

STYLES OF LEARNING

Information is processed by the cerebral hemispheres of the brain. The left hemisphere deals with analysis of information. The right hemisphere deals with synthesis of information. People tend to be dominant to one side.

Generally-speaking, the left-hemisphere dominant person tends to relate to details. He has to work along a train of information in order to see its overview. The right-hemisphere dominant person is conceptual and tends to relate to the generality of information. When he deals with details, he needs a framework within which he can place his details. Therefore, he needs to know the overview before he can handle the details.

So, a Detail-focusing reader begins at the beginning of the text and works through it until the end. The Conceptual reader tends to first scan the text and try to pick out clues as to what it is about.

NOTE:

The following descriptions are, of course, descriptions of extreme aspects.
Most people tend to be less extreme.

1. General attitude

Conceptual

The Conceptual person needs to work within a framework. Once he has a framework, he can develop it as an entity in itself without needing new information. Therefore, until he has the framework, he will seem *'switched-off'*, unable to use information given to him. However, once he has a framework, he will be able to use information and develop ideas beyond the limits of the actual information itself.

He will tend to be intuitive, creative, a good general planner and organizer, though perhaps lacking in attention to details.

Detail-focusing

The Detail-focusing person deals with information at its face value. He does not need to know the framework. He can concentrate on details for their own sake, and sometimes, perhaps, lose sight of the end goal through preoccupation with the details.

2. Learning

Conceptual

The Conceptual thinker requires a framework in which to place the ideas he is hearing or reading. Therefore, he first needs to have an overview of the topic and then he can deal with the details.

When such a person enters a class late, when the lesson has already started, he will find it very difficult to follow the lesson without knowing the exact topic being discussed. Until he gets the framework of the lesson, he might not even be able to hear the words of the teacher. (*See aspect 4 - Hearing*)

Detail-focusing

The Detail-focusing thinker progresses from one point to the next. Therefore, he has to build-up his understanding of the topic. Once he understands it, then he can make an overview. But he finds it hard to follow an overview before studying in depth because, in an overview, the discussion of each detail is not enough for him to build up his understanding.

When such a person enters a class late, when the lesson has already started, he will be able to follow the lesson without knowing the exact topic being discussed. He will listen carefully to what the teacher says and try to understand what the teacher is saying.

3. Accuracy

Conceptual

The Conceptual person thinks via frameworks. Therefore, if he forms an incorrect framework, the interpretation of the details will also be incorrect. This applies not only to the processing of thoughts but also to the primary processing of inputs from the senses.

Therefore the Conceptual person will be susceptible to mishearing words, to seeing the wrong thing, misunderstanding what someone says and getting the *'wrong end of the stick'*. This can be a major problem because the mistakes arise from incorrect triggering of primary memory-banks. So the person really feels as if he has heard or seen his incorrect version. If the Conceptual person tends to be stubborn and quarrelsome, he will find himself constantly in arguments with other people.

He will also tend to make a lot of *'slips of the tongue'*, substituting opposites. He will tend to say *'yes'* instead of *'no'*, *'right'* instead of *'left'*, mix-up people's names. This is because he thinks in concepts, and opposites are stored together with the concept. Therefore, when he selects one word, it is easy for him to select the wrong one.

Detail-focusing

The Detail-focusing person processes input objectively, at face value. Therefore, he will tend to be more accurate than the Conceptual.

4. Hearing

Conceptual

If the Conceptual person knows the framework of the conversation, or can guess one, then he can have super-acute hearing. This is because he is able to use fragments of conversations as bases for building whole *"pictures"*.

If, however, he does not know the framework of the conversation, then he will have no terms of reference for hearing the words. In other words, he might not *'hear'* the words at all. So, when someone tries to start a conversation with him regarding a topic which the Conceptual person is not thinking about at that moment, he might give the impression of being stupid, because he will ask the speaker to repeat what was said until he can obtain an idea of the framework of the conversation.

Detail-focusing

The Detail-focusing person takes what he hears at face value. He listens carefully and takes the words as they come.

5. Foreign Language

Conceptual

His concern is primarily to obtain the general message of the conversation. The actual words are only a means for transmitting the message. Therefore, he will not pay specific attention to the words, but will only listen for the message. And he will utilize a variety of means for obtaining the message, such as body-language, facial expressions, movements of the speaker's hands, intuition, etc. So, the actual words do not make any impression on him and he will not be able to recall them.

Therefore, on the one hand, he will be able to understand a conversation, even if he does not understand each word, because he can build up the meaning from odd words that he does understand, body-language, facial expression and a general understanding of the context of the situation.

On the other hand, since he tends to ignore the actual words, he will find it hard to recall words. Therefore, he will not be able to speak or read the language as well as he can understand the spoken language.

Detail-focusing

The Detail-focusing person listens carefully to what is said to him. He derives the message from the language. Therefore, he relates the message to the language, and he learns how to make a message from the language.

Therefore, he can speak the language as well as he can understand it.

6. Problems in Learning to Learn Gemora

Conceptual

Since he likes to work within a framework, he finds it hard to work on the unpunctuated, seemingly formless tract of Gemora. Going to a regular shiur may not help him because he will tend to grasp the concepts whilst ignoring the details of the text. Therefore, he might never learn how to deal with the 'raw' page of Gemora.

Detail-focusing

He likes to work from a complete understanding of one point to a complete and total understanding of the next point. Therefore, he tries to understand the Gemora totally the first time he reads it and feels that he cannot read on until he understands the first part. Unfortunately, often, the first part cannot be understood unless the next part has been learnt. So, he will get stuck and be unable to move on.

7. Correction

Conceptual

He has to be taught how to read through the new page and detect the underlying pattern of the Gemora. This pattern will give him the framework he needs to enable him to get to work on really understanding the Gemora.

Detail-focusing

He has to be taught how to read through the new page and accept the partial understanding as a first stage in the multi-stage process of learning. Attaining clarity in a text is not a one-shot process. The understanding is built up gradually from successive readings.

8. Combined Detail-focusing and Conceptual (The ‘Combo’)

POWER

Some people have the ability to be both *Detail-focusing* (Left-brain Dominant) and *Conceptual* (Right-brain Dominant) simultaneously. They can concentrate on the detail and see it as part of the overall pattern at the same time. This is a very powerful combination and such people tend to be exceptionally gifted intellectually.

Often, they are brilliant organizers because they can see all the details in relation to the overall picture. Therefore, they will attend to all the details without losing sight of the ultimate goal. In contrast, a *Conceptual* person will tend to ignore or forget details and a *Detail-focusing* person will pay undue attention to the details and lose sight of the general plan.

The ‘Combo’ can have encyclopedic knowledge and work their way through masses of books.

Similarly, they can immediately relate what he is now learning to his general knowledge.

THE NEED FOR CONTROL

But, this power can be misused by the person subjecting a decision to simultaneous *Detail-focusing* and *Conceptual* forms of analysis. He will analyze a detail, then look at the result of his analysis as part of the whole, reconsider his decision, then re-analyze it as a detail, etc., etc., without ever being able to come to a final conclusion.

He will set up a closed-loop circuit of continual re-appraisal of decisions, like a motor spinning without a load, he will tend to burn himself out as each decision becomes a major intellectual task of endless analysis.

TALKING...TALKING...TALKING

The ‘combo’ is constantly monitoring his feelings and he needs to verbalize his feelings. Usually when I work with people on their reading, I can repeat exercises continually with few interruptions. The ‘combo’ usually has to give a full report on his feelings/mistakes/performance/etc. after each exercise. This means that in the time I can usually do fifty exercises, I can only do about ten with a ‘combo’.

However, I must be grateful to the *combos* because their accurate feed-back has helped me in my researches tremendously and helped me gain insights and develop new techniques which otherwise would have been impossible.

QUESTIONS...QUESTIONS...QUESTIONS

Because he immediately relates what he hears to what he already knows and thinks about it, the ‘combo’ is naturally full of good questions. If his parents or teachers have the time and patience and intelligence to listen carefully to his questions, they will appreciate their quality. However, tragically, this is not all that common and often the ‘combo’ just has his questions ignored or even ridiculed. He then loses his self-confidence and can become very confused because he *knows* that his questions are good and he cannot understand why they are rejected.

In later years, the ‘combo’ can become very embittered when he sees from his own studies that his questions are indeed valid.

In shiur, the ‘combo’ can be a big nuisance, because the moment the rebbi opens his mouth, the ‘combo’ has a question. Usually the question is excellent but on a level above that of the shiur.

The rebbi can react in one of three ways. If the rebbi does not recognize the validity of the question, he will simply tell the talmid to keep quiet. The talmid is then effectively quieted and also given to understand that he has asked a dumb question.

If the rebbi recognizes the validity of the question, he might tell the talmid to come to him with the question after the shiur. Usually, the talmid takes this for a hint that the question is dumb and that the rebbi is being kind to him by not exposing his stupidity to the rest of the class.

What the rebbi should do is to explain to the class the depth and relevance of the question but also show how and why it is not directed to the immediate point and level of the shiur. The ‘combo’ will then understand why his question, though valid, is out of order at the moment. Furthermore, it will encourage him to concentrate on the basic levels of the Gemora which he otherwise tends to ignore.

Because of the *combo's* intellectual agility, it can be very difficult to pin him down and convince him to accept advice. Dealing with such a person can therefore be both frustrating and painful because the '*combo*' usually does seek help and he does want to improve and release himself from the self-destroying prison he puts himself into. However, while rejecting advice after advice, he still clings to you, seeking help and salvation.

Usually, the result is that soon the relationship sours and the advice-giver rejects the '*combo*' with a sad. "*Just leave me alone and do what you like!*"

After consultation with *combos*, it seems that the most effective way to deal with an obstinate '*combo*' is to (colloquially-speaking) "*give it to him on the head and smash him*" - though gently, of course!

Who do you think you are? Do you know everything? If you have all the answers why is it that you are doing so badly? Do you really think you know more than I do? How many years have you been teaching people? Just look at yourself - do you feel you are anything to be proud of? If you know so much why are you in this mess and can't get yourself out of it? You rejected X's advice because of whatever and you rejected Y's advice because of whatever and you rejected Z's advice because of whatever. Of course, you know best and they are idiots for giving their silly advice but look at yourself! Are you any better off now? Did you come up with anything better? Perhaps X, Y and Z are not such fools. Perhaps you should follow their advice and if you won't follow their advice, why should I waste my time giving different advice which you will reject anyway?

THE PROBLEMS

I. Gemora

Because the '*combo*' immediately detects inconsistencies with knowledge he already has, the '*combo*' sometimes fails to pick-up basic vocabulary and learning skills. This is because his questions divert his attention from the basic meaning of the text.

Levi did not do well in his bechina. He did not know some simple words and could not work out a simple text of gemora. I assumed that Levi was new to learning and therefore I suggested that he go to a yeshiva which would give him experience in basic gemora learning. The yeshiva he did go to referred him to me to check his reading in order to help him with his poor vocabulary.

*I screened his reading-skills thoroughly and found that his reading was much better than expected. Therefore his poor vocabulary could not be explained by poor reading skills. I then asked him to draw the test diagrams and he showed up as a *combo*. We chatted and he told me that he was far from new to learning - that he came from a very orthodox family and had attended cheder, mesifita and yeshiva all his life.*

*I explained the significance of the '*combo*' label and showed him how his problem was not a reading problem but an attitude problem. When he learns Gemora he must first concentrate on determining exactly what the plain meaning of the text is.*

Solutions

The '*combo*' must be trained to enjoy directing his considerable power to the basic interpretation of the text and regarding that as his challenge. These basic interpretations are:-

- a. plain meaning
- b. assumptions
- c. implications.

It might be necessary to train the '*combo*' in basic sentence analysis - subject, predicate, verb, object, etc. It might also be necessary to train him how he can extract information from a phrase or sentence by asking the basic questions

Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? By whom? etc.

It is only logical to insist that before you can argue with a person you must first hear and understand what he has said. Therefore, the '*combo*' should not allow himself to verbalize a question on the text until he has exhaustively analyzed it.

II Making the detail the whole

A '*combo*' has the ability to give a small detail the significance of the whole.

They can see a small defect in an object or person and condemn the whole because of it. Often, older bachelors are *combos* who consistently reject possible partners because of small defects they see in them. Similarly, they can be harsh to spouses and children by condemning them totally because of small faults in their behavior/character. They seem to lack appreciation for others because a small failure arouses a complete condemnation, despite past favors. He can also claim that he does not understand anything - because he is not clear about one small aspect.

A '*combo*' can therefore be very hard to please. As one dissatisfaction is satisfied, another minor dissatisfaction takes its place, filling the *combo's* horizon just like the first did.

They can ask what seems to be the most irrelevant questions. "*What color shoes was Avraham wearing when he went out of Ur-Chassdim? What did he eat for breakfast? How many camels did he take with?*" Who cares? So what? How am I supposed to know? But these questions are important to the '*combo*' because he needs to get the entire picture, and he needs those details to complete his picture.

Solutions

The '*combo*' must be taught a sense of proportion. Does a small scratch really make the whole machine useless? Is she really so bad because she has this minor fault

You may need to (colloquially-speaking) *give it to him on the head-*

Are you so perfect? Is it right of you do demand perfection from others? Does the machine work properly or doesn't it? So it has gotten a scratch on it! So what! Keep a sense of proportion! Is it really important or isn't it? If you think it is important, will you please tell me how and why!

But you always need to show your love and appreciation of him and your acceptance of him as a person. You need to give him jobs and responsibility which show him that you respect him and that you know you can give him responsibility and that you are confident of his ability.

III Virtual Reality

The '*combo*' often is able to work-out how each individual should react in any given circumstances. He can thereby make his own little world in which he assumes each person reacts as he reckons. Usually, he will be correct. When someone does not behave as assumed, the '*combo*' can explain the errant behavior so that it fits in with his idea of the reality.

Another problem associated with the virtual reality is the fact that any challenge to the reality of the virtual reality is actually a challenge which carries the risk of undermining the whole of the *combo's* carefully worked out world. Therefore, a '*combo*' will react far more violently to something which does not seem correct to him. For example, if you will tell a *non-combo* an unusual fact, he will probably either accept it or disagree. But the '*combo*' might become excited and exclaim, "*But it can't be like that!*" and continue to protest to an extent which does not seem justified to the *non-combo*.

A further result of the virtual reality is that the '*combo*' imagines that he is a paragon of care and consideration, yet he finds that he does not get on well socially. People do not seem to appreciate his sterling qualities. In fact, he might even be thoroughly unpopular. The reason for this is that unfortunately, what he imagines to be care and consideration does not actually fit in with what the recipient regards as care and consideration (as in the example above)!

Another problem is that they can have two standards. They can insult, because they are telling the truth and you must tell the truth at all cost even if it hurts "*That's the way I am and you must accept me for what I am and appreciate that I tell the unvarnished truth.*" But if you tell him the truth about himself, he can get *terribly* insulted!!! He does not believe what you say. He questions your expertise and integrity and checks up on you by asking others. However, if you question what he says he can get *so* insulted!!!

When arguing with them, they can change their parameters of the argument, but deny that they are changing one iota of what they said originally. If you say white, they will say black - then if you say black, they will say white - and deny that they ever held differently! The only solution is to record the conversation - but even then they will suspect that you are really tricking them.

They can ask what seems to be an entirely irrelevant question, at the oddest of times, when it should be clear to them that you cannot concentrate on a question.

Solutions

Logically, there are two aspects to the problem. Firstly, the 'combo' has tremendous intellectual power. Because of this, he needs to learn how to control the power.

"When you go to buy a packet of wafers, how much do you stand to lose? How much damage can you do if you make the wrong decision? Is it really worth while standing and worrying over the choice for half-an-hour? The whole packet cost \$1. If you stand there for half-an-hour how much are you losing in wages?"

Secondly, he needs to learn to be sensitive to feed-back from other people.

You want to do him a favor, but does he really want it? What are his feelings on the matter? Listen to how he reacts to your suggestion. Is he really agreeing or can you detect resistance in his manner? Do you really think that you know what is best for your friend, better than he knows himself? And even if you do know better, would you like it if your friend tried to run your life for you?

Often, they feel a great lack of security because they realize that something is going wrong, but they don't know what. Therefore, they need a lot of reassurances, love and attention. They need to know that their parents love them and support them, *come what may* !

Other Problems

Difficult social life with members of the family

All is quiet in the house. The children are playing nicely together or doing their homework. Benny walks in. Within five minutes, it seems that all hell breaks loose in the house. Fighting, screaming, squabbling! Benny denies doing anything to anyone. On the contrary, he claims that they all started with him. "They *always* pick on me and you *always* blame me for *everything*!"

Obsessive/Compulsive Behavior Disorder

Combos with a left-brain (detail-focusing) tendency might develop the habit to repeatedly re-assess details. This can become a compulsive habit which eventually takes over many aspects of decision-making.

The sufferer needs to be taught how this is caused by mis-control of what is essentially a wonderful and powerful mechanism.

Borderline Syndrome

Combos suffering from an Attention Deficit Disorder might develop severe lack of self-confidence. Since they are constantly monitoring and analyzing their behavior, they realize that their behavior is consistently in error. Therefore they need constant reassurance and develop the "*testing*" relationship which is characteristic of the *borderline syndrome*.

MENTAL CLOCK-SPEED

Like computers, the brain processes information at a tremendously high rate. This rate varies from person to person. Even for one person, the rate can vary from time to time.

For example, when you first wake up in the morning, you will notice that time seems to flash by. A menial task might take 10 minutes whereas later on in the day it will take 5 minutes. Take a look at the seconds of your watch when you first wake up, then look at it later on in the morning, then look at it when you are very busy. First thing in the morning, the seconds seem to tick away very fast. Later on they seem to tick slower.

This is because when you first wake up, the brain is working slower than later on in the day. The 'second' is a standard time-interval, but our appreciation of it depends on the processing speed of our brain. The faster our brain works, the slower 'one second' seems to be.

Someone who processes information at a higher rate than average will be able to process more information in a given amount of time than someone with a slower rate of processing. This does not mean that the person with the faster brain will process better than the slower person. He might not do it as well as the slower person, but he does have the opportunity, in a given length of time, to think through more combinations and make more mistakes and correct himself.

The person with the higher rate of processing usually needs a higher rate of information input in order to keep pace with his processing. This means that his primary information inputs - reading and hearing - must be to a higher level of competence than that needed by a slower person. (See *Breakthrough to Dynamic Reading - The Basics*). Therefore, the person with a higher speed will be more likely to read inefficiently, though this will probably not be detected because he sounds as good as the slower person.

BRAINPOWER

Brainpower is equivalent to the memory-power of computers. The greater the power, the greater the amount of information which can be retained and processed at one time.

Brainpower does not reflect intelligence, or quality of thinking. One person might have a large brainpower yet have poor quality thinking. Another person might have a smaller capacity yet process the information better.

A person with a lesser amount of brainpower can compensate for his lack of power by spending more time on processing. But if the topic requires a large amount of information to be processed, he might not be able to compensate.

Even if information is broken-down into smaller portions, the topic might require that all the information be retained in memory, or the processing might take too long.

ATTENTION TO DETAILS

The tendency of the Conceptual is to relate to generalities and concepts and to ignore details. That can often result in the Conceptual being fast and sloppy when doing tasks which he feels do not require him to concentrate on the details.

The Detail-focusing, on the other hand, views the details as his area of challenge.

COMBINATIONS OF ABILITIES

We can now consider the combinations of these aspects.

- A. Mode - detail-focusing or Conceptual
- B. Speed - fast or slow
- C. Brainpower - large or small
- D. Attention to details

The abilities of the *Detail-focusing* person will depend quite simply upon his speed and brainpower. The greater his speed and power, the more details he will be able to concentrate on and combine, in greater depth.

If the *Detail-focusing* person is of high intelligence, and he has had his self-confidence undermined through his inability to see ahead, he might become reduced to continual self-analysis and self-recriminations and become almost paralyzed from taking decisions because experience has taught him that he is '*always wrong*.'

The ability of the *Conceptual* person is more complex. Because he is able to form frameworks and to think about two topics at once, he is sometimes able to switch quickly between topics. If he has a fast speed, he is then able to sometimes form frameworks very quickly and switch between them very quickly, even if his brainpower is small.

This means that a high-speed *Conceptual* of small brainpower can give the impression of being exceptionally clever. And he will be able to engage in some activities as effectively as a person with a large brainpower because of his ability to switch from topic to topic quickly and rapidly deal with sections of a large topic. He will be able to engage in scintillating conversations of brilliant repartee and flash back stunning retorts.

Yet when such a person engages on a topic which requires large brainpower, he will not be able to cope with it. However, because of his ability to move fast, he might be able to cover-up his inability to understand, by using words and phrases as if he knows what they mean. He might even convince himself!

Once he realizes that he can cover-up for his lack of brainpower, he might become intellectually lazy and not bother to strain himself even for topics which would be within his ability.

Because the *Conceptual* thinks in terms of messages and concepts, he tends to ignore the details of words, spellings, specific syntax, etc. This means that when he learns Gemora, he tends to ignore all those aspects which will enable him to learn how to learn Gemora by himself.

Therefore, he will often present a distressing enigma. When he is told the *p'shat*, he can immediately grasp the *lomdos* and ask and answer advanced questions. But he never seems to be able to advance in textual learning by himself beyond the lowest levels.

The faster his brain speed, the faster he grasps concepts and so the less desire he has to engage in the tedious details of the actual text. Therefore, if he has even the most minor handicap in reading, it will deter him even more from bothering with the text and his ability to learn by himself will not develop at all.

Therefore, if he has a minor reading-handicap, then the faster his brain-speed and the greater his intelligence, the HARDER it will be for him to learn to learn by himself!

Some *Conceptuals* have been forced to continually focus onto details. Perhaps they were forced by teachers or parents as a reaction to the child's sloppiness and inattention to details. Sometimes the child has a convergence deficiency which prevents from scanning text at the high speed he needs. Sometimes the child suffers from ADD and dislikes making the careless mistakes which are symptomatic of that condition. Or, perhaps, the child just feels it is wrong to be fast and sloppy, even when the situation does not require care and attention to detail.

Whatever the cause, the result is that the person chronically directs his attention to details and thereby does not permit himself to access his potential for intuition and free-flowing creativity.