

Laughter for the Mind: Do You Think Too Much?

By Lynn Shaw, MSW

*"When we begin to think, instead of respond, we stop laughing."
~ Annette Goodheart, Ph.D., author, Laughter Therapy*

If it is true that we think over 50,000 thoughts a day, and if it is true that of those 50,000 thoughts, 40,000 thoughts are the same as yesterday's, then why wouldn't we want to clear our thoughts? Yet, in today's multi-task thinking world, people are thinking and living from their head and often ignoring a wonderful place to live-from their laughing heart.

In the past week, how many people have told you that you think too much? Now consider, in the past week, how many people have told you that you laugh too much?

While working in an inpatient psychiatric hospital, I remember the staff meeting when I heard disturbing news and a profound statement. The executive director had announced that the company was in bankruptcy reorganization - and we would remain open... for now.

As the news penetrated and the air in the room grew anxious, the executive director offered assurances that the reorganization would be beneficial. As I sat *thinking...* and *thinking...* and *thinking*, I felt my adrenalin surge creating a rapid pulse, constricted throat, and clenched hands. My mind whirled with thoughts and questions. What if there are layoffs? What if the bankruptcy is denied reorganization status? What if.... what if.... what if?

Spinning Thoughts

Cutting through my spinning thoughts, I heard Alan, a colleague, quietly say, "The mind is a powerful tool. It can either help us or hurt us. We choose." As Emeril, the gourmet chef, would say, "BAM!" and the profound statement took hold. The spinning thoughts halted, my breathing returned, and I understood exactly what Alan was saying. The *mind as a tool* can either work toward repair or toward chaos.

Does your mind help you or hurt you?

Dr. Annette Goodheart, author of *Laughter Therapy*, states that, "the first major myth about laughter that prevents us from laughing as much as we need to is that we must have a reason to laugh." Reasoning is powerful and helpful. It helps us solve daily problems, discern information, and create a plan of action. But when it comes to laughter and enjoying the experience of laughter, reasoning can be hurtful. We censor ourselves because we THINK too much about the laughter.

Have you ever been in a restaurant and heard a group of people spontaneously laugh so loudly that patrons stop with forks in mid-air to look? The reasoning part of your mind says, "What's so funny?" The spontaneous part of your mind says, "I want to laugh, too!"

It is impossible to laugh and think at the same time. You may think you're thinking when you're laughing because thoughts come quickly after laughter. It's really the heart that releases the flow of laughter and allows thought to stop. Need a break from thinking? Access your laughing heart.

How do you get started laughing?

Be intentional about enjoying the sounds of laughter. Start now! On the count of three, place your hands over your belly and say HA, HA, HA! Feel the belly muscles contract? Your mind was working for you to signal the muscles to contract. Yes, a helpful mind. Repeat this until your own spontaneous laugh begins? Enjoy your helpful mind!

Challenge yourself to spend 10 minutes every day letting your mind help you laugh out loud! Smile while thinking about laughing. Remember, the heart releases the flow of laughter, and the energy flows from the heart soaring on the sounds of laughter.

© Lynn Shaw. All rights reserved. If you are interested in publishing this article, please email lynn@lynnshaw.com