

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PJiMjSscgk4>

Are you a visual thinker?

Here's a question. Do you sometimes have difficulty remembering people's names but you're great at remembering their faces? Or maybe you're really good at moving odd-shaped furniture around corners? Or packing your car full with so much stuff everyone told you it was going to be impossible?

If so, you might just be a visual thinker.

How about this, try and remember an event from your past. What happens? Do you find yourself remembering something fuzzy, like the significance or emotion or mood around that event? Or do you remember specific scenes and images? For some people it turns out that images and spatial relationships seem to dominate their thinking process. Basically, they think in pictures. It's thought that upwards of 60 percent of people are in this category. And it's a continuum, not all or none. Some people just think this way more than others.

For example, for some people, and this might be you, a messy desk isn't a problem at all, you know where everything is. But you know where it is in relation to everything else. So when someone comes along and cleans that desk up, supposedly helping you organize, you completely feel lost and you can't find anything. The same sort of spatial thinking that helps you navigate a messy desk can be incredibly powerful.

The chess grandmaster Bobby Fischer said that he could see all of the pieces on the chessboard even when it wasn't in front of him, which allowed him to practice and play in his head.

Nicola Tesla, a pretty amazing inventor, took this one step further and said he was able to build and rebuild complicated machines in his mind and then run them to see where the moving parts can potentially fail.

When he was only 24 years old, the inventor Thomas Edison described his experience this way: "I have innumerable machines in my mind now, which I shall continue to illustrate and describe day by day when I have the spare time."

But this kind of thinking, visual thinking, sometimes comes with a price, namely, it can be hard to communicate what you're thinking to other people. Maybe you've had this experience where you see something pretty clearly in your head but you wind up needing to draw it to explain it to somebody else.

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Albert Einstein often said words failed him to describe the images in his head, but it turned out those images were the key to unlocking the secrets of the universe. It was after he envisioned a man riding a wave of light that he was able to construct his theory of relativity.

James Clerk Maxwell, the mathematical physicist, had a similar experience. His colleagues urged him to show the relationship between energy, entropy and volume using equations, which is how they best communicated ideas. Instead, he used clay and plaster to show the relationship in the way that he understood it, as a physical and visual form of thermodynamics.

And that's the power of visual metaphors. They allow people to see complex relationships in new, relatively simple ways. And the history of invention and discovery is filled with this kind of stories.

For example, August Kekulé unlocked a new way of thinking about the structure of molecules when he envisioned a snake eating his own tail. In that moment, he realized that the bonds in the molecule of benzene form a ring and this led to a whole new way of understanding how molecules could be visualized.

And that's ultimately the challenge that visual thinkers face. How do you get those images out of your head and into the real world as inventions or discoveries? It's also why right now it's such an exciting time for people who think like this.

The digital age has brought technology that allows visual thinkers to directly experiment with the forms that they're best at understanding. Visual thinkers can now fold complex proteins on the screen or use 3D printers to build almost any form they can imagine. And they can invent and play in virtual reality spaces that just couldn't exist in the real world.

It's a good time to be a visual thinker, so next time you forget the names of streets on a route that you can navigate with ease, don't beat yourself up. You might just be the next genius inventor of our time.

What kind of inventor are you?

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