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OVER THINK



A SIMPLE GUIDE TO
CALM YOUR THOUGHTS

LYNDSEY GETTY

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The Thought Method Company
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To the overthinkers and cycle breakers

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Contents

Author's Note	ix
Introduction.....	1
Value Setting	17

PART ONE

Thought Basics	25
Fixed Mindset.....	33
Unhelpful Thinking Habits	41
Low Self-Confidence	49
The Change Process	55

PART TWO

Rule #1: I Am the Observer	67
Rule #2: I Live in the Present.....	73
Rule #3: I Am My Own Hero	79
Rule #4: I Can Reject What Others Think	87
Rule #5: I Accept What I Cannot Control.....	95
Rule #6: I Am a Work in Progress.....	101
Rule #7: I Take One Step at a Time	107
Check-In	111

TEMPLATES

The ICE Method	116
Control	122
Notes.....	129
References and Recommended Reading.....	131
Acknowledgments.....	133
About the Author	135

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Introduction

Nearly everyone struggles with the repetitive thoughts and irritating mental chatter of overthinking. It's a common frustration affecting 73 percent of people aged 25–35 and 52 percent of those aged 45–55.¹ To put it simply, if you catch yourself replaying social interactions after a party, chances are that most of the other attendees are doing the same thing.

Traditional advice suggests that overthinking is merely thinking “too much,” and the solution is for us to somehow reduce our thoughts. But this approach sets us up for failure. Mindfulness techniques and attempts to quiet the mental noise might offer temporary relief, but they only scratch the surface.

To stop the mental chatter and eliminate unwanted and repetitive thoughts for good, we need to dig deeper. We need to identify and address the unproductive thoughts that are leading us into the spiral. Because what's commonly labeled as “overthinking” is actually *unproductive thinking*. And the goal isn't to stop our thoughts, it's to make them more productive.

Productive thinking is when you manage your thoughts to support your mental well-being and align with your values and goals. When thoughts are productive, you naturally opt for quality over quantity, eliminating the tendency to “overthink” or judge your thoughts on the disastrously unproductive over/under scale.

2 OVERTHINK

Making this seemingly simple shift will have a significant impact. Your mind doesn't register "don'ts," so if someone tells you, "Don't think of a red balloon," you will likely imagine a red balloon. In all likelihood, you're picturing one right now because I mentioned it. And if I ask you to deliberately *stop* thinking about a red balloon, your thoughts may be overrun with red balloons. The more you think about how you *don't* want to think about red balloons, the more you think about those darn red balloons. This is similar to when you think about how you want to stop thinking so much and end up thinking more. If you are reading this book, I am sure you can relate.

Being productive in your thinking involves understanding this psychological quirk and actively choosing to focus on what you do want, rather than what you don't. When it comes to "overthinking," instead of trying to stop the incessant thoughts, which will intensify the mental chatter and frustration, shifting your focus to what you do want, to think more productively, will reduce the mental noise. So, rather than saying, "I want to stop thinking as much," you'd say, "I am going to make my thoughts work for me."

Ideally, we would have been taught how to think productively in childhood, but traditional education does not put much emphasis in this area. So here you will get a welcome and overdue crash course on how thoughts work and how to make your thoughts productive. These concepts can be tricky so I'll break them down with just enough detail to provide a practical yet effective understanding. In my experience, this is all the average person needs to know so they can create healthier, more productive thoughts.

But before moving forward, it is important to acknowledge how far you've already come. Realizing you are "overthinking" is you becoming aware of your unproductive thoughts. Self-awareness is an incredible skill that, when cultivated, has

the power to change your life. While annoying, those repetitive thoughts are forcing you out of your comfort zone so you can build your awareness and come into your true potential. Cheers to you!

Are Your Thoughts Productive?

You have a wedgie but there's an attractive person in eyesight. Do you pick it? What should you have for dinner? They haven't replied to your text. How long ago did you send it? Should you send a follow-up or would that seem too eager? Are you coming off as clingy again? What now? You just remembered that cringey thing you did in grade school. Oh great, you just remembered that embarrassing thing you did last week.

In this complicated and chaotic world, there's a lot to think about. Since we haven't been taught how to think productively, we often make it more complicated and chaotic than it needs to be.

Unproductive thoughts look like:

- going over the same things repeatedly, even when you try to stop
- continually doubting your abilities and decisions
- replaying past events, examining every detail
- excessively thinking about anxiety-inducing or scary situations
- being hard on yourself and questioning if you're good enough
- expecting worst-case scenarios, even when they're unlikely
- struggling to move past mistakes or missed opportunities

4 OVERTHINK

- worrying about what other people might think
- striving for perfection while fearing failure
- feeling overwhelmed with racing thoughts
- feeling ashamed about past events or thoughts you've had

This quiz will help you figure out if your thoughts are unproductive. Check all that apply.

In social situations, do you...

- replay interactions in your mind, analyzing every detail
- worry a lot about how others perceive you
- frequently second-guess the things you say or do
- avoid certain social events because you fear making mistakes or feeling out of place
- find it hard to start or maintain conversations because you're afraid of saying the wrong thing
- feel anxious or self-conscious before, during, or after social gatherings
- obsessively plan and rehearse what to say or how to act in social situations
- often feel like you don't fit in or belong
- dwell on embarrassing moments long after they've occurred
- believe others are constantly looking at you or judging you, even when there's no evidence to support it

_____ checked

With self-care and daily routines, do you...

- struggle to relax because your mind is always busy with thoughts
- frequently feel guilty when you take time for self-care, thinking you should be doing something more “productive”
- overanalyze your daily routines and habits, trying to optimize every aspect of your life
- feel overwhelmed by your to-do list and have difficulty deciding what to prioritize
- worry excessively about minor decisions like what to wear or eat
- frequently compare yourself to others and feel like you’re not good enough
- have difficulty saying no to requests or commitments even when you’re already stretched thin
- constantly think about work or responsibilities even during leisure time
- often procrastinate on important tasks because you’re stuck in thought
- find it challenging to disconnect from technology and be fully in the moment

_____ checked

When thinking about the future, do you...

- spend a lot of time worrying about what will or might happen
- have trouble making decisions because you’re afraid of making the wrong choice

6 OVERTHINK

- obsessively plan and prepare, often expecting worst-case scenarios
- frequently feel anxious or stressed about the uncertainty of the future
- set impossibly high standards for future goals and feel overwhelmed by the pressure to achieve them
- are so focused on reaching your future goals that you forget to enjoy the journey
- get so caught up in worries you find it difficult to enjoy the present moment
- find it challenging to trust that things will work out without excessive planning
- worry about future regrets or missed opportunities
- frequently ask others for reassurance about your future decisions or plans

_____ checked

When you make mistakes, do you...

- often dwell on past mistakes or regrets, making it hard to let them go
- replay scenarios in your head, thinking about how things could have gone differently
- feel embarrassed or ashamed about past errors, even if they were minor
- have difficulty forgiving yourself for past mistakes or perceived failures
- think other people judge you for your past mistakes, even if they don't know about them
- avoid taking risks or trying new things because you fear making mistakes

- dwell on past criticism or negative feedback, even if it was constructive
- frequently feel the need to explain or justify your past actions to others
- have difficulty accepting that making mistakes is a natural part of life
- carry past mistakes with you that impact your self-esteem and confidence

_____ checked

If you've experienced trauma, do you...

- keep thinking about how you could have avoided the traumatic event
- wonder if seeking help is worth the risk of not being believed
- constantly replay the traumatic event in your mind and feel overwhelmed by its lasting impact
- experience intrusive thoughts related to a traumatic event
- have recurring nightmares or distressing dreams related to past trauma

_____ checked

TOTAL CHECKED: _____ out of 45

Many of us deal with racing thoughts and mental chatter from time to time, but if you checked fifteen or more boxes, it's likely your thoughts are unproductive. The difference is that people with unproductive thinking *often* deal with excessive mental chatter and racing thoughts, making life harder

8 OVERTHINK

than it needs to be and leading to both mental and physical health issues.

For example, if you're tired after socializing because you keep analyzing everything you said and did, you might start avoiding social situations altogether. This can lead to loneliness, strain relationships, and cause or heighten social anxiety.

If you are constantly filled with mental noise, you'll likely have trouble concentrating, feel stuck, and give up on goals. You'll not only feel mentally exhausted but also less happy and confident.

Unproductive thinkers often struggle to enjoy the present moment, falling into cycles of worrying about the past or future. This ongoing worry can lead to restlessness, difficulty sleeping, and anxiety-related symptoms, like headaches and tense muscles. The physical symptoms make it hard to stay active, intensifying unproductive thoughts, since physical activity helps clear the mind. This self-perpetuating cycle is demotivating and leaves even the most driven individuals feeling hopeless. Breaking free from this pattern is crucial for reclaiming mental well-being and building a more satisfying life.

Who This Book Is For

This book is not just about identifying unproductive thoughts; it's a guide to transforming your mental landscape and reclaiming control over your life. While directed toward those struggling with repetitive and unwanted thoughts, it is equally valuable for anyone seeking to improve their mindset and make lasting and positive change.

Even though "overthinking" isn't considered a mental illness, it can worsen depression and anxiety, and is linked to c-PTSD (complex PTSD) and PTSD.² Mastering the skill of nurturing productive thoughts not only equips you with the

tools to combat “overthinking” but also unlocks the potential for a more fulfilling and resilient mindset.

The Stats

To understand why people tend to “overthink,” and pinpoint the most common types of unproductive thoughts that lead to mental chatter, I went to the source and asked “overthinkers” *why* they overthink. To keep it authentic, I collected insights in a relaxed format using social media for its original purpose: connection. A simple prompt was posted in different forums on multiple social media sites: “I’m working on a book about overcoming overthinking. If you’re prone to overthink, would you share what you overthink about?”

From there, I used my experience of over a decade in tech operations to aggregate the responses from more than 300 overthinkers and get what we call in the industry, “strategic insights.” Responses were first put into two main categories: overthinking and rumination. Though these terms are often used interchangeably, “overthinking” involves fixating on the future while “rumination” centers around dwelling on the past (both signify unproductive thoughts).

Interestingly, 83 percent of respondents reported thinking about the future, while only 17 percent ruminated on the past. Responses were then separated into common triggers.

TRIGGERS	OVERTHINKING	RUMINATION
Social Interactions	40%	60%
Day-to-Day Planning	31%	–
Future Planning	29%	–
Perceived Mistakes	–	24%
Trauma	–	8%
Philosophical Pondering	–	8%

10 OVERTHINK

Social interactions, such as replaying past conversations, worrying about other people's opinions, being mindful not to offend anyone, setting up appointments, dating, and interacting with coworkers, were the most common things people repeatedly thought about. Next came everyday concerns like deciding what to have for dinner, whether to make an expensive purchase, and handling new parenting challenges. Lastly, planning for the future, considering a career change, furthering education, organizing a vacation, and buying presents were the third most common things people shared.

About a quarter of rumination involved dwelling on mistakes, such as saying or doing something silly or buying something just before it went on sale. Reflecting on past experiences, such as feeling manipulated, traumatic events like car accidents, and contemplating deeper aspects of life, such as wondering why people do the things they do, each accounted for about 8 percent of the time spent ruminating.

The Insights

Concepts commonly associated with “overthinking,” such as fear, control, and perfectionism, were present in most responses. However, all responses indicated either a fixed mindset, unhelpful thinking habits known as “cognitive distortions,” or low self-confidence. Many of them displayed two or more of these elements.

For example, if you often worry about whether you should pursue a goal or if you'll succeed, it's probably due to a lack of confidence and a cognitive distortion called “should thinking.” If you excessively dwell on every social interaction regardless of its importance, it likely comes from having a fixed mindset and low self-confidence. And if you believe that you can never move past a mistake you made, it's likely due to a fixed

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PART ONE

The Root Causes

Marcus was really looking forward to dinner at his favorite restaurant. When the friendly server told him, “Enjoy your meal,” he replied, “You too!” without hesitation.

As soon as the words left his mouth, he felt instant regret and a wave of embarrassment. A simple slip of the tongue quickly snowballed into a whirlwind of thinking. Marcus’s thoughts spiraled and his inner critic went into overdrive. *Why did I say that? It was so awkward. The server must think I’m an idiot. I should have just said ‘thank you.’ What if the server tells the kitchen staff and they are all laughing at me?*

Throughout dinner, Marcus couldn’t shake his self-consciousness. He kept replaying the moment in his head, cringing each time he revisited it. He even considered leaving a bigger tip in hopes it would make the server like him.

Later that night, Marcus found himself googling “how to recover from a ‘you too’ moment.” His mind raced as he spent the night reading through countless forum threads with similar stories.

In the days that followed, Marcus kept replaying the incident in his mind. He told himself that people are either good at socializing or they are not, and that he never will be. He wondered if he should avoid going back to that restaurant just to save himself from feeling embarrassed. He soon began practicing what he would say if he saw the server again.

Poor Marcus. We will use his story to identify the root causes of unproductive thinking and suggest better ways to think. But first, let’s talk about thoughts and how we get them in the first place.

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