

Innovations in Thinking and Learning

Roger Martin – Applying Integrative Thinking

STUDENT: Would you say there is no situation, or no problem, that you couldn't use integrative thinking to solve with?

ROGER: You know, that's the way I think. Now, you have to be careful, because it might be like I have a hammer, so every darned thing looks like a nail. But it was -- the process is sort of designed to be able to be a universal tool, if you will, a tool to apply to any situation. That having been said, when people ask me, "Gee, Roger, do you mean you have to sort of ponder deeply every last thing you do in life? Won't you drive yourself nuts? And you'll be incredibly slow?" And so what I say is, what I like for students of integrative thinking to have is this little red flag in their head. When somebody says to them, "Gee, you can do A or B," and your reaction is, "I don't really like either one of those." I want the little red flag to go up and say, "Ah, now I have to for sure use this skill." If they come to you and say, "You can do A or B," and you say, "I love A. I love absolutely everything about A." I just say, "Do A," right? Don't spend a whole lot of time, just do A.

So there's where I sort of say you don't have to be obsessive about using this for everything. But it's when that little red flag goes up and says, "Uh-oh, I'm being forced to choose between two things" -- or three or four, but that's to say, "Two things that I don't really like either one of them," then I think it's in your interest. You'll be better off. You'll accomplish more if you stop and say, "I'm not going to do that." And I honestly think a lot of young kids get into trouble in this modern, complicated kind of world, when they feel like they're between a rock and a hard place. You know, do I? My friends are doing something I kind of know they shouldn't be doing. It's dangerous, or it's semi-legal, or something, and I either have to go with them, along with them, even though I'm a bit queasy about it, because I need to be part of that group, because they're my friends. Or, I have to stay out of that potential trouble, but then they'll think I'm a loser. Right? It's times like that, that's the red flag. Red flag should go up, and I want that young person in that tough situation to say, can I use my integrative thinking skills to get to a better place, and I'm now an outcast, or I've just gotten into trouble in a way that'll put a black mark on my record for a long time. That's sort of how I think about it.

STUDENT: Yeah, and I agree. I think integrative thinking is more like a life skill, because no matter where you go in life, you will always have conflicts.

ROGER: Yes.

STUDENT: You will always have decisions to make. It's good to come out with the best possible decision.

ROGER: So the way I think about it is, I don't want anybody to take integrative thinking on faith. That's why how you were taught it, how were you taught it? Go to work on a real problem and see if this helps you. Because that's what I want. I want people to just feel very practical about it. So they try it, it works for them -- okay, good. Do more, rather than I'm telling you, "integrative thinking is the greatest thing since sliced bread, you should believe me."

STUDENT: Yeah.

ROGER: I don't believe in that. And that's why. There's a method behind the madness to how we do the teaching. We put you to work on a real problem that's from your -- kind of that's relevant to you in your life, so that you can just see for yourself, was this helpful or not?