

## July's Tip: Houdini Thinking - Taking a Different Perspective

### The Burglar-Proof Safe

In 1904, in London, Houdini gained a great deal of publicity by announcing that he could escape from any safe. In response to this he was challenged by a company to try to escape from their new 'Burglar-Proof' safe.

Houdini took on the challenge at the Euston Theatre. The safe was so heavy that the stage had to be reinforced to take its weight. On the night of the performance the safe and Houdini were searched by a committee of men from the audience. Houdini was then locked in the safe and the safe covered by a screen.

Just when the audience were convinced that Houdini had run out of air and were starting to clamour for his release, Houdini stepped out from behind the screen – **free!**

Following the success of this performance, escaping from safes featured as a regular challenge for some time.

### The Secret

The thinking behind this escape is nicely summed up in the film 'Houdini', starring Tony Curtis and Janet Leigh.

After he makes his escape, Bess (Janet Leigh), whispers to Houdini's mother,

***"The trick was to get them to lock him in the safe.  
Safes are made to prevent people from getting in, not getting out!"***

One of the main principles of magic is misdirection. With Houdini's escape from the safe, the public were already thinking in the wrong direction in terms of the safe's security. He was able to manipulate the mechanism from the inside of the safe. Remember, it was a 'burglar-proof' safe, not an 'escape-proof' safe!

### Taking a Different Perspective

Consider the possibility that the reason you cannot find your way out of certain problems is that you are thinking in the wrong direction.

In problem solving **going against the grain** or heading in the **opposite direction** to what you think would be logical, is sometimes a way to get a breakthrough.

So, to help you find new approaches to old problems or issues, **ask new questions** that direct your attention towards other possibilities or different ways of thinking.

When you ask a question it not only directs your thinking, but you are unconsciously accepting all the assumptions and presuppositions behind that question.

When you ask a new question that points in the opposite direction, this bypasses the original assumptions that may be holding you back.

## **Apply it for yourself**

Pick a situation where you haven't been making any progress for some time, an issue where it feels like you are 'banging your head against a brick wall', or 'pushing against a door that is closed'. Take a moment to consider how you could approach the problem from a different direction, one where you pull the door perhaps, or tackle it from the other side. When you think about whatever it is that you have been doing, figure out what might be the opposite approach. Certainly doing more of the same is hard work, so try approaching it from the other side as Houdini did with the safe.

Here are some interesting questions you could ask:

**As you see yourself with this problem, what strikes you as curious?**

**Are you secretly in love with the problem?**

**How could you make money out of this problem?**

**How will having this problem have helped you?**

**What if this was really someone else's problem?**

**What if you were wrong about this?**

**What can you do?**

I'm sure that you can think of some more questions ... Why not send us your most interesting "Taking a Different Perspective Question?" at [www.iridiumconsulting.co.uk](http://www.iridiumconsulting.co.uk)

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## **Recommended Website**

Occasionally you come across websites that you just want to tell other people about and so I thought this month I would add this link to the newsletter: <http://www.monday9am.tv> Every Monday at 9am a new short (five minute) film is released. The films are deliberately low tech and feature interviews with extraordinary people in everyday life. The films aim to be quietly provocative, set out to inspire and ask questions that make you think. Take a look for yourself - there is an archive of all the films released so far on the site.

[www.iridiumconsulting.co.uk](http://www.iridiumconsulting.co.uk)