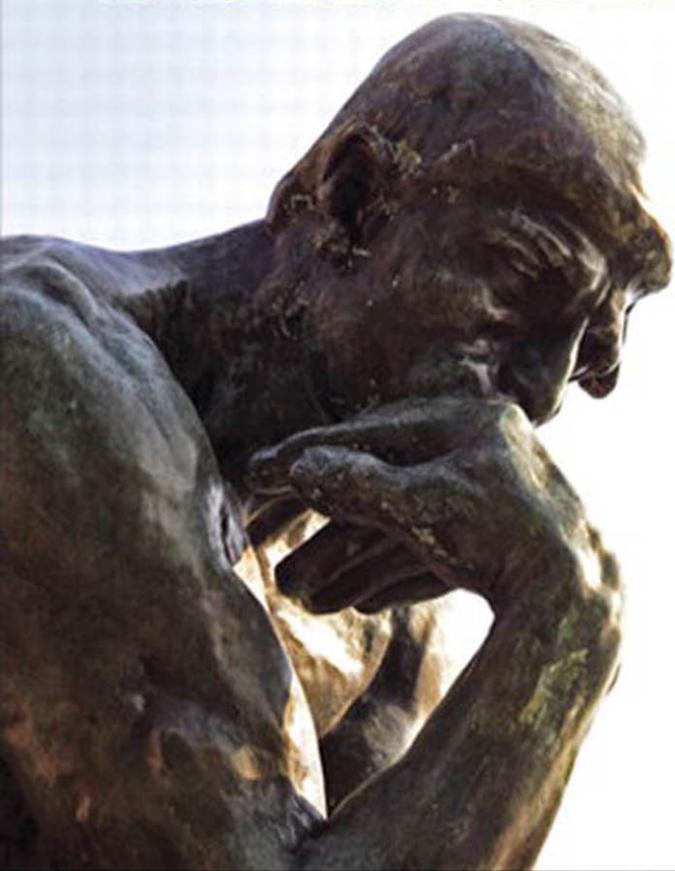


30 DAYS TO BETTER THINKING  
AND BETTER LIVING WITH

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# CRITICAL THINKING



Revised  
&  
Expanded

A Guide for Improving Every Aspect of Your Life

LINDA ELDER ★ RICHARD PAUL

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—Dr. Joe Luciani, Bestselling Author of *Self-Coaching: The Powerful Program to Beat Anxiety and Depression*

“It is ironic and in many ways tragic that you can go through 12 years of undergraduate education, 4 years of college, and 4–6 years of graduate school, and still never learn how to think. Educators mouth the words ‘critical thinking,’ but in my 35 years as a college professor, writer, and public intellectual, I have found that almost no one knows how to think. They may know *what* to think if they are good at memorization, but the all important skill of learning *how* to think is still a lost art. This makes the work of Dr. Linda Elder and Dr. Richard Paul vital to the progress of our democratic society, and *30 Days to Better Thinking and Better Living Through Critical Thinking* is their best guide yet on teaching people how to think, not just about *big ideas*, but about everything in life. Buy this book, change your life, and in the process make the world a safer and saner place to live.”

—Dr. Michael Shermer, Publisher of *Skeptic* magazine;  
Author of *Why People Believe Weird Things*

“One of the qualities that sets us apart from thinking creatures of other species is our ability—if we choose to use it—to ‘think about our thinking.’ My husband, the pioneering psychologist, humanist, and great thinker: Albert Ellis, Ph.D., would remind people of that fact, tirelessly and constantly! In this substantial, clear, and easy-to-read book by Dr. Linda Elder and Dr. Richard Paul . . . readers are offered stimulating descriptions, definitions, principles, and suggestions for understanding and using thinking in effective ways in order to experience a better quality of life. The earnest dedication of the authors to contributing impactful ideas—and to encouraging their readers to allow themselves to experience growth in their lives through making choices to think and act in beneficial ways—is felt strongly throughout the whole book. That in itself is inspiring to read and feel. The topic is presented through combining the premises and ideas of the authors with guidelines which allow us to identify problematic flaws in thinking in order that we may prevent such flaws, along with action strategies—indeed fine exercise for the mind

and the brain. Additionally it is uplifting to read the urging of the authors to make the world we live in a more kind and healthy place. Let's do it—by maximizing the benefits to ourselves, to others, and to society, which can flourish as a result of applying the tools which allow us to think and act in healthy ways.”

—Dr. Debbie Joffe Ellis, Psychologist; Author; Presenter

“ . . . I am sure that, if the 30-day plan outlined in Dr. Linda Elder and Dr. Richard Paul's book is followed consistently, it truly will improve the thinking and the lives of its readers. The 30-day regimen starts with the chapter 'Discover Your Ignorance' and moves along through chapters such as 'Empathize with Others,' 'Clarify Your Thinking,' 'Be Reasonable,' and 'Ask Deep Questions.' It is clearly inspired by Socrates, by his example of following the classical injunction 'Know Thyself,' questioning the conventional wisdom of himself and his fellow Athenians. Moreover, it is important that this critical thinking regimen is not merely a matter of acquiring skills, but is a deeply ethical endeavor. That is made crystal clear in chapters such as 'Be Fair, Not Selfish' and (one of my favorites) 'Don't Be Righteous: Show Mercy.' This small, easily readable book contains wisdom hard won during the two authors' dedicated and decades-long efforts to develop and communicate their conception of critical thinking, a conception that has rightly been very influential.”

—Dr. Frank Fair, Sam Houston State University, Managing Editor  
of *INQUIRY: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines*

“*30 Days* is a manifesto for approaching life and relationships assertively, for thinking clearly and fairly, and for uncovering your own biases and vulnerabilities to the persuasive tactics of others. Stop being an underdog or a domineering top dog and read *30 Days*! *30 Days* is an excellent text for new graduate students to introduce them to the kind of logic and critical thinking that underlies scholarly thinking. A hands-on approach to helping anyone who wants to see the world around them more fairly and clearly.”

—Dr. Karen E. Dill, Author of *How Fantasy Becomes Reality*

“A comprehensive and effective blueprint for getting one's thoughts on straight through the application of a proven intellectual concept to the practicalities of daily living. A critical thinking classic.”

—George Hanford, President Emeritus, The College Board

“There is much to gain from reading books written by Dr. Linda Elder and Dr. Richard Paul. This book carries on their tradition of elevating our thinking into the stratosphere while keeping our feet planted firmly on practical ground. The turbulent, globalized twenty-first century world presents us with enormously complex and serious problems as well as unprecedented opportunities. If we are to survive and thrive in this environment, we need to employ much better thinking

than we have in the past. Fortunately, this book is a high-quality toolkit containing sophisticated, powerful, creative and critical thinking tools. It's also fortunate that the authors provide easy-to-follow, jargon-free instructions for the use of these tools."

—Dr. Don Ambrose, Editor, *The Roeper Review*

"At a time when many Americans are faced with the need to make decisions on complex issues comes a book that offers a useful guide on how this can be accomplished. Using their conceptual scheme for critical thinking, Dr. Linda Elder and Dr. Richard Paul offer the reader a series of ideas, questions, and guidelines to help the reader develop clear thinking skills and to give the reader directions for living in a more rational and fairminded world. I have found that these clearly stated strategies accompanied by examples, the inclusion of well-developed visual graphics, and the in depth glossary of concepts make the book both practical and readable. The book is a necessary addition to anyone's personal library and a valuable guideline for understanding the need for critical thinking in one's daily life."

—Mel Manson, Professor of Sociology and Psychology, Endicott College

"Through their elegant and readable style, Dr. Linda Elder and Dr. Richard Paul, preeminent leaders in the Critical Thinking Community, show us how to objectively and honestly navigate the 'terrain' of critical thinking . . . to better employ the essential skills and art of critical thinking to enhance our self awareness, and our interactions and relations with family, colleagues, society. A truly valuable book!"

—Bill Messink, Oakton Community College

30 Days to  
Better Thinking  
and Better Living  
Through Critical  
Thinking

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A Guide for Improving  
Every Aspect of Your Life,  
Revised and Expanded

Dr. Linda Elder and Dr. Richard Paul

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Nosich—dedicated thinker, exemplary scholar,  
lifelong friend, and colleague.

*To all those who use their thinking to expose  
hypocrisy and self-deception, and who work to  
create what is now a remote dream—a just and  
humane world.*

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“The key to every man is his thought.” —Emerson

“Of all knowledge, the wise and good seek most to know themselves.” —Shakespeare

“Do you want to know the man against whom you have most reason to guard yourself? Your looking-glass will give you a very fair likeness of his face.” —Whately

“The first step to knowledge is to know that we are ignorant.”  
—Cecil

“The more you practice what you know, the more shall you know what to practice.” —W. Jenkin

“Thinking is the hardest work there is, which is the probable reason why so few engage in it.” —Henry Ford

“Thinking leads man to knowledge. He may see and hear, and read and learn whatever he pleases, and as much as he pleases; he will never know anything of it, except that which he has thought over, that which by thinking he has made the property of his own mind.”  
—Pestalozzi

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# About the Authors

**Dr. Linda Elder** is an educational psychologist, executive director of the Center for Critical Thinking, and president of the Foundation for Critical Thinking. She is highly published and has a special interest in the relationship between cognition and effect, or thought and emotion. She has developed an original theory of the stages of critical-thinking development. She is a major keynote presenter at the *International Conference on Critical Thinking*, is highly sought after as a speaker, and is a recognized leader in critical thinking.

**Dr. Richard Paul** is founder of the Foundation for Critical Thinking and director of Research and Professional Development at the Center for Critical Thinking. He is an internationally recognized authority on critical thinking, with nine books and more than 200 articles on the subject. His views on critical thinking have been canvassed in the *New York Times*, *Education Week*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *American Teacher*, *Reader's Digest*, *Educational Leadership*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report*.

The works of Linda Elder and Richard Paul have been translated into Spanish, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Polish, Chinese, Turkish, Greek, Thai, and Korean. The growing demand for translations into increasing numbers of languages testifies to the emerging international recognition of the importance of critical thinking in human life. It is a testament to the contributions of Paul and Elder to the growing field of critical thinking studies.

The **Foundation for Critical Thinking** seeks to promote essential change in society through the cultivation of fairminded critical thinking, thinking predisposed toward intellectual empathy, intellectual humility, intellectual perseverance, intellectual integrity, and intellectual responsibility. In a world of accelerating change, intensifying complexity, and increasing interdependence, critical thinking is now a requirement for economic and social survival. Contact the Foundation for Critical Thinking at [www.criticalthinking.org](http://www.criticalthinking.org).

# Introduction

There is nothing we do as humans that does not involve thinking. Our thinking tells us what to believe, what to reject, what is important, what is unimportant, what is true, what is false, who are our friends, who our enemies are, how we should spend our time, what jobs we should pursue, where we should live, who we should marry, how we should parent. Everything we know, believe, want, fear, and hope for, our thinking tells us.

It follows, then, that the quality of our lives is primarily determined by the quality of our thinking. Our thinking has implications for how we go about doing literally everything we do.

The quality of your work is determined by the quality of your thinking as you reason through the problems you face as you work. The quality of your relationships is determined by the thinking you do in those relationships. Right now, as you read this book, the very sense you make of it comes from your thinking. Your ability to understand and internalize the ideas it contains will be determined by the quality of your thinking as you read it.

“Thinking is skilled work. It is not true that we are naturally endowed with the ability to think clearly and logically—without learning how, or without practicing... People with untrained minds should no more expect to think clearly and logically than those people who have never learned and never practiced can expect to find themselves good carpenters, golfers, bridge players, or pianists. Yet our world is full of people who apparently do suppose that thinking is entirely unskilled work; that thinking clearly and accurately is so easy and so ‘natural’ that ‘anybody can think;’ and that any person’s thinking is quite as reliable as any other person’s.”

—A. E. Mander, *Clear Thinking: Logic for Every Man*, 1938

Therefore, learning to think critically is too important to leave to chance. Critical thinking is the disciplined art of ensuring that you use the best thinking you are capable of in any set of circumstances. Through developed critical capacities, you can take command of the thinking that commands you.

No matter what your circumstance or goals, no matter where you are or what problems you face, you are better off if you are in control of your thinking. As a professional, parent, citizen, lover, friend, shopper—in every realm and situation of your life—skilled thinking pays off. Poor thinking, in contrast, inevitably causes problems, wastes time and energy, and engenders frustration and pain.

Becoming a critical thinker requires that you learn to observe, monitor, analyze, assess, and reconstruct thinking of many sorts in many dimensions of human life. It requires building important habits of mind. It has implications for every act that takes place in your mind. It requires a special form of dedication and perseverance, honesty and integrity. It can be done only if taken seriously and pursued throughout a lifetime.

This book shows you how to use your mind to improve your mind. Each of the ideas in this book can help you take command of the mind that is controlling your thoughts, emotions, desires, and behavior.

Our hope is not in a miracle transformation, but in laying a foundation for your future intellectual and emotional growth. We are merely scratching the surface of deep and complex topics. We do not provide a quick fix, but rather places to begin. When you begin to take your intellectual growth seriously, you begin to see payoffs in every part of your life.

But first, you must wake up your mind. You must begin to understand your mind. You must begin to see when it causes you problems. You must begin to see when it causes others problems. You must learn how to trap it when it tries to hide from itself (using one of the many forms of self-deception at which it is naturally skilled). You must discover some of the trash and nonsense you have unknowingly taken in during years of passive absorption—to which all of us are subject. This book shows you how to begin.

**The quality  
of  
your life  
is  
determined  
by  
the quality  
of  
your  
thinking.**

Thinking gets us into trouble because we often:

- are unclear, muddled, or confused
- jump to conclusions
- fail to think through implications
- lose track of our goals
- are unrealistic
- focus on the trivial
- fail to notice contradictions
- accept inaccurate information
- ask vague questions
- give vague answers
- ask loaded questions
- ask irrelevant questions
- confuse questions of different types
- answer questions we are not competent to answer
- come to conclusions based on inaccurate or irrelevant information
- ignore information that does not support our view
- make inferences not justified by our experience
- distort data and present it inaccurately
- fail to notice our inferences
- fail to distinguish inferences from assumptions
- come to unreasonable conclusions
- fail to notice our assumptions
- make unjustified assumptions
- miss key ideas
- use irrelevant ideas
- form confused ideas
- form superficial concepts
- misuse words

- ignore relevant viewpoints
- cannot see issues from points of view other than our own
- confuse issues of different types
- are unaware of our prejudices
- think narrowly
- think imprecisely
- think illogically
- think one-sidedly
- think simplistically
- think hypocritically
- think superficially
- think sociocentrically
- think egocentrically
- think irrationally
- fail to reason well through problems
- make poor decisions
- are poor communicators
- lack insight into our ignorance

## **Improve Your Thinking, Improve Your Life**

This book is about how to improve your thinking to improve your life. Why thinking? Why is thinking significant? Why try to improve your thinking?

The answer is simple: Only through thinking can you change whatever it is about your life that needs changing (even the parts you don't know need changing). Only through thinking can you take command of your future. Sound too simple? Read on.

Humans routinely (you might say almost constantly) think. For certain, thinking is the main thing we do. From the minute we wake up in the morning, we begin thinking. During all of our waking hours, we are thinking. We cannot escape our thinking, even if we want to.

Right now you are thinking about whether to take seriously what we are saying. Your thinking structures your feelings, shapes your desires, and guides your actions.<sup>1</sup> The way you think about parenting determines how you parent. The way you think about your financial situation determines the financial decisions you make. The way you think when you are at work determines how you function on the job.

The problem is that human thinking is often flawed. Many of our regrettable actions emerge from faulty reasoning. In fact, problems in thinking lead to more problems in life than perhaps any other single variable. They lead to conflict and war, pain and frustration, cruelty and suffering.

Yet, most people are content with their thinking. Because the development of thinking typically is not valued in human societies, people don't tend to trace the problems in their lives to problems in their thinking. Instead, they often live the whole of their lives without recognizing the leading role that thinking plays in it.

To improve your quality of life significantly, you must begin to take thinking seriously—to become a student, if you will, of thinking. You must begin to observe thinking, examine it, witness its power in action. You must begin to discipline your thinking through knowledge of thinking, and you should practice using that knowledge (of thinking) daily. You must begin to analyze your thinking, assess your thinking, and improve your thinking. You must engage in *critical* thinking.

This book explores some of the basic facts about thinking. Although the study of thinking and its relationship to emotions and desires are complex, most everyone can access its essential ideas. The trick is to use basic principles systematically to change your life for the better. In other words, the trick is to put critical thinking into action in your life. You can learn it. You can use it. This book provides some of the essential building blocks.

---

1. For an introduction to the relationships between thinking, feeling, and wanting, see *The Miniature Guide to the Human Mind* by Elder, L. and Paul, R. Dillon Beach: Foundation for Critical Thinking (2002).

## Can Your Thinking Be Your Problem?

To begin to take thinking seriously, you must first recognize the inherently flawed nature of human thought in its “normal” state. Put another way, without active intervention, human thinking naturally develops problems. For example, humans are prejudiced. We stereotype one another. We are often hypocritical. We sometimes justify in our own minds policies and practices that result in stealing, killing, and torture. We often ignore important problems that we could, with determination and good thinking, solve—problems such as world hunger, poverty, and homelessness.

What is more, when we behave irrationally, our behavior usually seems reasonable to us. When challenged, the mind says (to itself), “Why are these people giving me a hard time? I’m just doing what makes sense. Any reasonable person would see that!” In short, we naturally think that our thinking is fully justified. As far as we can tell, we are only doing what is right and proper and reasonable. Any fleeting thoughts suggesting that we might be at fault typically are overcome by more powerful self-justifying thoughts: “I don’t mean any harm. I’m just! I’m fair! It’s the others who are wrong!”

It is important to recognize this self-justifying nature of the human mind as its *natural state*. In other words, humans don’t have to learn self-justifying, self-serving, self-deceptive thinking, and behavior. These patterns are innate in every one of us. How does self-deception work in the mind? In other words, how can it be that we can see ourselves as right even when readily available evidence proves us wrong? One powerful reason is the mind’s *native* ability to represent unreasonable thoughts as perfectly reasonable. Indeed, this is perhaps the most significant reason that humans fail to recognize their own irrationality.

For example, consider the female supervisor who, after interviewing both male and female applicants, always hires women.<sup>2</sup> This supervisor considers herself unbiased and objective. When asked

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2. Consider also the male supervisor who hires only men.

why she hires only female employees, she most likely would give what appear to be logical reasons to support her decisions—facts, for example, about the applicants’ work experiences, skills, and so on. In supporting her hiring decisions, she would see herself as even-handed, as simply trying to hire the best employees for the job. She might at some level recognize that she hires only women, but justify it by arguing that women are somehow naturally better in the jobs she oversees. Indeed, the only way she can feel justified *in her own mind* is to see herself as behaving objectively. The material point is that biased thinking appears to the mind as dispassionate, unprejudiced, impartial thinking. We don’t see ourselves as wrong. Rather, we see ourselves as right, as doing what is most reasonable in the situation, even when we are dead wrong.

Consider the police officer who often uses excessive force during arrests. This officer likely sees himself as giving criminals what they deserve, getting them off the streets so they can’t harm innocent people. He couldn’t act in this way if he recognized the role that prejudice and the desire for power were playing in his thinking, if he could see that he was irrationally using unnecessary power and force—over others who were unable to defend themselves. In his own mind, he is professional and just. However cruel he may be, he doesn’t see himself as such. Such is the power of self-deception.

Welcome to human nature. We are all, to varying degrees, prejudiced. We all stereotype and deceive ourselves. We see ourselves as possessing *the truth*. Yet we all fall prey to human egocentricity—although not to the same degree. None of us will ever be a perfect thinker, but we can all be *better* thinkers.

To develop as a thinker, you need to work daily to bring what is unconscious in your thinking to the level of consciousness. You need to discover the problems that exist in your thinking and face them. Only then can you make significant improvements in your thinking and your life. Inherent in human nature is the capacity to rise above your native egocentric patterns of thought. You can use your mind to educate your mind. You can use your thinking to change your thinking. You can “remake” or “transform” yourself. It is this side of your

nature we hope to stimulate as you work through and internalize the ideas in this book.

## **A How-To List for Dysfunctional Living**

One of the ways you can enhance the power of your mind is by learning to create contrasts and oppositions that make clear precisely what you need to avoid. In other words, by making poor habits of thought more and more explicit, you get better and better at avoiding them.

We now illustrate this strategy by constructing a set of rules that no reasonable person would knowingly follow. By illuminating dysfunctional, even pathological, ways of thinking, it becomes obvious how easy it is to fall prey to them without recognizing yourself doing so.

Consider the following, and ask yourself how many of these dysfunctional ways of thinking you engage in:

- 1. Surround yourself with people who think like you.** Then no one will criticize you.
- 2. Don't question your relationships.** You then can avoid dealing with problems within them.
- 3. If critiqued by a friend or lover, look sad and dejected** and say, "I thought you were my friend!" or "I thought you loved me!"
- 4. When you do something unreasonable, always be ready with an excuse.** Then you won't have to take responsibility. If you can't think of an excuse, look sorry and say, "I can't help how I am!"
- 5. Focus on the negative side of life.** Then you can make yourself miserable and blame it on others.
- 6. Blame others for your mistakes.** Then you won't have to feel responsible for your mistakes nor will you have to do anything about them.

7. **Verbally attack those who criticize you.** Then you don't have to bother listening to what they say.
8. **Go along with the groups you are in.** Then you won't have to figure out anything for yourself.
9. **Act out when you don't get what you want.** If questioned, look indignant and say, "I'm just an emotional person. At least I don't keep my feelings bottled up!"
10. **Focus on getting what you want.** If questioned, say, "If I don't look out for number one, who will?"

This list would be almost laughable if these irrational ways of thinking didn't lead to problems in life. But they do. And often. Only when you are faced with the absurdity of dysfunctional or even pathological thinking and can see it at work in your life do you have a chance to alter it. The strategies outlined in this book presuppose your willingness to do so.

## **Take Your Thinking Seriously**

Our goal is to help you begin to think *critically* about your thinking, to think about the ways in which your thinking might be causing problems for you or others. As you work through the ideas in this book, simple ideas intelligently applied, you will begin to improve the habits of your mind. You will become aware of your thinking. When you do, you will assess it. When you assess it, you will improve it.

Think of yourself as your own private investigator, probing the workings of your mind to figure out what is going on inside its mental walls. Once you sort out some of the patterns that dominate your thinking, you can take your thinking to the next level; you can target those patterns for improvement. You can build on your strengths. You can determine what to retain in your thinking and what to throw out, which of your beliefs are sensible and which are senseless, which are causing problems, which are bringing richness to your life, which are entrapping or limiting you, and which are freeing or liberating you.

## **No Intellectual Pain, No Intellectual Gain**

Although most people readily agree that a *no pain, no gain* attitude is necessary for physical fitness, those same people often give up at the first sign of mental discomfort when working on their minds. If you are unwilling to persevere through intellectual pain, you simply will not develop as a thinker. Without some stress, the condition of the mind, like the body, will not improve. Like it or not, one undeniable fact is *no intellectual pain, no intellectual gain*.

So expect some mental stress, discomfort, and pain as you proceed through this book. When it comes, face it and work through it. Realize that the most important ideas humans need to learn are often among the most difficult for the mind to understand and accept (like the fact that we are all naturally egocentric). Recognize that the mind, by nature, resists change—especially change that would force it to see itself in an unfavorable light. So, as you begin to internalize the ideas in this book and feel frustrated, uncomfortable, or discouraged, keep pushing forward. Celebrate the fact that you are growing, rather than standing still, like most people. Realize that the reward is in the improved quality of your life that will occur in the long run. You must stretch and work the mind if you want it to become flexible and powerful, and if you want it to do the work, you need it to do in the many dimensions of your life.

## **The Concepts, Principles, and Tools of Critical Thinking**

To this point, we have argued that thinking about thinking in a disciplined way is largely ignored in human societies, and that it needs to be at the center of how we live every day. When we realize there are many problems in human thought and we want to explicitly target these problems, we can intervene in thought. But we need tools for doing this. And these tools need to emerge from a rich, substantive approach to the mind, not one that is simplistic or superficial. For instance, we need a concept that helps us deal with our intrinsic

selfish and self-validating tendencies. We need a rich concept of critical thought that helps us deal with the forces within us that lead us to seek uncritical approval from others. We need a concept that helps us live more reasonably in all parts of our lives, as well as one that helps us adhere to reasonable standards for thought—standards like clarity, accuracy, relevance, depth, breadth, logicalness, and fairness. We need a concept of critical thinking that helps us take our thinking apart and examine each part for quality. We need a concept that guides us to fairminded, critical societies.

As you work through the book, see if you can figure out how each day's idea is related to one or more critical thinking concepts in this section.

In this section, we briefly introduce a conception of critical thinking that has emerged through our work in the last three decades. To help make the ideas embedded in critical thinking intuitive, we present them primarily in graphic form.<sup>3</sup> Each of the “30-days” ideas in this book is intimately connected with this concept. Some are connected to the *analysis of thought*, some to the *assessment of thought*, some to the development of *intellectual virtues*. Others focus on the barriers to critical thought (or pathologies in human thought), which we can place under the rough umbrellas of *egocentric* and *sociocentric* thought. And still others are implications or contextualizations of critical thought.

There is no perfect way to learn critical thinking, no definite order to it. Instead, there are many powerful ideas in critical thinking, any one of which, if deeply internalized can profoundly change the way you live. Consider, for instance, intellectual empathy, which entails the developed propensity to think within other viewpoints, to think

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3. For a more in-depth understanding of critical thinking, read *Critical Thinking: Tools for Taking Charge of Your Professional and Personal Life* by Richard Paul and Linda Elder (2002). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

the thoughts and feel the emotions of others in order to appreciate and understand their perspectives. If everyone in the world were to take this idea seriously, the pain and suffering caused by humans would be greatly reduced. For instance, people would, almost naturally, imagine what it would be like to experience the feelings of those they were controlling, dominating, oppressing, manipulating, or otherwise mistreating. People would almost literally feel one another's pain. By implication, they would come to more highly value living together peacefully and respectfully. We would move closer to the realization of fairminded, critical societies. Of course, keep in mind that this way of putting the point is somewhat oversimplified because all the concepts in critical thinking are interconnected. To develop deep and transformative understanding of any one idea in critical thinking is to develop deep and transformative understanding of other essential ideas in critical thinking. For instance, to cultivate within ourselves intellectual empathy, we must also cultivate intellectual humility, the tendency to uncover one's own ignorance, to separate what we know from what we don't know. We cannot effectively think within alternate viewpoints (intellectual empathy) if we are not inclined to identify our knowledge and our ignorance within these viewpoints (intellectual humility).

In short, the concepts and principles of critical thinking should ultimately be understood in connection with one another, hence the impetus for this section—to help you see some of the important connections among all the ideas in this book. People throughout the world now embrace a rich, substantive, integrated concept of critical thinking (not nearly enough, though). We welcome you to this complex of ideas.

## Why Critical Thinking?

### The Problem:

Everyone thinks; it is our nature to do so. But much of our thinking, left to itself, is biased, distorted, partial, uninformed, or down-right prejudiced. Yet the quality of our life and that of what we produce, make, or build depends precisely on the quality of our thought. Shoddy thinking is costly, both in money and in quality of life. Excellence in thought, however, must be systematically cultivated.

### A Definition:

Critical thinking, in a rich sense of the term, is self-guided disciplined thought that attempts to reason at the highest level of quality in a fairminded way. People who think critically consistently attempt to live rationally, reasonably, and with empathy. They are keenly aware of the inherently flawed nature of human thinking when left unchecked. They strive to diminish the power of their egocentric and sociocentric tendencies. They use the intellectual tools that critical thinking offers—concepts and principles that enable them to analyze, assess, and improve thinking. They realize that no matter how skilled they are as thinkers, at times they will fall prey to mistakes in reasoning, to irrationality, prejudices, biases, distortions, uncritically accepted social rules and taboos, selfish interest, and vested interest. They avoid thinking simplistically about complicated issues and strive to appropriately consider the rights and needs of relevant others. They embody the Socratic principle: The unexamined life is not worth living. They are concerned with their own intellectual development as well as the cultivation of fairminded critical societies.

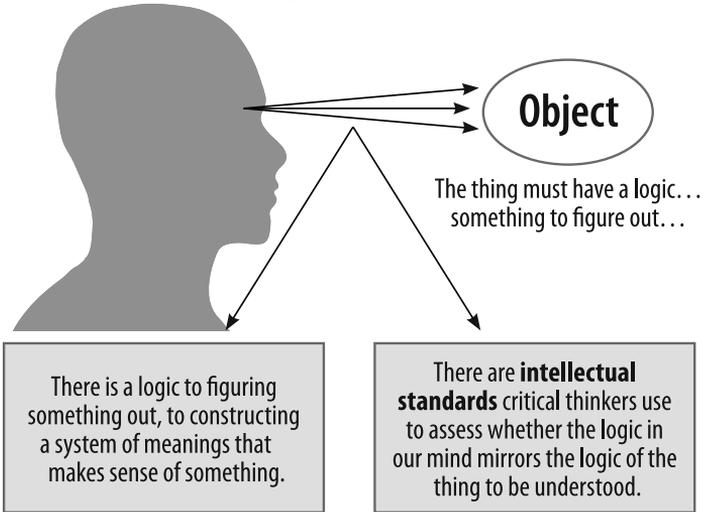
### The Result:

A well-cultivated critical thinker:

- Raises vital questions and problems, formulating them clearly and precisely;
- Gathers and assesses relevant information, using abstract ideas to interpret it effectively
- Comes to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards
- Thinks openmindedly within alternative systems of thought, recognizing and assessing, as need be, their assumptions, implications, and practical consequences and
- Communicates effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems

Critical thinking is, in short, self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking. It requires rigorous standards of excellence and mindful command of their use. It entails effective communication and problem solving abilities and a commitment to overcoming our native egocentrism and sociocentrism.

# The Figuring Mind



The Elements of Thought reveal the logic:		Intellectual Standards include:
1	An object to be figured out → Some data or information, some experience of it (the <b>Empirical Dimension</b> )	
2	Some reason for wanting to figure it out → Our <b>Purpose</b> or <b>Goal</b>	
3	Some question or problem we want solved → Our <b>Question at Issue</b>	
4	Some initial sense of the object (whatever we take for granted) → Our <b>Assumptions</b>	
5	Some ideas by which we are making sense of the object → The <b>Conceptual Dimension</b>	
6	Some drawing of conclusions about the object → Our <b>Inferences</b> or interpretations	
7	What follows from our interpretation of the object → The <b>Implications</b> and <b>Consequences</b>	
8	Some viewpoint from which we conceptualize the object → Our <b>Point of View</b> or <b>Frame of Reference</b>	

Intellectual Standards include:

Clarity

Precision

Relevance

Accuracy

Depth

Breadth

Logic

Fairness

## Analyze Your Thinking (Focusing on the Elements of Reasoning)

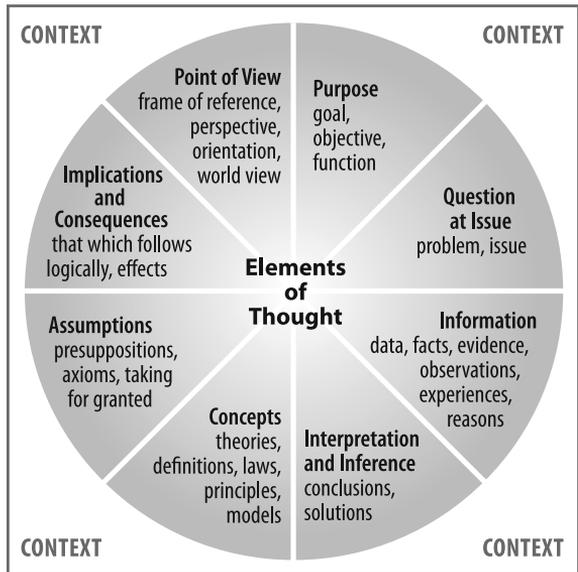
If we want to think well, we must understand at least the rudiments of thought, the most basic structures out of which all thinking is made. We must learn how to take thinking apart.

### All Thinking Is Defined by the Eight Elements That Make It Up

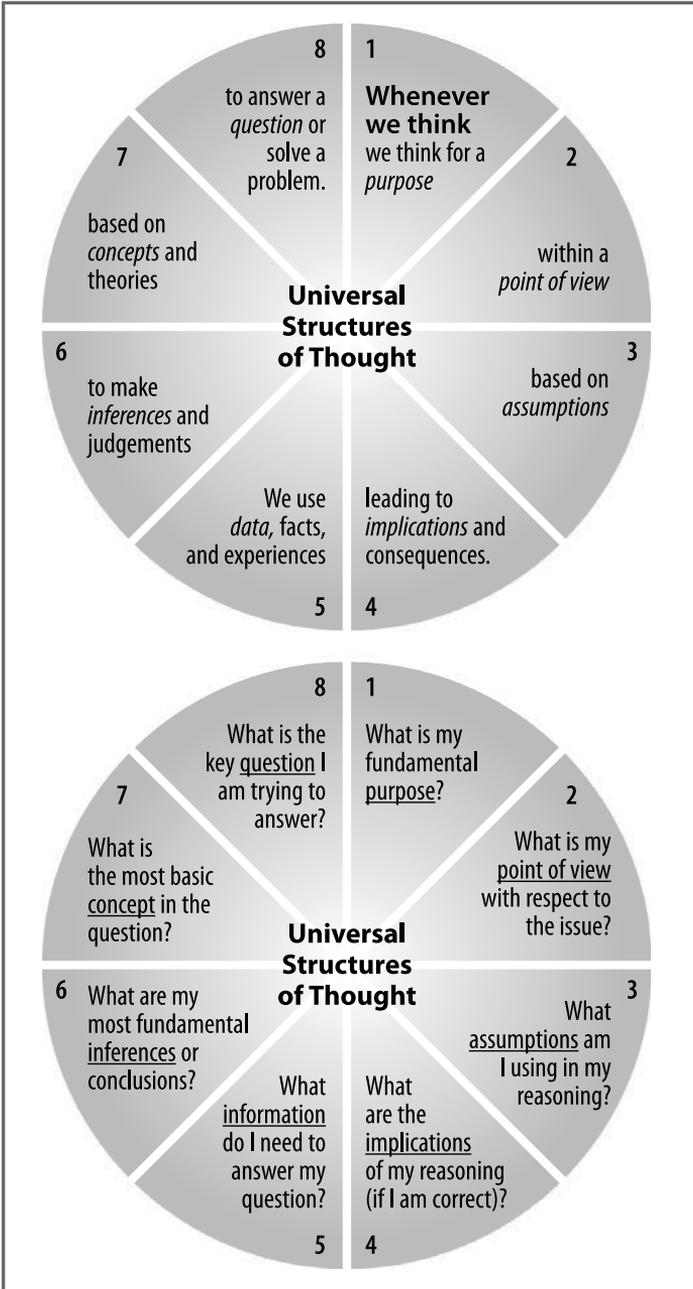
**Eight basic structures are present in all thinking:** Whenever we think, we think for a purpose within a point of view based on assumptions leading to implications and consequences. We use concepts, ideas, and theories to interpret data, facts, and experiences in order to answer questions, solve problems, and resolve issues.

Thinking, then:

- Generates purposes
- Raises questions
- Uses information
- Utilizes concepts
- Makes inferences
- Makes assumptions
- Generates implications
- Embodies a point of view



Each of these structures has implications for the others. If you change your purpose or agenda, you change your questions and problems. If you change your questions and problems, you are forced to seek new information and data. If you collect new information and data...



## Assess Your Thinking (Using Reasonable Standards)

Reasonable people judge reasoning by intellectual standards. When you internalize these standards and explicitly use them in your thinking, your thinking becomes more clear, more accurate, more precise, more relevant, deeper, broader, and more fair. You should note that we focus here on a selection of standards. Among others are credibility, sufficiency, reliability, and practicality. Some questions that employ these standards are listed on the following page.

**Clarity:** understandable, the meaning can be grasped

**Accuracy:** free from errors or distortions, true

**Precision:** exact to the necessary level of detail

**Relevance:** relating to the matter at hand

**Depth:** containing complexities and multiple interrelationships

**Breadth:** encompassing multiple viewpoints

**Logic:** the parts make sense together, no contradictions

**Significance:** focusing on the important, not trivial

**Fairness:** justifiable, not self-serving or one-sided

**Clarity**

Could you elaborate further?  
Could you give me an example?  
Could you illustrate what you mean?

**Accuracy**

How could we check on that?  
How could we find out if that is true?  
How could we verify or test that?

**Precision**

Could you be more specific?  
Could you give me more details?  
Could you be more exact?

**Relevance**

How does that relate to the problem?  
How does that bear on the question?  
How does that help us with the issue?

**Depth**

What factors make this a difficult problem?  
What are some of the complexities of this question?  
What are some of the difficulties we need to deal with?

**Breadth**

Do we need to look at this from another perspective?  
Do we need to consider another point of view?  
Do we need to look at this in other ways?

**Logic**

Does all this make sense together?  
Does your first paragraph fit in with your last?  
Does what you say follow from the evidence?

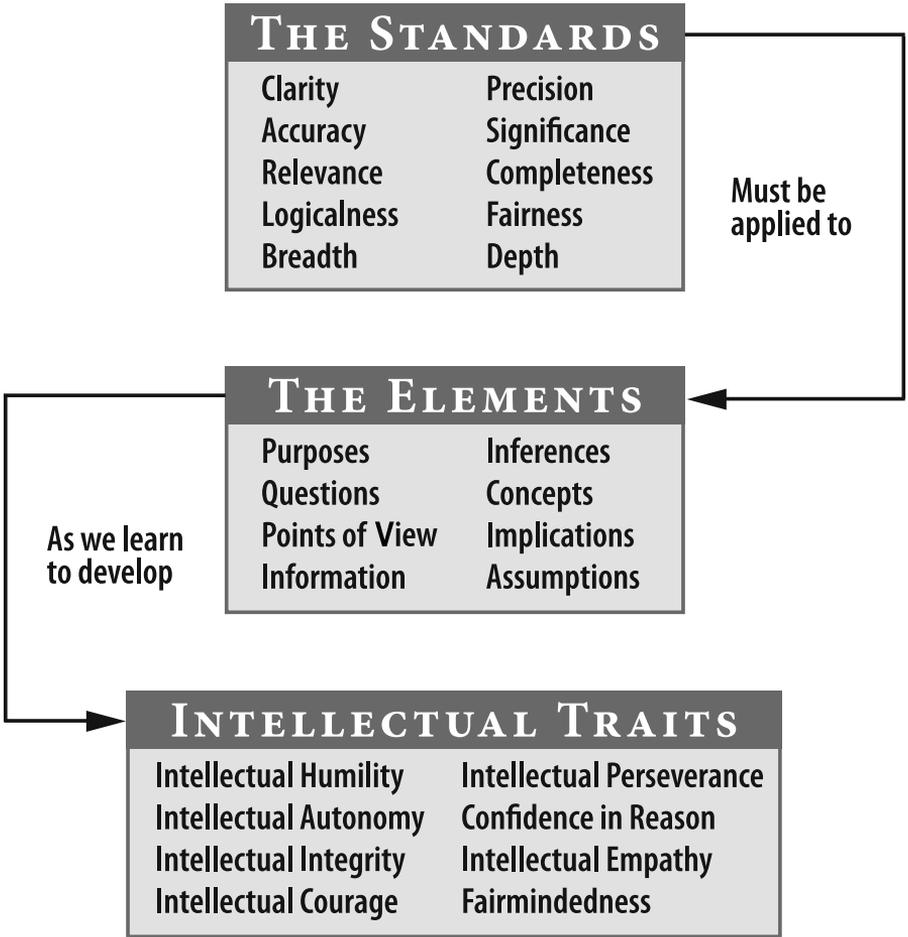
**Significance**

Is this the most important problem to consider?  
Is this the central idea to focus on?  
Which of these facts are most important?

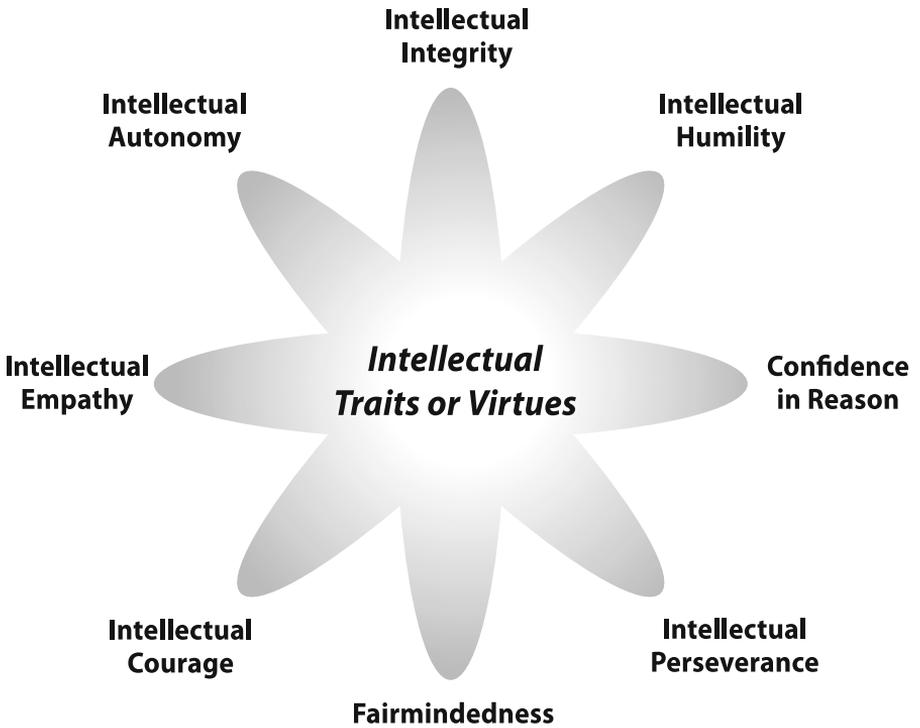
**Fairness**

Do I have any vested interest in this issue?  
Am I sympathetically representing the viewpoints of others?

# Systematically Apply Intellectual Standards to the Elements of Reasoning to Develop Intellectual Traits



## Pursue the Constellation of Intellectual Traits



**Intellectual Humility****Versus Intellectual Arrogance**

Having a consciousness of the limits of one's knowledge, including a sensitivity to circumstances in which one's native egocentrism is likely to function self-deceptively; sensitivity to bias, prejudice, and limitations of one's viewpoint. Intellectual humility depends on recognizing that one should not claim more than one actually knows. It does not imply spinelessness or submissiveness. It implies the lack of intellectual pretentiousness, boastfulness, or conceit, combined with insight into the logical foundations, or lack of such foundations, of one's beliefs.

**Intellectual Courage****Versus Intellectual Cowardice**

Having a consciousness of the need to face and fairly address ideas, beliefs, or viewpoints toward which we have strong negative emotions and to which we have not given a serious hearing. This courage is connected with the recognition that ideas considered dangerous or absurd are sometimes rationally justified (in whole or in part) and that conclusions and beliefs inculcated in us are sometimes false or misleading. To determine for ourselves which is which, we must not passively and uncritically "accept" what we have "learned." Intellectual courage comes into play here, because inevitably we will come to see some truth in some ideas considered dangerous and absurd, and distortion or falsity in some ideas strongly held in our social group. We need courage to be true to our own thinking in such circumstances. The penalties for nonconformity can be severe.

**Intellectual Empathy****Versus Intellectual Narrow-mindedness**

Having a consciousness of the need to imaginatively put oneself in the place of others in order to genuinely understand them, which requires the consciousness of our egocentric tendency to identify truth with our immediate perceptions of long-standing thought or belief. This trait correlates with the ability to reconstruct accurately the viewpoints and reasoning of others and to reason from premises, assumptions, and ideas other than our own. This trait also correlates with the willingness to remember occasions when we were wrong in the past despite an intense conviction that we were right, and with the ability to imagine our being similarly deceived in a case-at-hand.

**Intellectual Autonomy****Versus Intellectual Conformity**

Having rational control of one's beliefs, values, and inferences. The ideal of critical thinking is to learn to think for oneself, to gain command over one's thought processes. It entails a commitment to analyzing and evaluating beliefs on the basis of reason and evidence, to question when it is rational to question, to believe when it is rational to believe, and to conform when it is rational to conform.

**Intellectual Integrity****Versus Intellectual Hypocrisy**

Recognition of the need to be true to one's own thinking; to be consistent in the intellectual standards one applies; to hold one's self to the same rigorous standards of evidence and proof to which one holds one's antagonists; to practice what one advocates for others; and to honestly admit discrepancies and inconsistencies in one's own thought and action.

**Intellectual Perseverance****Versus Intellectual Laziness**

Having a consciousness of the need to use intellectual insights and truths in spite of difficulties, obstacles, and frustrations; firm adherence to rational principles despite the irrational opposition of others; a sense of the need to struggle with confusion and unsettled questions over an extended period of time to achieve deeper understanding or insight.

**Confidence In Reason****Versus Distrust of Reason and Evidence**

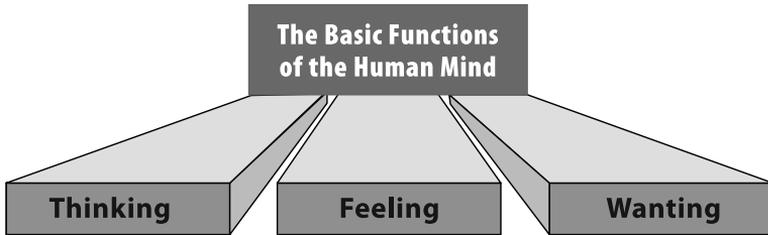
Confidence that, in the long run, one's own higher interests and those of humankind at large will be best served by giving the freest play to reason, by encouraging people to come to their own conclusions by developing their own rational faculties; faith that, with proper encouragement and cultivation, people can learn to think for themselves, to form rational viewpoints, draw reasonable conclusions, think coherently and logically, persuade each other by reason and become reasonable persons, despite the deep-seated obstacles in the native character of the human mind and in society as we know it.

**Fairmindedness****Versus Intellectual Unfairness**

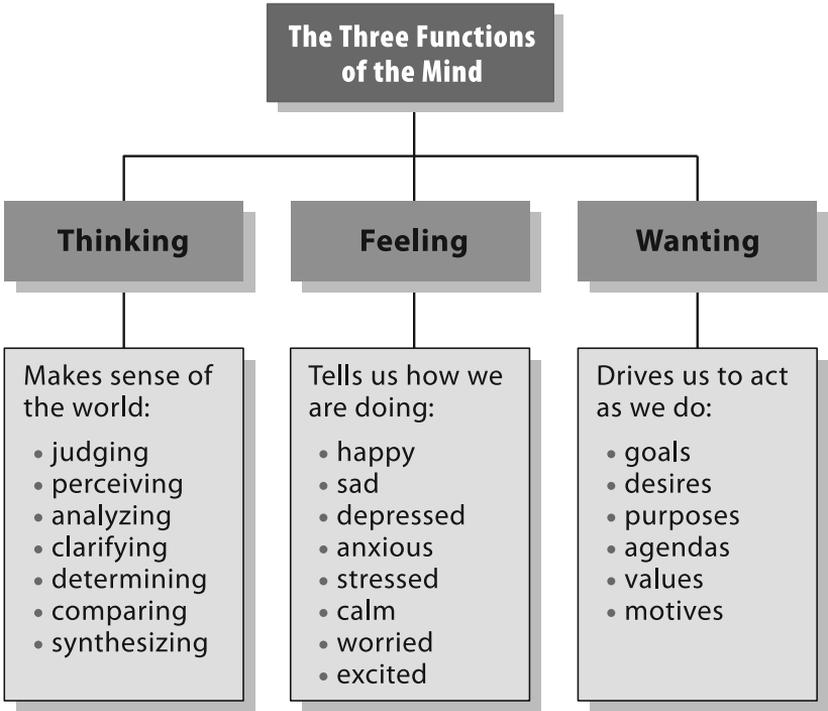
Having a consciousness of the need to treat all viewpoints alike, without reference to one's own feelings or vested interests, or the feelings or vested interests of one's friends, community, or nation; implies adherence to intellectual standards without reference to one's own advantage or the advantage of one's group.

## Understand the Mind's Three Distinctive Functions

The mind has three basic functions: thinking, feeling, and wanting.



- Thinking is the part of the mind that figures things out. It makes sense of life's events. It creates the ideas through which we define situations, relationships, and problems. It continually tells us: This is what is going on. This is what is happening. Notice this and that.
- Feelings\* are created by thinking—evaluating whether the events of our lives are positive or negative. Feelings continually tell us: “This is how I should feel about what is happening in my life. I’m doing really well.” Or, alternatively, “Things aren’t going well for me.”
- Our desires allocate energy to action, in keeping with what we define as desirable and possible. It continually tells us: “This is worth getting. Go for it!” Or, conversely, “This is not worth getting. Don’t bother.”
- \* When we speak of feelings, we are not referring to emotions caused by dysfunctional biological processes such as problems in brain chemistry. When emotions are caused by imbalances in brain chemistry that people cannot control themselves, clinical help may be needed. When we speak of feelings, we are also not referring to bodily sensations, though feelings often accompany bodily sensations. For instance, being “cold” might cause you to feel irritable. Recognizing the feeling of irritability might lead you to do something about being cold, like putting on a jacket. Finally, though the terms “feelings” and “emotions” might be used in some cases to refer to different phenomena, we use these terms interchangeably in this book.

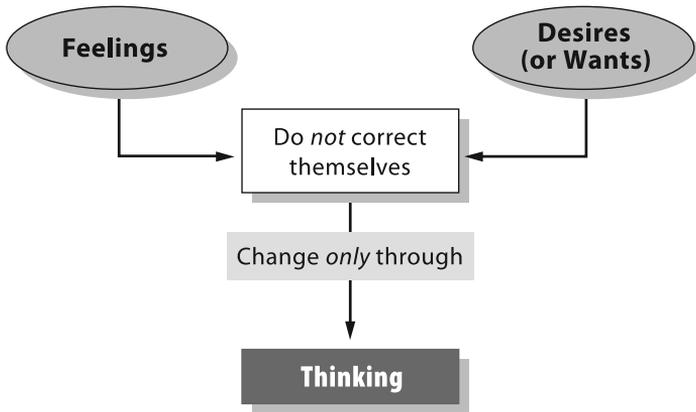


Essential Idea: Our mind is continually communicating three kinds of things to us:

- What is going on in life
- Feelings (positive or negative) about those events
- Things to pursue, where to put our energy (in light of 1 and 2)

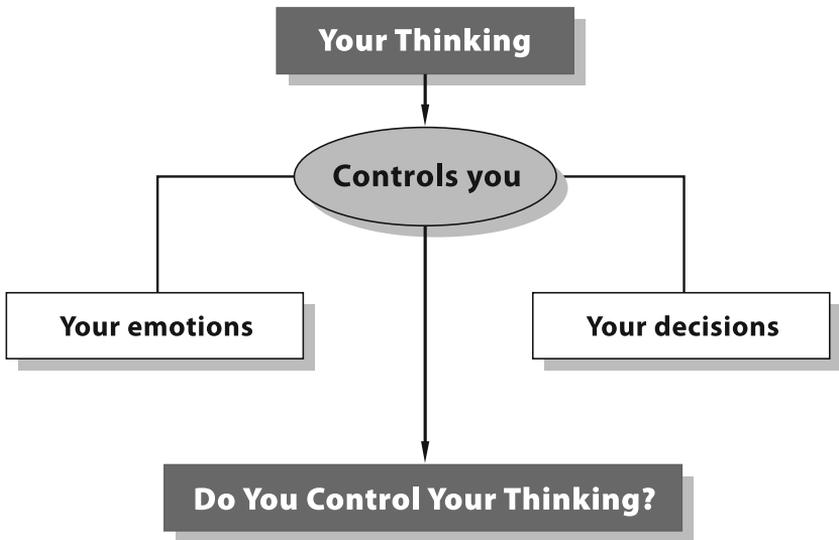
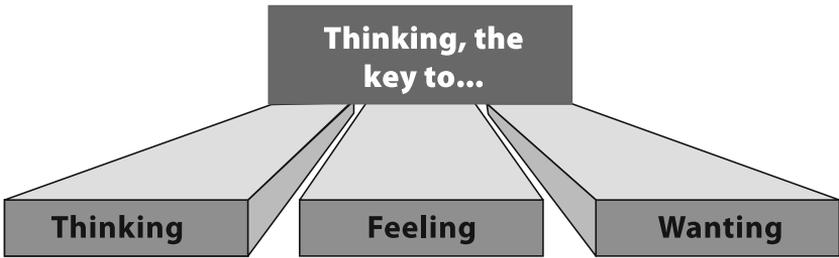
## Recognize Thinking as the Key to Feelings and Desires

Though thoughts, feelings, and desires play equally important roles in the mind, continually influencing and being influenced by one another, thinking is the key to command of feelings and desires. To change a feeling is to change the thinking that leads to the feeling. To change a desire is to change the thinking that underlies the desire.

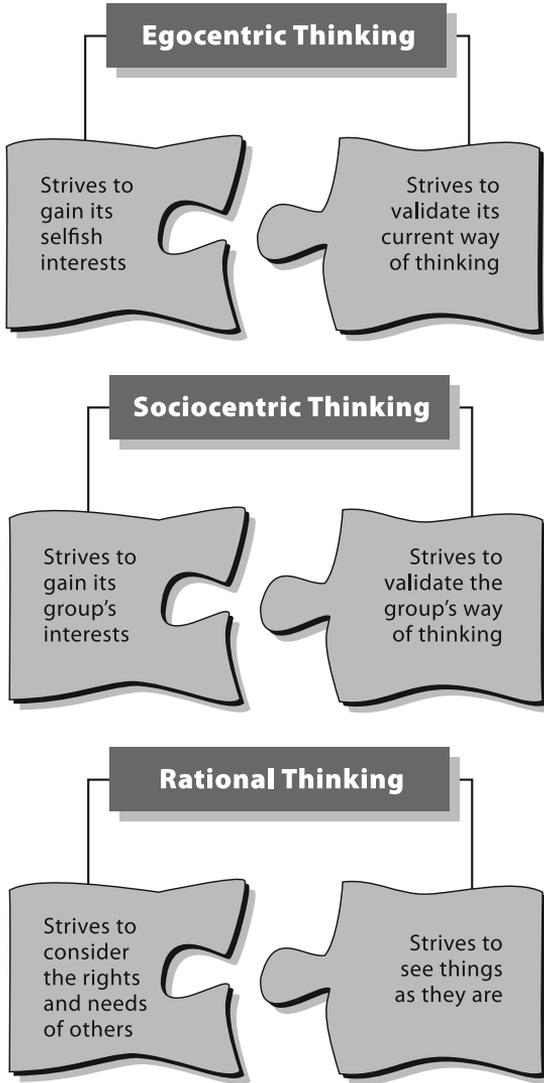


If I feel angry because my child is behaving disrespectfully toward me, I can't simply replace anger with satisfaction, for example. To change the anger to a more positive emotion, I must change the thinking I am doing in the situation. Perhaps I need to think about how to teach my child to behave respectfully toward me, and then behave in accordance with that new thinking. Perhaps I need to think about the influences in my child's life that might be causing the rude behavior and then try to eliminate those influences. In other words, I get control of my emotional state through my thinking.

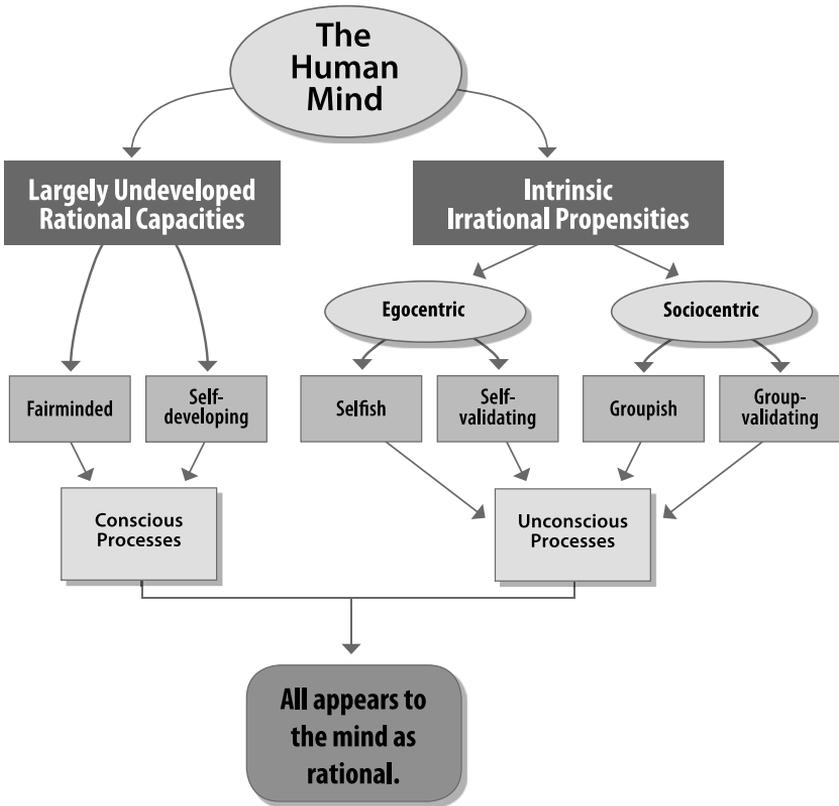
Similarly, we can't change a desire without changing the thinking that causes the desire. Suppose, for example, two people, Jan and John, have been in a romantic relationship but John has broken off the relationship. Yet Jan still wants to be in the relationship. Suppose that her desire comes from thinking (that may be unconscious) that she needs to be in the relationship to be emotionally stable, that she won't be able to function without John. Clearly this thinking is the problem. Jan must therefore change her thinking so she no longer wants a relationship with John. In other words, until she thinks that she does not need John to be okay, that she can function satisfactorily without him, that she doesn't need to be in a relationship with a person who doesn't want to be with her, she will want to be in the relationship with John. In short, unless her thinking changes, her desire won't change. She must defeat the thinking that is defeating her.



## Distinguish Rational from Egocentric and Sociocentric Thoughts



**Essential Idea:** It is important to distinguish egocentric and sociocentric motives from rational motives.



**Essential Idea:** All humans are innately egocentric and sociocentric. Humans also have (largely undeveloped) rational capacities. Humans begin life as primarily egocentric creatures. Over time, infantile egocentric self-centered thinking merges with sociocentric group-centered thinking. All humans regularly engage in both forms of irrational thought. The extent to which any of us is egocentric or sociocentric is a matter of degree and can change significantly in various situations or contexts. While egocentric and sociocentric propensities are naturally occurring phenomena, rational capacities must be largely developed. It is through the development of rational capacities that we combat irrational tendencies and cultivate critical societies.

## Understand Egocentric Thinking as a Problem

Egocentric thinking results from the unfortunate fact that humans do not naturally consider the rights and needs of others. We do not naturally appreciate the point of view of others nor the limitations in our own point of view. We become explicitly aware of our egocentric thinking only if trained to do so. We do not naturally recognize our egocentric assumptions, the egocentric way we use information, the egocentric way we interpret data, the source of our egocentric concepts and ideas, the implications of our egocentric thought. We do not naturally recognize our self-serving perspective.

As humans we live with the unrealistic but confident sense that we have fundamentally figured out the way things actually are, and that we have done this objectively. We naturally believe in our intuitive perceptions—however inaccurate. Instead of using intellectual standards in thinking, we often use self-centered psychological standards to determine what to believe and what to reject. Here are the most commonly used psychological standards in human thinking.

**“IT’S TRUE BECAUSE I BELIEVE IT.”** Innate egocentrism: I assume that what I believe is true, even though I have never questioned the basis for many of my beliefs.

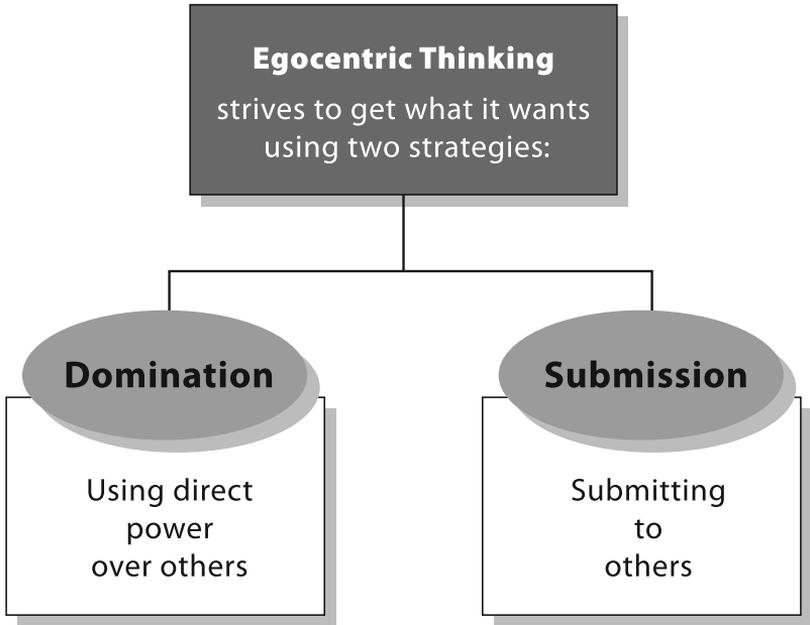
**“IT’S TRUE BECAUSE WE BELIEVE IT.”** Innate sociocentrism: I assume that the dominant beliefs of the groups to which I belong are true, even though I have never questioned the basis for those beliefs.

**“IT’S TRUE BECAUSE I WANT TO BELIEVE IT.”** Innate wish fulfillment: I believe in whatever puts me (or the groups to which I belong) in a positive light. I believe what “feels good,” what does not require me to change my thinking in any significant way, what does not require me to admit I have been wrong.

**“IT’S TRUE BECAUSE I HAVE ALWAYS BELIEVED IT.”** Innate self-validation: I have a strong desire to maintain beliefs that I have long held, even though I have not seriously considered the extent to which those beliefs are justified by the evidence.

**“IT’S TRUE BECAUSE IT IS IN MY SELFISH INTEREST TO BELIEVE IT.”** Innate selfishness: I believe whatever justifies my getting more power, money, or personal advantage even though these beliefs are not grounded in sound reasoning or evidence.

## Distinguish Egocentric Domination from Egocentric Submission



Essential Idea: Two irrational ways to gain and use power are given in two distinct forms of egocentric strategy:

- 1) The art of dominating others (a direct means to getting what one wants).
- 2) The art of submitting to others (an indirect means to getting what one wants).

Insofar as we are thinking egocentrically, we seek to satisfy our egocentric desires either directly or indirectly, by exercising power and control over others, or by submitting to those who can act to serve our interest. To put it crudely, egocentric behavior either bullies or grovels. It either threatens those weaker or subordinates itself to those more powerful, or oscillates between them in subtle maneuvers and schemes.

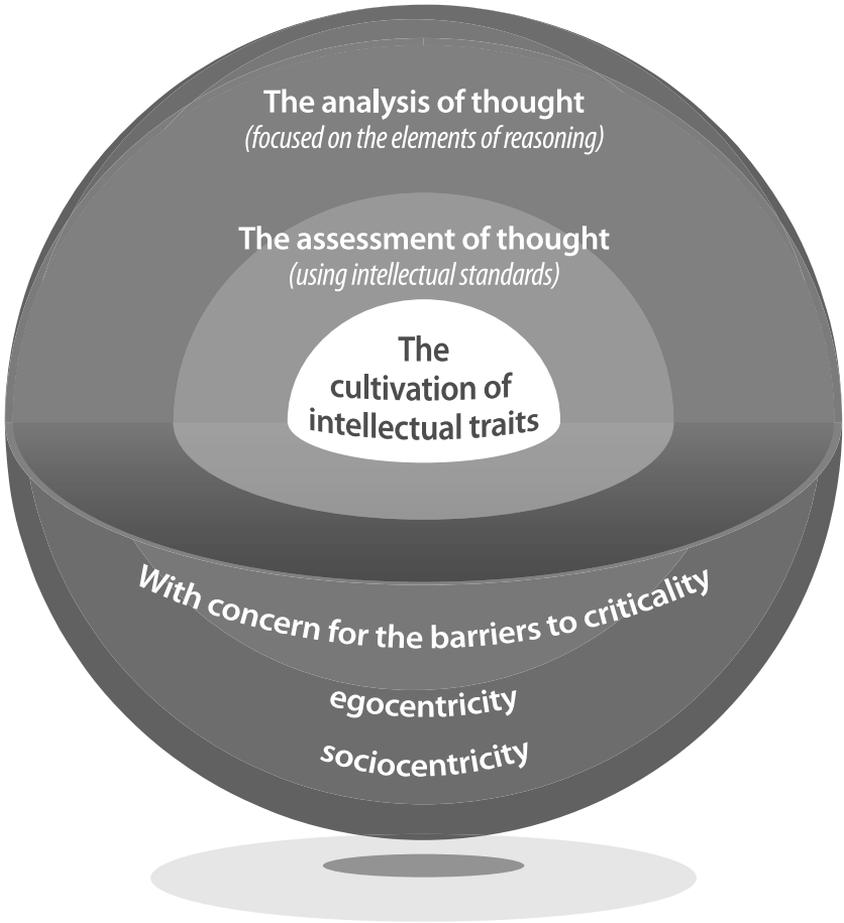
## Understand Sociocentric Thinking as a Problem

Most people do not understand the degree to which they have uncritically internalized the dominant prejudices of their society or culture. Sociologists and anthropologists identify this as the state of being “culture bound.” This phenomenon is caused by sociocentric thinking, which includes:

- The uncritical tendency to place one’s culture, nation, and religion above all others.
- The uncritical tendency to select self-serving positive descriptions of ourselves and negative descriptions of those who think differently from us.
- The uncritical tendency to internalize group norms and beliefs, take on group identities, and act as we are expected to act—without the least sense that what we are doing might reasonably be questioned.
- The tendency to blindly conform to group restrictions (many of which are arbitrary or coercive).
- The failure to think beyond the traditional prejudices of one’s culture.
- The failure to study and internalize the insights of other cultures (improving thereby the breadth and depth of one’s thinking).
- The failure to distinguish universal ethics from relativistic cultural requirements and taboos.
- The failure to realize that mass media in every culture shapes the news from the point of view of that culture.
- The failure to think historically and anthropologically (and hence, to be trapped in current ways of thinking).
- The failure to see sociocentric thinking as a significant impediment to intellectual development.

Sociocentric thinking is a hallmark of an uncritical society. It can be diminished only when replaced by cross-cultural, fairminded thinking—critical thinking in the strong sense.

# A Substantive Approach to Critical Thinking Targets



## The Thirty-Day Plan

This book introduces 30 fundamental ideas about thinking that form the basis of your 30-day plan. We include some of the important ideas we believe people need to grasp if they are to take command of their thinking and their lives. There is nothing magical about the number 30 rather than, say, 24, 32, or 35. And there are always new and important ideas to be learned—ideas that, when internalized and applied, help us think and live better. The development of thinking, you will discover, is an ongoing dynamic process.

We provide the ideas in a 30-day format so you can get an initial feel for the whole. You also can get an overview and begin to experience the power of ideas aimed at the improvement of thought. As you move through the 30 days, you will realize you cannot *internalize* any of these ideas in one day. Nevertheless, you can *begin* to bring important and powerful ideas into your thinking and *begin* to practice using them as agents for mental (intellectual) change.

On the first day, you focus on just one idea. On the second day, you focus on a second idea in light of the first. On the third day, you focus on the third idea in light of the second and the first. Each day, the tapestry becomes richer. Each day, you add a new and powerful idea to your thinking. As you proceed, you will always have a central focus, but your central focus is enriched through the background logic of, and interaction with, other powerful ideas.

As you move from day to day, you should try to integrate previously learned ideas with new ones. Having powerful ideas interact with other powerful ideas is a key to success. Long-term success largely depends on how you proceed after you complete the 30 days. Do you keep and use the ideas? Do you forget them? Do you pursue additional important ideas that connect with these ideas? Do you go back to the way you were before you read this book? Do you move forward? These are the kinds of questions you must ask, and revisit again and again, if you want to continue developing as a free and independent thinker.

Use the daily action plans and progress notes in the back of this section to plan and assess your progress as you move through each day.

Keep daily notes to deeply internalize each day's idea. See pages 42-43 for a suggested format.

### ***Expanding to a 30-Week Plan***

One way to proceed after you work through the 30-day plan is to advance to a 30-week plan, focusing on one idea per week, rather than one idea per day. In this advanced phase, as you move forward from week to week, you will find the power of each idea being intensified by new interactions with previous ideas. You will begin to see the interrelationships between and among the ideas. Whenever you take important ideas seriously and begin working them into your thinking, you will begin to see that every important idea has many connections to other important ideas. Powerful ideas are powerful *in light of* their important connections.

So we suggest a 30-day sprint to get the ideas flowing. Then a follow-up, longer-term, second run to deepen and further interconnect the ideas and begin to permanently internalize them.

The 30-week plan helps you build good habits of thought as each new idea adds to and connects with ideas learned in previous weeks. For example, following the 30-week plan, you will:

- Concentrate on *uncovering the extent of your ignorance* in the first week.
- Look out for *hypocrisy* in the second week—look for it in yourself and others (as a matter of secondary emphasis, though, you should still look for opportunities to *uncover deficiencies in your thinking*).
- Focus on *empathizing with others* whenever and however you can in the third week (while also *uncovering ignorance* in your thinking and looking out for hypocrisy).

Keep weekly notes to deeply internalize the ideas running through this book. See pages 44-45 for a suggested format.

When you have internalized the first three ideas in this book, you will realize that endless problems in thinking occur precisely because people often fail to empathize, to differentiate what they know from what they do not know (but assume they know), and to seek out hypocrisy (in themselves and others). Moreover, you should recognize that our propensity to empathize with others increases as we become less intellectually arrogant, less sure that what we think is true must always be true, and, as we become more aware of hypocrisy in our own thinking and more aware of how often we expect more from others than we expect from ourselves.

And so it goes from week to week. Every week you focus on a new and important idea. As you add a new idea, you connect it with ideas already learned.

Periodically you should review all the ideas you have covered and determine whether you need to refresh in your mind one or more of the ideas previously covered. The more often you crisscross the terrain of important and powerful ideas, the more deeply they become embedded in your thinking and the more likely you are to use them in your life.

What is most important, as you expand to a weekly plan, is that at any given time you have a specific focus and that this focus is of sufficient duration. Feel free to move around within the ideas—there is no magic order.

### ***You Will Reach a Payoff Point***

When you have worked through the 30 ideas as recommended in this book, applying them on a daily or weekly basis, you should begin to experience payoffs in your life. You should find that

- You are better at communicating your ideas and understanding others.

- You are better at sticking to issues and solving problems.
- You pursue more rational goals and can better reach them.
- You are better at asking productive questions.
- You are less selfish.
- You have more control over your emotions.
- You have more control over your desires and behavior.
- You can better understand the viewpoints of others.
- You are more reasonable.
- You are less controlling.
- You are less submissive, less easily intimidated.
- You no longer worry about things you can't do anything about.
- You are less likely to irrationally blame others.
- You think through implications before acting.
- You are more comfortable admitting when you are wrong, and you seek to correct your faulty beliefs.
- You work to become a person of integrity, living up to a consistent, rational self-image, and you surround yourself with people of integrity.
- You begin to question social conventions and taboos.
- You begin to question what you read, hear, and see in the news media.
- You are less easily manipulated by smooth-talking, self-interested politicians.
- You are more aware of the ways in which you use words and how your understanding of reality is influenced by your word choice.
- You are able to identify the assumptions that lead to your inferences and conclusions (so you can check your assumptions for justifiability).
- You realize that all people see themselves as critical thinkers (and therefore not in need of improvement), which is one of the great barriers to the cultivation of critical societies.

- You are less likely to use words in ways that are not justified given educated usage.
- You are more concerned with the rights and needs of all people in the world, rather than the narrow vested interests of your country.
- You are more likely to recognize the influence the media has in your life.
- You are contributing to a more just world.
- You are becoming better educated, reading more widely to broaden your historical sense and your worldview.
- You understand intellectual growth as a long-term process and have designed a plan for continued development.
- You understand that your development in critical thinking will occur along a continuum, or in stages, and you chart your development accordingly.

## **Tips for Internalizing Each Idea**

As you develop your daily or weekly plans for action, consider using one or more of the following strategies:

- Each evening, read the pages you are focused on for that day. Work the ideas into your thinking (give voice to them) so you begin to internalize them. Reread the pages until you can engage in a silent dialogue with yourself about the ideas and strategies on those pages.
- Explain the ideas you are attempting to internalize to someone else. (Ideally you would identify someone to work through these ideas with you—a significant other, perhaps.)
- Figure out the best settings for practicing the recommended strategies. Where can you best use them right away? At work? With your partner? With your children?
- Think through possible dialogues prior to actual situations. For example, if you are internalizing the idea of clarification (the idea for Day Six, “Clarify Your Thinking”), and you plan to be

in a meeting on the following day, think through possible clarifying questions. For example, you might prepare to ask “Could you state that point in another way for me,” “Could you give me an example of that,?” and “Would you illustrate that point for me by drawing a diagram?”

- Find ways to keep the key idea of the day in the front of your mind. You might tape a key word (such as “clarity”) to the refrigerator, to your desk, or to anything else you frequently see. This will help focus your thinking on the key idea for the day.

## **Planning and Logging Your Progress**

In the back of this section, you will find daily and weekly action plan and progress pages. Copy one set for each day or week, or write in your own notebook or journal (using the action plan and progress formats). The more time you spend giving voice to the ideas (explaining them to others, summarizing them in written form, using them explicitly in your conversations and interactions with others), the better you will internalize them, the more readily and effectively you will be able to use them, and the more spontaneous they will become.

### ***A Caveat***

As you work through this book, realize that each day’s idea is a complex concept presented in simplified form. Remember our goal is to *get you started* on a path toward critical thinking. We therefore have often omitted qualifications and further commentary we would have liked to include. Furthermore, in compressing our ideas, and in seeking examples from everyday life, we may have unwittingly oversimplified some of them. What is more, you may occasionally disagree with one of our examples. If so, try not to be distracted from the larger end: your development as a thinker. Use what you can. Put aside the rest.

If one of our 30 ideas does not make sense to you, by all means pass it by and perhaps come back to it later. Give yourself time to

grow, and use only those ideas you can put into action. For further explanations of the ideas, you will find recommended readings at the end of the book. We hope these ideas stimulate you to seek more and that they prompt you to make critical thinking a guiding force in your life.

### ***Before You Begin***

Before you begin to actively work through the ideas in this book, consider this idea. Then periodically revisit it:

**The quality  
of  
your life  
is  
determined  
by  
the quality  
of  
your  
thinking.**

If humans typically form prejudices, begin with the premise that you have prejudices. If humans frequently engage in self-deception, assume you do as well. You can't make significant progress as a thinker if you maintain the myth that you are exceptional. The fact is that feeling exceptional is not at all exceptional. It is common. What *is* exceptional is the recognition that you are not exceptional—that you, like everyone else, are a self-deceived, self-centered person.

***Daily Action Plan***

The key idea I am focused on today is:

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The settings in which I can best practice using this idea are:

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---

I plan to practice using this idea in the following ways (using the following strategies):

---

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### ***Daily Progress Notes***

To be completed at the end of each day.

Today, I was successful in using the following ideas/strategies:

---

---

---

The key insights that emerged for me as I attempted to take ownership of this idea were:

---

---

---

One problem in my thinking I now realize I need to work on is:

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---

---

I plan to continue working on this problem in my thinking by using the following strategy:

---

---

---

Some important ways in which the idea for today connects with other ideas in this book...

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***Weekly Action Plan***

The key idea for this week is:

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The settings in which I can best practice using this idea are:

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---

I plan to practice using this idea in the following ways (using these strategies):

---

---

---

---

---

## ***Weekly Progress Notes***

To be completed at the end of each week.

This week I was successful in using the following ideas/strategies:

---

---

---

The key insights that emerged for me as I attempted to take ownership of this idea were:

---

---

---

One problem in my thinking I now realize I need to work on is:

---

---

---

I plan to continue working on this problem in my thinking by using the following strategy:

---

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Some important ways in which the idea for this week connects with other ideas in this book...

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# Discover Your Ignorance

Most of us assume whatever we believe to be “right.” Though we were taught much of what we believe before we could critically analyze our beliefs, we nevertheless defend our beliefs as *the truth*. Good thinkers know this is absurd.

When you actively focus on uncovering your ignorance, you realize you are often wrong. You look for opportunities to test your ideas for soundness. You recognize that much of what people believe is based on prejudice, bias, half-truths, and sometimes superstition. You routinely question your beliefs. Your beliefs do not control you; you control your beliefs. You develop intellectual humility—awareness of the extent of your ignorance.

“Willingness to be taught what we do not know is the sure pledge of growth both in knowledge and wisdom.” —Blair

*Intellectual humility* is the disposition to distinguish, at any given moment and in any given situation, between what you know and what you don’t know. People disposed toward intellectual humility recognize the natural tendency of the mind to think it knows more than it does, to see itself as right when the evidence proves otherwise. They routinely think within alternative viewpoints, making sure they are accurately representing those viewpoints. They consider other viewpoints to understand them in good faith—not to dismiss them.

Socrates, an early Greek philosopher and teacher (c. 470–399 B.C.E.), was a living model of intellectual humility. Consider:

“Socrates philosophized by joining in a discussion with another person who thought he knew what justice, courage, or the like was. Under Socrates’ questioning, it became clear that neither [of the two] knew, and they cooperated in a new effort, Socrates making interrogatory suggestions that were accepted or rejected by his friend. They failed to solve the problem, but, now conscious of their lack of knowledge, agreed to continue the search whenever possible (p. 483).”<sup>4</sup>

“Profoundly sensible of the inconsistencies of his own thoughts and words and actions, and shrewdly suspecting that the like inconsistencies were to be found in other men, he was careful always to place himself upon the standpoint of ignorance and to invite others to join him there, in order that, proving all things, he and they might hold fast to that which is good (p. 332).”<sup>5</sup>

People with a high degree of intellectual humility (and they are rare) understand that there is far more that they will *never* know than they will *ever* know. They continually seek to learn more, to develop their intellectual abilities, and to expand their knowledge base, always with a healthy awareness of the limits of their knowledge.

### **Be on the lookout for...**

...intellectual arrogance today, the tendency to confidently assert as true what you do not in fact know to be true. Try to discover the limitations and biases of your sources of information. Question those who speak with authority. Question the information they use in their arguments, the information they ignore, the information they distort. Question what you read and see in the media. Notice the confidence with which “the news” is asserted. Question the sources that “produce”

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4. *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 1972.

5. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Eleventh Edition, 1911, Cambridge, England: the University Press.

the news. Whenever you feel inclined to make a bold statement, stop and ask how much you really know about what you're asserting.

### **Strategies for developing intellectual humility:**

1. When you cannot find sufficient evidence that *proves* your belief to be true, begin by saying: "I may be wrong, but what I think is..." or "Up to this point, I have believed..." or "Based on my limited knowledge in this area, I would say...".
2. Notice when you argue for beliefs without evidence to justify them. Recognize why you are doing this.
3. Actively question beliefs that seem obviously true to you, especially deeply held beliefs such as religious, cultural, or political beliefs.
4. Find alternative sources of information that represent viewpoints you have never considered.
5. Don't be afraid to "explore" new beliefs, and hence, be open to new insights.
6. Make a list of everything you absolutely know about someone you think you know well. Then make a list of things you think are true about that person, but that you cannot be absolutely sure about. Then make a list of things you do not know about that person. Then, if you can trust the person, show him or her the list to see how accurate you are. What insights emerge for you after you get feedback on such lists?

### **Questions you might ask to identify weaknesses in your thinking:**

- What do I truly know (about myself, about this or that situation, about another person, about my nation, about what is going on in the world)?
- To what extent do my prejudices or biases influence my thinking?

- To what extent have I been indoctrinated into beliefs that might be false?
- How do the beliefs I have accepted uncritically keep me from seeing things as they are?
- Do I ever think outside the box (of my culture, nation, religion, and so on)?
- How knowledgeable am I about alternative belief systems?
- How have my beliefs been shaped by the time period in which I was born, by the place in which I was raised, by my parents' beliefs, by my spouse's beliefs, and by my religion, culture, politics, and so on?

# Strive to Be a Person of Integrity: Beware of Your Own Hypocrisy

People are hypocritical in at least three ways. First, they tend to have higher standards for those with whom they disagree than they have for themselves or their friends. Second, they often fail to live in accordance with their professed beliefs. Third, they often fail to see contradictions in the behavior of people with whom they identify (such as people of high status).

*Hypocrisy*, then, is a state of mind unconcerned with honesty. It is often marked by unconscious contradictions and inconsistencies. Because the mind is naturally egocentric, it is naturally hypocritical. Yet at the same time, it can skillfully rationalize whatever it thinks and does. In other words, the human mind naturally wants to see itself in a positive light. The *appearance* of integrity is important to the egocentric mind. This is why, as humans, we actively hide our hypocrisy from ourselves and from others (through self-deception and rationalization). For example, though we are often selfish, we almost never see ourselves in this light. But we readily see selfishness in others. In other words, it is okay for me to be selfish, but not for you to be selfish. Although we expect others to adhere to much more rigid standards than the standards we impose on ourselves, we see ourselves as fair. For instance, the bookkeeper who steals money from her company may deceive herself into believing the company “owes” her that money, because the company has never paid her what she is worth, or, she might reason that the business is highly lucrative so should pay

her more, and so on. All are rationalizations that enable her to hide from the truth. Though we profess certain beliefs, we often fail to behave in accordance with those beliefs.

Only to the extent that our beliefs and actions are consistent, only when we say what we mean and mean what we say, do we have intellectual integrity.

**“We are companions in hypocrisy.”**

—William Dean Howells

When you resolve to live a life of integrity, you routinely examine your own inconsistencies and face them truthfully, without excuses. You want to know the truth about yourself. You want to know the truth in others. By facing your own hypocrisy, you begin to grow beyond it (while recognizing that you can never get full command of your hypocrisy because you can never get full command of your egocentricity). When you recognize it in others (especially those of status), they are less able to manipulate you.

See page 23 for an explanation of intellectual integrity, which is the opposite of hypocrisy.

### **Be on the lookout for...**

...contradictions or hypocrisy in your behavior and the behavior of others today. Catch yourself using double standards. Notice when others do. Because hypocrisy is a natural human tendency, theoretically this should be easy. Look closely at what people say they believe. Compare this with what their behavior implies. Dig out inconsistencies in your thinking and behavior. Notice when you profess a belief, and then act in contradiction to that belief. Notice how you justify or rationalize inconsistencies in your behavior. Figure out the consequences of your hypocrisy. Does it enable you to get what you want without having to face the truth about yourself? Figure out the consequences of others' hypocrisies. However, if you don't see hypocrisy in yourself, look again and again and again.

## **Strategies for reducing hypocrisy in yourself:**

- Begin to notice situations in which you expect more from others than you do from yourself. Target the areas of your greatest hypocrisy (these are usually areas in which you are emotionally involved). Do you expect more from your spouse than you do from yourself? From your coworkers? From your subordinates? From your children?
- Write a list of beliefs that seem most important to you. Then identify situations in which your behavior is inconsistent with those beliefs (where you say one thing and do another). Realize that what you believe is embedded in your actions, not your words. What does your behavior tell you about yourself? For example, you might say that you love someone while often failing to behave in accordance with his or her interests. Or, you might say your intellectual development is important to you while in fact spending little time on it.
- Think about the way you are living your life. Are you living a life of integrity where your motives are transparent? Or, are you hiding something significant? If so, what are you hiding, and more importantly, why are you doing this? How can you face your hypocrisy? What do you need to change about yourself or your situation?

## **Strategies for noticing hypocrisy in others:**

1. Observe the people around you. Begin to analyze the extent to which they say one thing and do another. Compare their words to their deeds. For example, notice how often people claim to love someone they criticize behind the person's back. This is a common form of bad faith.
2. Think about the people you are closest to—your partner, spouse, children, or friends. To what extent can you identify hypocrisy or integrity in these relationships? To what extent do they say what they mean and mean what they say? What problems are caused by their hypocrisy?

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