

LESSON 21: DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING

Vocabulary Word:

Critical thinking — The ability to analyze, evaluate, and interpret information objectively and logically in order to form well-reasoned judgments and make sound decisions.

Lesson Content:

Critical thinking involves thinking independently, assessing information objectively, and making thoughtful decisions based on evidence and logical reasoning. It involves questioning and challenging assumptions, biases, and preconceived notions. With critical thinking, a person thinks deeper and tries to get the logical coherence of arguments. It goes beyond accepting information at face value.

In prison, it's crucial to develop critical thinking. People spread rumors, or cling to fantasy rather than reality.

Developing critical thinking skills enhances our problem-solving abilities, increases our understanding of complex issues, and makes us more self-reliant decision-makers.

Our course offers many examples to show how critical thinking influences prospects for higher success levels. We should always grasp how today's decisions influence opportunities for tomorrow.

I've written about many people who developed strong critical thinking during their time in prison. For example, consider Weldon Long. Drug abuse led him to commit violent crimes. A judge sentenced him to prison when he was 19. While Weldon served his sentence, he allowed other people to influence him. Bad adjustment decisions led to further problems when he got out.

Within a couple of years, authorities charged Weldon with new criminal conduct. He returned to prison. Again, a failure to prepare for success during his second term in prison brought consequences. He got out and found more problems. Within a couple of years, Weldon returned to prison



a third time. During his third term in prison, however, Weldon exercised will power. He rejected the bad advice of people around him and developed himself. Those skills helped him leave prison the third time with exceptional critical thinking. That commitment to personal development led to a massively successful career in corporate training.

We feature Weldon's story in one of our supplemental DVD recordings. If you listen to Weldon, you'll hear him talk about his regret that he didn't develop critical thinking during his first or second terms. But it's never too late to work on personal development.

Each person in prison uses critical thinking every day. To the extent that we consider the opportunity costs that accompany every decision, we make better decisions. We want participants in our course to make better decisions. For that reason, we emphasize the importance of critical thinking for personal development:

To make the best progress:

Analyze Information:

Critical thinking begins with the skill of analyzing information. It involves breaking down complex ideas or situations into their parts, examining evidence, and identifying relevant factors.

Evaluate Arguments:

Critical thinking requires assessing the strengths and weaknesses of arguments or claims. It involves questioning assumptions, considering alternative viewpoints, and distinguishing between valid reasoning and logical fallacies.

Consider Objectivity and Open-Mindedness:

Critical thinking necessitates approaching information and ideas with objectivity and open-mindedness. It means being willing to challenge our



beliefs and biases, considering different perspectives, and being receptive to new evidence or viewpoints.

Be a Problem-Solver and Decision-Maker:

Critical thinking enhances our problem-solving and decision-making skills. It involves systematically analyzing a situation, considering multiple options, and selecting the most viable solution based on logical reasoning and evidence.

Communicate Ideas Effectively:

Critical thinking aligns with effective communication. It involves articulating our thoughts clearly, supporting our arguments with evidence, and engaging in thoughtful discussions to refine our ideas.

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES: IN ONE HOUR, ANSWER AS YOU DEEM APPROPRIATE.

How do you understand the concept of critical thinking?

Why is critical thinking important for personal development, particularly during imprisonment?

Share an example of a time when critical thinking helped you make a sound decision or solve a problem in prison. How did it contribute to your personal growth?

How can developing your critical thinking skills help you prepare for making informed choices and solving complex problems after release?

What strategies can you employ to enhance your critical thinking during your time in prison?



Activity:

Reflect on a recent decision and describe how you used critical thinking to arrive at that decision. Analyze the steps, the information you considered, and the reasoning behind your choice. What could you have done differently to improve your critical thinking process?

Identify one area where you would like to apply critical thinking more effectively. Write down specific actions you can take to develop and enhance your critical thinking skills, such as seeking out diverse perspectives or conducting research on the topic.

Remember, critical thinking is a powerful personal development, problem-solving, and decision-making tool. By developing and honing your critical thinking skills during your time in prison, you equip yourself with the ability to analyze information objectively, make sound judgments, and confidently navigate complex situations. These skills will serve you well in your journey towards post-release success.



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