



# 9 Steps to Thinking Bigger

*Hugh Blane, President of Claris Consulting*

“Where success is concerned, people are not measured in inches, or pounds, or college degrees, or family background; they are measured by the size of their thinking.”

David Schwartz, Ph.D.

## 1. Believe You Can:

1. Find an extraordinary exemplar – someone who has achieved something extraordinary and study him or her. Don’t reinvent the wheel.
2. Recognize that thinking bigger is often about perfecting an idea and not inventing a new idea.
3. Recall a big success and what people said to you and what you said to yourself.
4. Create a file to capture your list from #3 and review and add to it as frequently as possible.
5. Read, watch and immerse yourself in the biographies of people who achieved something extraordinary and determine what you can learn and adopt/adapt from their experience.
6. Surround yourself with big thinkers.
7. Review your calendar every morning and choose one task or appointment and choose to think bigger about it.
8. Remember Proverbs 4:2 “Let God renew your mind because your life is shaped by your thoughts.”

## 2. Cultivate Extraordinary Courage:

The definition of the word courage comes from the Old French cuer, which means heart.

1. Start by defining what you aspire to achieve.
2. Play to win versus play not to lose. If you strike out seven out of ten times you’re an all star.
3. Make friends with fear for without fear there is no need for courage!
4. When you feel fear lean into it and plan to learn from it.
5. Define how risky your aspiration is on a scale of one through ten.



“If you think you can do a thing or think you can't do a thing, you're right.”

Henry Ford

6. Isolate three beliefs you hold about your aspiration and why you shouldn't proceed with it.
7. Isolate the content and context of your fear and create at least one alternative perspective.
8. Plan on failing once next week. If you aren't failing no learning or growth is taking place.
9. Managers, convince your employees they will not be locked in stockades and people will not point and yell “failure”.
10. Action cures fear!

### **3. Build Your Competence:**

1. Get an honest assessment of your current skills and talents.
2. Focus on growth and learning otherwise you'll stagnate.
3. Ask the question, “What would I need to do in order for you to say, wow, working with you is great?” Don't accept “you already are.” Ask, “what can I do to elevate your wow to an even higher level?”
4. Schedule time to be curious and explore your aspiration and or what you deem extraordinary.
5. What skills, thinking or attitudes does your extraordinary exemplar have that you want to replicate?
6. Isolate three new skills, attitudes and or thought processes you need to adopt in order to be more fully aligned with your aspiration.
7. Think marathon and not sprint.

### **4. Eliminate Negative Self-Talk:**

1. Focus on one of your greatest successes: Specifically, remember what people said to you or about you and your performance. Then create the longest list possible of affirming feedback you received and view it daily for thirty days.



“The smallest good deed is of more importance to creating the extraordinary than the grandest of intentions.”

Hugh Blane,  
paraphrasing Duguet

2. Inventory your self-talk: Notice what type of conversations you have with yourself. Are your conversations positive and affirming or the opposite? Learn to catch yourself when they are negative and review your list from #1 above.
3. Meditation and or prayer time: The most important time of your day is the first thirty minutes. Spend the first ten, fifteen or thirty minutes in meditation, prayer and or reading inspirational works and reconnect with who you are spiritually.
4. Get an accountability partner: Recognize that we all have advanced ways of fooling ourselves and need a trusted and respected accountability partner in order to grow and prosper.
5. Affirmations and visualization: Develop a list of qualities and traits you want to exemplify. Visualize accomplishing your list every morning before getting out of bed and every evening before turning the lights out.
6. Have an internal contrarian: When you start to spiral into negativity stop and ask yourself to find three alternative conclusions to whatever is happening. Choose the most plausible and set out to prove the alternative conclusion as fact. If you can make a case that your negative perspective is skewed it becomes less powerful.
7. Set a higher standard for how you talk with yourself: Why do you talk to yourself in ways you wouldn't accept from a friend, client or family member? Have the same standard for your own self-talk as you would from a close and respected friend. If you won't stop your negative self-talk no one else will.
8. Practice assertive optimism: Assertive optimism is the process of seeing people, events, and situations from an optimistic perspective.





“The joy is in  
creating, not  
maintaining.”


Vince Lombardi

Keep in mind that there is always another side to every story – you just don’t know what it is. Work to assertively insert optimism into all of your interactions and transactions.

9. Choose your words carefully: When you are tired and worn down you become sloppy with your language. Replace statements such as “I’m so stupid” or “I’m completely blowing this” with the statements “I’m tired and can’t concentrate” or “this is not my best performance. I will do so much better when I’m rested.”
10. Don’t dwell on negative self-talk: If we attract what we focus on, focus on what you DO WANT and not what you DON’T WANT. The first is focused on your aspirational future and the later is focused on a fear based past.

#### 5. Spark Greater Creativity:

1. Think of creativity as focusing on improvement and getting better not starting from scratch.
2. Determine one process you can improve.
3. Believe you can have a positive impact.
4. Focus on how you would solve the problem rather than the difficulties of the problem.
5. Remove the word impossible from your vocabulary.
6. Don’t start sentences with negative contractions such as wouldn’t, shouldn’t, couldn’t, weren’t, or aren’t.
7. Reduce your stress level.
8. Stop taking yourself so seriously.
9. Read widely in order to make broader connections.
10. Schedule a creativity date: Take a baking class, see a play or the new art exhibit - follow it with a conversation about what you saw and experienced.



“Remember that fear always lurks behind perfectionism. Confronting your fears and allowing yourself the right to be human can, paradoxically, make you a far happier and more productive person.”

Dr. David M. Burns

#### 6. Untwist Twisted Thinking:

In the book *The Feeling Good Handbook* by David Burns, MD, the connection is made between how we “think” and how we “feel”. We all limit our ability to think big by engaging in one of the following.

1. All-or-nothing thinking: Seeing things in black and white categories. If your performance falls short of perfection, you see yourself as a total failure.
2. Overgeneralization: Seeing a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.
3. Mental Filter: You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively, so that your vision of all reality become darkened.
4. Discounting the positive: Rejecting positive experiences by insisting they “don’t count.”
5. Jumping to conclusions: Interpreting things negatively even though there are no facts to support your conclusion.
6. Magnification: Exaggerating the importance of your problems or minimizing the importance of your desirable qualities.
7. Emotional Reasoning: Assuming that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are: ‘I feel it, therefore it must be true.’
8. Should Statements: Telling yourself that things should be the way you expected them to be.
9. Labeling: This is an extreme form of all-or-nothing thinking. Instead of saying “I made a mistake,” you label yourself “I’m a loser.”
10. Personalization: Holding yourself personally responsible for an event that isn’t entirely under your control.



“Teach us to give  
and not to count  
the cost.”

Saint Ignatius Loyola

### **7. Create A Stellar Support Network:**

1. Limit your exposure to negative people.
2. Create a personal board of directors with three to five people.
3. Be clear about what you want to accomplish and ask for support and feedback.
4. Be a support to someone and help him or her grow.
5. Check your ego at the door.
6. Learn People Skills.
7. Build extraordinary relationships personally and professionally.
8. Assume positive intent with everyone you meet.
9. Hire a coach or mentor.

### **8. Gratitude / Generosity**

1. Before your head hits the pillow, list three things you're grateful for.
2. Replace “no worries” with “you're welcome”.
3. Say “thank you”.
4. On a daily basis find one way to be generous with your time, insight, and wisdom.
5. Buy someone his or her coffee or lunch.
6. Remember gratitude fuels thinking and acting bigger.

### **9. Disciplined Thinking:**

1. Break your aspirational goal down into actionable items.
2. Schedule time to explore the extraordinary.
3. Procrastination is about fear...isolate the fear and link to twisted thinking.





4. Focus on getting the next light to turn green.
5. Focus on progress not on perfection...80% and launch.
6. Focus on results and not effort.
7. Remember Newton's first law of motion: The velocity of a body remains constant unless the body is acted upon by an external force. See # 1 above.
8. Julia Cameron and *The Artists Way* - morning pages.

Hugh Blane is President of Claris Consulting. He is a nationally recognized business strategist hired to help organizations solve challenging business issues, strengthen personal and professional relationships, and execute on strategic initiatives with greater effectiveness. A subject-matter expert in leadership, team performance, and influence, Hugh Blane is a senior-level consultant who has worked with thousands of people in a wide variety of organizations including Pepperdine and Stanford University, the University of Washington, Microsoft, Starbucks, Spacelabs Medical, KPMG and Costco.