EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Adam Grant’s newest book Think Again – The Power of Knowing What You Don’t Know argues that people that think more like scientists are more likely to challenge assumptions, stay humble, curious, and build teams capable of learning and improving.

HIGHLIGHTS
• To make progress, we must be able to rethink by questioning our assumptions and staying humble. We must be willing to be wrong and unlearn.
• Daniel Kahneman’s ground breaking book, Thinking Fast and Slow, describes Fast Thinking (FT) and Slow Thinking (ST). Though our FT is efficient and takes little brain power (driving to work for example), it takes effort to ensure we challenge our assumptions using ST in order to ensure we are not headed into failure.
• Thinking again takes humility. The proud will likely stay stuck in their ways, emboldened by confirmation bias. The humble stay curious, which can lead to discovering different, better ways of doing business.
• Surrounding yourself with personnel that challenge your thoughts make you a stronger leader. The opposite is more than just maintaining the status quo, it is actually making you a weaker leader.
• The scientist says I might be wrong and seek truth, the preacher says I’m right, the prosecutor says you’re wrong, and the politician has a fixed view and looks for others to join their cause.
• We typically cling to our assumptions, instincts, and habits.
• The path to humility starts with acknowledging our fallibility.
• It is important to hunt for reasons we may be wrong, rather than just reasons we are right.
• A good debate should be more like a dance than a battle. You can align your moves by finding common ground, provide reason, and possibly find some harmony to move on and make progress.
• Don’t wait until you are already wrong to learn.
• Admitting our mistakes or uncertainties help to foster a culture that is tolerant of mistakes, open to feedback, and free of reprisal.
• Foster a desire to achieve a purpose over a pursuit of happiness.

THOUGHTS
• Challenging assumptions is vital to how we operate in the military from both a tactical and strategic level. We do ourselves, our teams, and our nation an injustice if we don’t pause, check our assumptions, before we pull the trigger, push the button, give the order, or sign the EXORD.
• There must be a balance because constantly questioning everything can be exhausting and lead to analysis paralysis. We do have to operate on incomplete information, and we do have to MAKE DECISIONS, but we can stay humble, curious, and ensure our assumptions are clearly captured. We can build a team that has red cells and personnel tasked with checking assumptions prior to execution.
NOTEWORTHY QUOTES

Think Again – The Power of Knowing What you Don’t Know – Adam Grant

“Intelligence is traditionally viewed as the ability to think and learn. Yet in a turbulent world, there’s another set of cognitive skills that might matter more: the ability to rethink and unlearn.” – 2

“Questioning ourselves makes the world more unpredictable. It requires us to admit that the facts may have changed, that what was once right may now be wrong. Reconsidering something we believe deeply can threaten our identities, making it feel as if we’re losing a part of ourselves.” – 4

“I’m beginning to think decisiveness is overrated... but I reserve the right to change my mind.” – 22

“Mental horsepower doesn’t guarantee mental dexterity. No matter how much brainpower you have, if you lack the motivation to change your mind, you’ll miss many occasions to think again.” – 24

“...biases don’t just prevent us from applying our intelligence. They can actually contort our intelligence into a weapon against the truth.” – 25

“The brighter you are, the harder it can be to see your own limitations. Being good at thinking can make you worse at rethinking.” – 25

“Thinking like a scientist involves more than just reacting with an open mind. It means being actively open-minded. It requires searching for reasons why we might be wrong – not for reasons why we must be right – and revising our views based on what we learn.” – 25

“Recognizing our shortcomings opens the door to doubt. As we question our current understanding, we become curious about what information we’re missing. That search leads us to new discoveries, which in turn maintain our humility by reinforcing how much we still have to learn. If knowledge is power, knowing what we don’t know is wisdom.” – 28

“Good judgement depends on having the skill – and the will – to open our minds.” – 31

“When we lack the knowledge and skills to achieve excellence, we sometimes lack the knowledge and skills to judge excellence.” – 43

“Humility is often misunderstood. It’s not a matter of having low self-confidence. One of the Latin roots of humility means ‘from the earth.’ It’s about being grounded – recognizing that we’re flawed and fallible.” – 46

“Great thinkers don’t harbor doubts because they’re imposters. They maintain doubts because they know we’re all partially blind and they’re committed to improving their sight. They don’t boast about how much they know; they marvel at how little they understand. They’re aware that each answer raises new questions, and the quest for knowledge is never finished. A mark of lifelong learners is recognizing that
they can learn something from everyone they meet. Arrogance leaves us blind to our weaknesses. Humility is a reflective lens: it helps us see clearly. Confident humility is a corrective lens: it enables us to overcome those weaknesses.” – 54

“Unlike our height or raw intelligence, we have full control over what we believe is true. We choose our views, and we can choose to rethink them any time we want.” – 60

“…[Daniel Kahneman] genuinely enjoys discovering that he is wrong, because it means he is now less wrong than before.” – 61

“As Bridgewater founder Ray Dalio told me, ‘If you don’t look back at yourself and think, ‘Wow, how stupid I was a year ago,’ then you must not have learned much last year.’” – 63

“It’s a sign of wisdom to avoid believing every thought that enters your mind. It’s a mark of emotional intelligence to avoid internalizing every feeling that enters your heart.” – 68

“If being wrong repeatedly leads us to the right answer, the experience of being wrong itself can become joyful.” – 69

“It’s one thing to admit to ourselves that we’ve been wrong. It’s another thing to confess that to other people. Even if we manage to overthrow our inner dictator, we run the risk of facing outer ridicule. In some cases we fear that if others find out we were wrong, it could destroy our reputations.” – 73

“…admitting we were wrong doesn’t make us look less competent. It’s a display of honesty and a willingness to learn.” – 73

“Kids whose parents clash constructively feel more emotionally safe in elementary school, and over the next few years they actually demonstrate more helpfulness and compassion toward their classmates.” – 80

“Rethinking depends on a different kind of network: a challenge network, a group of people we trust to point out our blind spots and help us overcome our weaknesses.” – 83

“We learn more from people who challenge our thought process than those who affirm our conclusions. Strong leaders engage their critics and make themselves stronger. Weak leaders silence their critics and make themselves weaker.” – 86

“Starting a disagreement by asking, ‘Can we debate?’ sends a message that you want to think like a scientist, not a preacher, or a prosecutor – and encourages the other person to think that way, too.” – 92

“Note to self: on my next trip to the top of Mount Stupid, remember to take a selfie.” – 102

“When someone becomes hostile, if you respond by viewing the argument as a war, you can neither attack nor retreat. If instead you treat it as a dance, you have another option – you can sidestep.” – 115
“In a heated argument, you can always stop and ask, ‘What evidence would change your mind?’ If the answer is nothing, then there’s no point in continuing the debate. You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it think.” – 116

“By asking questions rather than thinking for the audience, we invite them to join us as a partner and think for themselves. If we approach an argument as a war, there will be winners and losers. If we see it more as a dance, we can begin to choreograph a way forward. By considering the strongest version of an opponent’s perspective and limiting our responses to our few best steps, we have a better chance of finding a rhythm.” – 119

“A rivalry exists whenever we reserve special animosity for a group we see as competing with us for resources or threatening our identities.” – 124

“We don’t just preach the virtues of our side; we find self-worth in prosecuting the vices of our rivals.” – 124

“Refuting a point of view produces antibodies against future influence attempts. We become more certain of our opinions and less curious about alternative views. Counterarguments no longer surprise us or stump us – we have our rebuttals ready.” – 145

“When people ignore advice, it isn’t always because they disagree with it. Sometimes they’re resisting the sense of pressure and the feeling that someone else is controlling their decision.” – 150

“Listening well is more than a matter of talking less. It’s a set of skills in asking and responding. It starts with showing more interest in other people’s interests rather than trying to judge their status or prove our own.” – 156

“Great listeners are more interested in making their audiences feel smart.” – 158

“When we succeed in changing someone’s mind, we shouldn’t only ask whether we’re proud of what we’ve achieved. We should also ask whether we’re proud of how we’ve achieved it.” – 160

“When someone knowledgeable admits uncertainty, it surprises people, and they end up paying more attention to the substance of the argument.” – 171

“New research reveals that people are more likely to promote diversity and inclusion when the message is more nuanced (and more accurate): ‘Diversity is good but it isn’t easy.’ Acknowledging complexity doesn’t make speakers and writers less convincing; it makes them more credible. It doesn’t lose viewers and readers; it maintains their engagement while stoking their curiosity.” – 174

“By freely admitting their mistakes, they were then able to learn what had caused them to eliminate them moving forward.” – 209

“…psychological safety is not a matter of relaxing standards, making people comfortable, being nice and agreeable, or giving unconditional praise. It’s fostering a climate of respect, trust, and openness in which
people can raise concerns and suggestions without fear of reprisal. It’s the foundation of a learning culture. In performance cultures, the emphasis on results often undermines psychological safety. When we see people get punished for failures and mistakes, we become worried about proving our competence and protecting our careers.” – 209

“…changing the culture of an entire organization is daunting, while changing the culture of a team is more feasible. It starts with modeling the values we want to promote, identifying and praising others who exemplify them, and building a coalition of colleagues who are committed to making the change.” – 212

“It takes confident humility to admit that we’re a work in progress. It shows that we can care more about improving ourselves than proving ourselves.” – 215

“Exclusively praising and rewarding results is dangerous because it breeds overconfidence in poor strategies, incentivizing people to keep doing things the way they’ve always done them.” – 217

“Escalation of commitment happens because we’re rationalizing creatures, constantly searching for self-justifications for our prior beliefs as a way to soothe our egos, shield our images, and validate our past decisions.” – 229

“Psychologists find that the more people value happiness, the less happy they often become in their lives.” – 237

“…when we hunt for happiness, we overemphasize pleasure at the expense of purpose. This theory is consistent with data suggesting that meaning is healthier than happiness, and that people who look for purpose in their work are more successful in pursuing their passions – and less likely to quit their jobs – than those who look for joy. While enjoyment waxes and wanes, meaning tends to least.” – 238