

## **I choose to be an Independent Thinker**

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Want a real New Year's Resolution? Drop the lame resolutions to lose weight or get up on time. How about making a resolution to think for yourself? Even research shows that most people fail to think for themselves – they're too busy looking to what others are doing and saying to guide their own thoughts and behaviors. They mimic what has been done before, what they have been told, or what everybody else is doing. They simply act as mirrors and reflect the beliefs, thoughts, and behaviors of others rather than their own.

What's wrong with that you might ask? It's a lot easier just to memorize (and regurgitate) answers from a study guide than to really reflect on what you're learning, or question what you're being taught. It's also a lot easier to view life as having clear-cut, definitive answers. However, this simplistic approach fails to account for the complexity found in life and stunts your growth as an individual. You fail to acquire important skills that allow you to think on your own, you're relationships are limited and lack diversity, and your view of the world becomes extremely narrow and restricted. In the end you lose out because you don't question what your friends are doing and you end up with DUIs or failing grades. Or, you don't figure out your purpose in life – you stay in a career that is unfulfilling for you. Worse, your relationships stay very superficial because you are not being you. I don't think anyone would want to be known solely as "He who repeats Jon Stewart" or "She who wears Tommy H." Your parents (probably) no longer dress you for school so why let someone else choose how you think?

Blindly adopting the behaviors and beliefs of others *is* a normal stage of development, but it's important not to get stuck there. There is a strong underlying fear that can keep us at this stage: the fear of not being accepted by others. This fear traps many people into conforming. The chance to become a critical and independent thinker is often sacrificed for the desire to be accepted by or please others.

How can you resist this powerful pull to go along, to copy others, to not make waves? Ask yourself: Would you be willing to go against the grain? Would you be willing to be questioned and possibly criticized by others and still stand up for your beliefs? What do you believe in? How do you handle conflict and differences of opinion? Do you follow the advice of others or do you gather information, examine it, question it, and then draw your own conclusions? Do you have the courage to let go of how others perceive you? Only by really questioning and challenging yourself can you move past this stage and develop into a mature, competent, and complex person. You have to find out: Why do I gossip? Why do I get "loaded" every weekend? Why do I dress like everyone else? What do I benefit from using drugs? Why do I have to be liked by everybody? Is this who I want to be? It takes a lot effort, time, and energy to push yourself beyond the safety of the masses, take risks, and explore new territory. Sure, it's definitely a lot easier to let others do the thinking for you, but is that really who you are?

"Be yourself. There is something that you can do better than any other. Listen to the inward voice and bravely obey that." - Unknown