

**Below you will find a series of six booster shots designed by psychologists to reduce the risk of being infected by groupthink. Write down your answers to each of the multiple choice questions and check them against the correct answers available below.**

### **Booster Shots #1**

The following quote is from a chapter written by Irving Janis (1997) for the third edition of the book *A First Look at Communication Theory* by E. Griffin published by McGraw-Hill, Inc.

As the person in charge of the Flight Readiness Review for NASA, Jesse Moore had the ultimate authority to approve or scrub the shuttle mission. He relied on the assessments of managers at the Kennedy, Johnson, and Marshall Space Centers, who in turn consulted with engineers from the companies that designed the *Challenger*'s subsystems. The film *Apollo 13* dramatized the final phase of this "go/no-go" launch procedure. NASA has always taken the position that "a launch should be canceled if there is any doubt of its safety."

The day before the launch, Morton Thiokol engineers warned that the flight might be risky. As the team responsible for the performance of the rocket booster, they worried about the below-freezing temperature that was forecast for the morning of the launch. The O-ring seals had never been tested below 53 degrees Fahrenheit, and as Thiokol engineer Roger Boisjoly later testified, getting the O-rings to seal gaps with the temperature in the 20s was like "trying to shove a brick into a crack versus a sponge."

The O-ring seals had long been classified a critical component on the rocket motor, "a failure point—without back-up—that could cause a loss of life or vehicle if the component failed." Yet when Thiokol engineers raised the safety issue in a teleconference, NASA personnel discounted their concerns and urged them to reconsider their recommendation. After an off-line caucus with company executives, Thiokol engineers reversed their "no-go" position and announced that their solid rocket motor was ready to fly. When the Kennedy, Johnson, and Marshall Space Center directors later certified that the *Challenger* was flight ready, they never mentioned any concern about the O-rings. At the top of the flight readiness review chain, Jesse Moore had every reason to believe that the shuttle was "A-OK."

1. Jesse Moore's leadership at NASA did not avert groupthink in the Challenger disaster primarily because of
  - a. Lack of impartial leadership
  - b. Self-censorship of his managers
  - c. Belief in inherent morality
  
2. Morton Thiokol engineers probably changed their position for launch because of
  - a. Homogenous background or ideology
  - b. Closed-mindedness
  - c. Pressure toward uniformity

## Booster Shots #2

A group of peace activists are attending a meeting to try to stop the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Arleen comments that the President of the United States is a truly evil and insane man who only cares about the money his friends in the construction industry would make. Jane, Larry, Loretta, and Ricardo quickly agree. When Serena says that it is clear that Saddam Hussein has been a horrendous and brutal dictator, Fiona is critical of her for expressing this view. After hearing Fiona's retort to Serena, Sam decides to keep his mouth shut. When no one says anything for a minute, Arleen proposes that the group draft a position statement outlining the evilness of the President and the psychological reasons for this diagnosis. Jane, Larry, Loretta, and Ricardo again agree and the remainder of the meeting is spent drafting this statement.

3. Fiona was serving as a \_\_\_\_\_ in this group.
  - a. mindguard
  - b. devil's advocate
  - c. assessor of external stress
4. Sam's behavior in the group is consistent with
  - a. a mind guard.
  - b. self-censorship.
  - c. close-mindedness.

## Booster Shots #3

A group of peace activists are attending a meeting to try to stop the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Arleen comments that the President of the United States is a truly evil and insane man who only cares about the money his friends in the construction industry would make. Jane, Larry, Loretta, and Ricardo quickly agree. When Serena says that it is clear that Saddam Hussein has been a horrendous and brutal dictator, Fiona is critical of her for expressing this view. After hearing Fiona's retort to Serena, Sam decides to keep his mouth shut. When no one says anything for a minute, Arleen proposes that the group draft a position statement outlining the evilness of the President and the psychological reasons for this diagnosis. Jane, Larry, Loretta, and Ricardo again agree and the remainder of the meeting is spent drafting this statement.

5. The potential for groupthink might have been lessened in this group if the group
  - a. had a common ideology
  - b. would carefully consider alternatives
  - c. would designate a mindguard to keep the group focused.
6. If Sam would have expressed a belief that the Bush administration were not insane but rationally working from different assumptions, he would have been
  - a. acting based on a strong ideology
  - b. engaging in collective rationalization.
  - c. serving as a devil's advocate.

### Booster Shot #4

7. Which of the following is **NOT** a symptom of groupthink?
  - a. Believing in the group's morality.
  - b. Exercising direct pressure on others.
  - c. Not expressing your true feelings.
  - d. Presence of a devil's advocate in the group.
  
8. Groupthink usually occurs in groups that are highly cohesive and people want to get along.  
True  
False
  
9. When a group decides what should be done, it should act and not revisit other options.  
True  
False

### Booster Shot #5

10. Which of the following is **NOT** a solution for groupthink?
  - a. using a devil's advocate.
  - b. using mindguards.
  - c. using outside experts.
  - d. using a policy-forming subgroup which reports to the larger group.
  
11. It is a good idea to have leaders remain impartial.  
True  
False
  
12. Strong beliefs in the group's morality is a positive factor in the reduction of groupthink.  
True  
False

### Booster Shot #6

Janis describes a story in his book *Groupthink (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed)* (p. 8) about a group that was designed to assist middle class men and women quit smoking. Shortly after the group began meeting, one member quit smoking totally and told the other members that they should be strong and just stop "cold turkey". Immediately after expressing his views, this early quitter was attacked by the other members, who believed that in order to quit smoking a person needs to do so in a gradual way and that sheer will power is not enough. At the next meeting the early quitter essentially told the group that they were correct, that he would continue to participate, that he was smoking two packs of cigarettes a day again, and that he would stop after the last meeting. When Janis and one of

colleagues pointed the dynamics of the early quitter's behavior in a smoking cessation group, the other members reiterated their belief that smoking could only be cured gradually over a long period of time.

13. The early quitter's smoking of two packs of cigarettes a day after having stopped was a result of

- a. highly selective information gathering.
- b. group exercising direct pressure to conform.
- c. rationalizing poor decision making.

14. The groups' failure to take the comments of Janis and his colleague seriously was the result of

- a. being selective in information gathering.
- b. not seeking expert opinion.
- c. using a policy forming group.

Check your answers against the [correct answers here](#).