

## THE BIG IDEAS

### The Seven Principles

Of da Vinci's genius.

### A Hundred Questions

That can change your life.

### Keep a Journal

Or da Vinci-like Notebook.

### Unconscious Database

Tap into it!

### Get Your Mind Map On!

Powerful stuff.

### Affirmations

How're yours?

### Learning to Draw

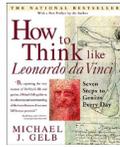
See the world anew.

### The Body of a Genius

How's yours?

### Goals and Process

Both, please! :)



# How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci

## Seven Steps to Genius Everyday

BY MICHAEL GELB · DELL © 2000 · 336 PAGES

“It was with the idea of finding the principles underlying Leonardo’s limitless creativity that I began my work on the book you are now holding in your hands. The seven principles I eventually identified were simply my attempt to write the how-to guide that Leonardo never put down on paper, to codify the principles implicit in Leonardo’s work so that they can be used by others. I feel very strongly that the genius of Leonardo resides not just in what he created by in what he can inspire us to create. Beyond all his stellar achievements, Leonardo da Vinci serves as a global archetype of human potential, giving us intimations of what we ourselves may be capable of doing.”

~ Michael Gelb from *How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci*

Did you know that Leonardo da Vinci was not only the leading artist (*Mona Lisa*, *Last Supper*, etc.) of his time, he was also an incredible inventor, military engineer, musician, and scientist (not to mention the fact that he was, apparently, also one heck of a party planner and one of the strongest athletes as well)?!

Yep. That’s our kind of guy.

In *How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci*, Michael Gelb boils down da Vinci’s genius into seven attributes and provides a fun and powerful framework complimented with incredible exercises that help us develop our creativity and fully express our unique genius.

This book was one of the most influential reads in my early days and I can vividly remember reading it shortly after selling my first business (eteamz) nearly eight years ago. I highly recommend it and I’m excited to share some of my favorite Big Ideas (plus one of the most transformative exercises I’ve ever done: A Hundred Questions).

Let’s start by taking a quick look at the seven attributes of da Vinci and then we’ll explore a few of my favorite Big Ideas on how to rock ‘em!

## THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF DA VINCI’S GENIUS

After an introduction to da Vinci’s life, Gelb walks us through these seven attributes of da Vinci’s genius. (Note: Please say these out loud with your best Italian accent! :)

1. **“Curiosità—An insatiably curious approach to life and an unrelenting quest for continuous learning.**
2. **Dimonstrazione—A commitment to test knowledge through experience, persistence, and a willingness to learn from mistakes.**
3. **Sensazione—The continual refinement of the senses, especially sight, as the means to clarify experience.**
4. **Sfumato (literally ‘Going up in Smoke’)—A willingness to embrace ambiguity, paradox, and uncertainty.**

*“For in truth, great love is born of great knowledge of the thing loved.”*

~ Leonardo da Vinci

*"The knowledge of all things  
is possible."*

~ Leonardo da Vinci

5. *Arte/Scienza*—The development of the balance between science and art, logic and imagination. 'Whole-brain thinking.'
6. *Corporalita*—The cultivation of grace, ambidexterity, fitness, and poise.
7. *Connessione*—A recognition and appreciation for the connectedness of all things and phenomena. Systems thinking."

## A HUNDRED QUESTIONS

"Great minds ask great questions. The questions that 'engage our thought' on a daily basis reflect our life purpose and influence the quality of our lives. By cultivating a Da Vinci-like open, questioning frame of mind, we broaden our universe and improve our ability to travel through it."

Got a journal? If not, time to get one!

Da Vinci carried his everywhere. You might want to as well. Gelb has a lot of awesome exercises to fill your new journal up and research has proven that capturing your thoughts, questions, dreams, goals and all that jazz is good for ya. (See the next Big Idea. :)

*"The desire to know is  
natural to good men."*

~ Leonardo da Vinci

[Speaking of journals: Did you know that in 1994, Bill Gates bought 18 sheets (of the 7,000 existing) from da Vinci's notes for 30.8 million bucks. Not bad, eh?]

The first Da Vincian principle is *Curiosità* and Gelb offers us an incredible exercise for that new journal of yours. It's called "A Hundred Questions" and is easily one of the most powerful exercises I've ever done. It goes like this:

Give yourself ~60 minutes. Find a comfortable place where you won't be distracted. Sit down and make a list of 100 questions you find interesting. Write about whatever's meaningful for you. Questions can range from "Why is the sky blue?" and "How can I optimize my health?" to "What are my greatest strengths?" and "What am I most passionate about?" and whatever else comes through.

Odds are that the first few questions will flow and then it will be a little tougher. Push through the desire to walk away and finish them all in one sitting. Then read through your list and note the themes that emerge. Consider the themes you notice without judging them. Are your questions about Business? Relationships? Self-Growth? Money? Spirituality? The Meaning of Life?

*"I wish to work miracles."*

~ Leonardo da Vinci

Top 10 Questions. Once you've done that, review your list of 100 questions and choose the 10 that you find most significant. Then rank them in importance from 1 to 10. Do that and I promise you you'll have a REALLY good sense of what's important to you in your life!!

Without exaggeration, this is probably the most powerful exercise I've ever done and those 10 questions have guided my life over the last 8 years in incredibly powerful ways.

So...

What're you waiting for?!? Find some quiet time and get your questions on will ya?!

[P.S. For those curious souls, here are the Top 10 Questions I came up with on Saturday, June 8th, 2001:

*"Just as iron rusts from  
disuse, and stagnant water  
putrefies, or when cold  
turns to ice, so our  
intellect wastes unless it is  
kept in use."*

~ Leonardo da Vinci

1. *How do I master myself and control my will/how do I become a warrior?* (I was into Dan Millman's *Way of the Peaceful Warrior* at that stage. :)
2. *What is love? How do I live with agape, philo and eros?* (I was also binging on Paulo Coelho who described the three Greek words for love in one of his books!)
3. *What is the optimal life? How do I live this life?*
4. *What is health? How do I achieve optimal health/energy/power?*
5. *What is important to me?*

*"The greatest geniuses sometimes accomplish more when they work less."*

~ Leonardo da Vinci

6. How can I inspire others to reach their potential and to love life?
7. Who are the 10 greatest wisdom philosophers?
8. Who are the 10 greatest examples of this wisdom in action?
9. What is living in the moment? How do I do that?
10. Why is religion so widespread?

Wow.

Just typing those out gave me goosebumps as I feel into how much they have influenced my life.

I really hope you do the exercise!

P.P.S. After this exercise, Gelb presents what he calls "10 Power Questions" and suggests you pick one of those or one of your Top 10 questions and practice the lost art of contemplation. The question I picked? "How can I get paid to do what I love?" SUPER powerful question and the fact that I've lived this question for nearly a decade is why I'm getting paid to read and write and grow! ... How can YOU get paid to do what you love?!? ]

## KEEP A JOURNAL OR "NOTEBOOK"

"Leonardo da Vinci carried a notebook with him at all times so that he could jot down ideas, impressions, and observations as they occurred. His notebooks (seven thousand pages exist; most scholars estimate this is about one half of the amount he left to Francesco Melzi in his will) contained jokes and fables, the observations and thoughts of scholars he admired, personal financial records, letters, reflections on domestic problems, philosophical musings and prophecies, plans for inventions, and treatises on anatomy, botany, geology, flight, water, and painting."

*"The happiest people in the world ask, 'What if I could find some way to get paid for doing what I love?'"*

~ Michael Gelb

Journaling. Powerful stuff.

Did you know it's scientifically proven to boost your happiness levels? Yepperz.

In fact, according to Marci Shimoff in her great book *Happy for No Reason* (see Notes): "In an experiment by Dr. Robert Emmons at the University of California-Davis, people who kept a 'gratitude journal,' a weekly record of things they felt grateful for, enjoyed better physical health, were more optimistic, exercised more regularly, and described themselves as happier than a control group who didn't keep journals."

Plus, how 'bout this from Sonja Lyubomirsky in *The How of Happiness* (see Notes): "There are many ways to practice optimism, but the one that has been empirically shown to enhance well-being is the original Best Possible Selves diary method. To try it out, sit in a quiet place, and take twenty to thirty minutes to think about what you expect your life to be one, five, or ten years from now. Visualize a future for yourself in which everything has turned out the way you've wanted. You have tried your best, worked hard, and achieved all your goals. Now write down what you imagine. This writing exercise in a sense puts your optimistic 'muscles' into practice. Even if thinking about the brightest future for yourself doesn't come naturally at first, it may get there with time and training. Amazing things can come about as a result of writing."

So, you got a journal yet? :)

## TAP INTO YOUR UNCONSCIOUS DATABASE

*"If the young Leonardo were alive today and attending grade school, he would probably be on medication."*

~Michael Gelb

"Neuroscientists estimate that your unconscious database outweighs the conscious on an order exceeding ten million to one. This database is the source of your creative potential. In other words, a part of you is much smarter than you are. The wisest people regularly consult that smartest part. You can, too, by making space for incubation."

Love that.

*"Keeping your mind open in the face of uncertainty is the single most powerful secret of unleashing your creative potential."*

~ Michael Gelb

*"In addition to expanding the understanding of the nature and scope of intelligence, contemporary psychological research has revealed startling truths about the extent of your potential. We can summarize the results with the phrase: Your brain is much better than you think."*

~ Michael Gelb

*"The ability to thrive with ambiguity must become part of our everyday lives."*

~ Michael Gelb

So, how do the greatest minds do this?

According to Gelb, we rarely get our best ideas when we're officially "at work." If we want to enter the domain of genius, we've gotta "take time for solitude and relaxation"!

Joseph Campbell says something similar. He puts it this way: "This is an absolute necessity for anybody today. You must have a room, or a certain hour or so a day, where you don't know what was in the newspapers this morning, you don't know who your friends are, you don't know what you owe anybody, you don't know what anybody owes you. This is a place where you can simply experience and bring forth what you are and what you might be. This is the place of creative incubation. At first you might find that nothing happens there. But if you have a sacred place and use it, something eventually will happen."

## GET YOUR MIND MAP ON!

"Mind mapping is a whole-brain method for generating and organizing ideas, originated by Tony Buzan, and largely inspired by Da Vinci's approach to note taking. You can use mind mapping for personal goal setting, daily planning, and interpersonal problem solving. It can help you at work, with your kids, or with any pursuit. The most marvelous application of mind mapping, however, is that through regular practice it trains you to be a more balanced thinker, à la Leonardo."

Mind mapping absolutely rocks.

The basic idea is that our minds aren't ordered linearly and we want to give ourselves an organic structure that mirrors our minds and nature as we capture ideas.

Gelb's brilliant intro to mind mapping is worth the price of the book alone (many times over) and you can check out a video of how I mind map on the site! :)

## HOW'RE YOUR AFFIRMATIONS?

"Although he experienced self-doubt and questioned the value of his efforts, he never gave up. Leonardo's courage and persistence in the face of adversity are tremendously inspiring. He strengthened his will to continue his work through affirmations that he wrote in his notebook, such as:

'I do not depart from my furrow.'

'Obstacles do not bend me.'

'Every obstacle is destroyed through rigor.'

'I shall continue.'

'I never tire of being useful.'"

Gotta love those affirmations, eh?!?

I love to write this as the first line in my AM journaling: "Today is going to be the greatest day of my life!" And, I dig this Gay Hendricks-inspired affirmation: "Every day I expand in creativity, love, kindness, generosity and abundance as I inspire those around me to do the same!"

So, what are some of your favorite affirmations?

## LEARNING TO DRAW

"For Leonardo, drawing was much more than illustration; it was the key to understanding creation. So for aspiring Da Vincians, learning to draw is the best way to begin to learn to see and create."

Drawing: This falls under the third principle: *sensazione*—all about developing our senses.

Before reading this book I was convinced I couldn't draw a stick figure. Seriously. Not pretty.

*"The bottom line: Embrace ambiguity and trust your gut."*

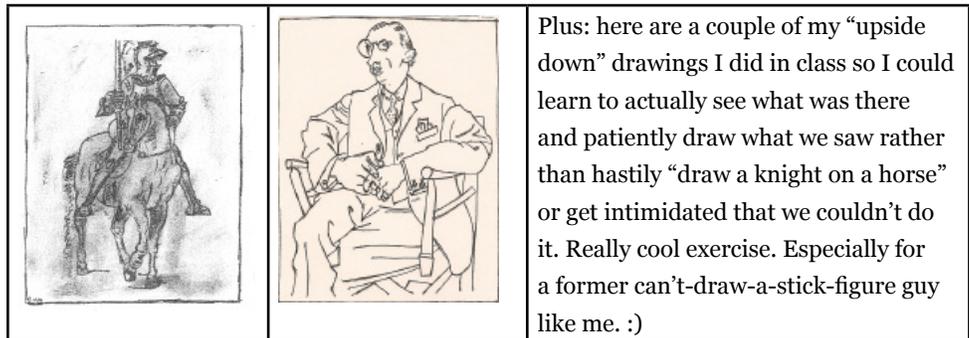
~ Michael Gelb

*"I've worked with thousands of managers at all levels. Some are analytical, serious, thorough planners; others are intuitive, playful, spontaneous improvisers. The very best are those who balance analysis and intuition, seriousness and play, planning and improvisation, Arte and Scienza."*

~ Michael Gelb

But Gelb convinced me to give it a shot and inspired me to get into Betty Edwards' *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* book (which blew me away) and even take a week long drawing course a couple years ago.

Here are the amusing before and after shots of my self-portraits from that class (yes, I know I look a bit like a wanted poster! :):



*"Aerobic (with oxygen) exercise strengthens your cardiovascular system, improving blood and therefore oxygen flow to your body and brain. Your brain is, on average, less than 3 percent of your body weight, yet it uses more than 30 percent of your body's oxygen. As you become aerobically fit, you double your capacity to process oxygen."*

~ Michael Gelb

## THE BODY OF A GENIUS

**"What is your image of the body type of a genius? Did you grow up, as I did, with the stereotype of the skinny, 'four-eyed,' brainiac nerd? It's amazing how many people associate high intelligence with physical ineptitude. With a few exceptions, the great geniuses of history were gifted with remarkable physical energy and aptitude, none more so than Da Vinci."**

*Corporalita.* That's the sixth principle.

Hard to believe that in addition to *everything* else that was amazing about Da Vinci, he was ALSO an incredible athlete. Dig it.

I like to say we're gonna have a hard time living at our highest potential if we have a hard time getting out of bed and, as Gelb says: *"With a few exceptions, the great geniuses of history were gifted with remarkable physical energy and aptitude."*

In the book Gelb goes off on a number of ways we can rock our *"grace, ambidexterity, fitness, and poise"* including a discussion on The Alexander Technique that led me to a workshop in Greece where I studied this movement discipline. (Fun.)

For now, what's the #1 thing you can do for your body?!? Is it exercising more consistently, eating more healthfully, getting more rest?!?

What's the #1 thing that, if you started doing today, would have THE most positive impact on your life?!?

*"Now the most important question for artists of life: Am I willing to hold the creative tension between my ideals and my current reality?"*

~ Michael Gelb

*"Genius is made, not born."*

~ Michael Gelb

## GOALS AND PROCESS

"Think of an important goal that you have accomplished. Describe the process you followed in achieving that goal. Have you ever achieved a success without experiencing fulfillment? How do goal and process, doing and being, relate? Does the end justify the means? To live a successful and fulfilling life, must one: a) be 100 percent committed to achieving clearly defined goals; b) recognize that the process of living every day, the daily quality of life, is of greatest importance; or c) both a and b?"

I'll take c) please!!!! :)

Tal Ben-Shahar, the Harvard professor of Positive Psychology, captures the beauty of holding both in his fantastic book *Happier* (see Notes) where he delineates four different archetypes and points the way to happiness that echoes Gelb's wisdom here: *"The rat racer's illusion is that reaching some future destination will bring him lasting happiness; he does not recognize the significance of the journey. The hedonist's illusion is that only the journey is important. The nihilist, having given up on both the destination and the journey, is disillusioned with life. The rat racer becomes a slave to the future; the hedonist, a slave to the moment; the nihilist, a slave to the past.*

*Attaining lasting happiness requires that we enjoy the journey on our way toward a destination we deem valuable. Happiness is not about making it to the peak of the mountain nor is it about climbing aimlessly around the mountain; happiness is the experience of climbing toward the peak."*

Here's to embracing BOTH the journey AND the destination as we have fun learning to think like Da Vinci and express our most radiant genius!

B

**Brian Johnson,**  
*Chief Philosopher*

If you liked this Note,  
you'll probably like...

**Happier**

**Happy for No Reason**

**The How of Happiness**

**The Power of Myth**

**The Seven Spiritual Laws  
of Success**

**The Gifted Adult**

## About the Author of "How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci"

MICHAEL GELB



Michael J. Gelb, is the world's leading authority on the application of genius thinking to personal and organizational development. He is a pioneer in the fields of creative thinking, accelerated learning, and innovative leadership. Gelb leads seminars for organizations such as DuPont, IBM, Merck, Microsoft, Nike, and YPO. He brings more than 30 years of experience as a professional speaker, seminar leader and organizational consultant to his diverse, international clientele. (from his web site where you can learn more: [MichaelGelb.com](http://MichaelGelb.com))

## About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON



Brian Johnson is a lover of wisdom (aka a "Philosopher") and a passionate student of life who's committed to inspiring and empowering millions of people to live their greatest lives as he studies, embodies and shares the universal truths of optimal living. He hates his job.