alter **our plans**. The better we get a running this loop and working with our teams **today**, the better we can get at foresight for tomorrow and beyond.

Give yourself **emotional kudos** for each **prioritized, proactive accomplishment** you get done within any time box, and over each day. Note your accomplishments in your **daily journal**. Even if you spend **most** of any day **reacting** to events and **putting out fires**, you still can **mentally review** what went well and what didn't, at the end of each time box, and day. That will **close your Do loops**, and position you to make a **good brief plan** for the **next time box,** and for the **next day**.

Remember your **beliefs, values, feelings, and attitude**, your **daily GRASPs** (Today's plans), and your **time** and **schedule awareness and management**, are **your most precious foresight freedoms and assets**. What will you do with the time you have been given? What value will you create, every day? Please note any final thoughts, and potential action plans, below:

Feedback? Email John Smart at johnsmart@gmail.com. Thanks for doing this hard foresight work.

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[10] Nir Eyal, *Indistractable: Control Your Attention and Choose Your Life*, 2019.
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[15] Chet Richards, Certain to Win: The Strategy of John Boyd Applied to Business, 2004.
[16] John Smart, The Eight Skills of Adaptive Foresight. In: *Introduction to Foresight*, 2022.