

CHAPTER SIX

Critical thinking is a skill that helps you understand your thought process. Most people assume their thoughts are automatic, but actually, we have plenty of control over our minds. The ability to explore our thoughts develops over time. It helps us make more informed decisions and shows us the positive and negatives of a given situation. Control your mind and control your life when you start...

Learning without thought is labor lost; and thought without learning is perilous.

- Confucius

THINKING CRITICALLY



Photo by Todd Fong

WHEN IT'S SAID AND DONE

The examples and exercises in this chapter are designed to help build certain skills. By the end of the chapter, you will be able to say:

- I can think about situations beyond the surface by using critical thinking skills.
- I can explain the dangers of using stereotypes.
- I can react to stereotypes intelligently.
- I can identify the true problems in a situation.
- I can identify relevant details of a situation.
- I can ask clarifying questions in order to understand a situation better.
- I can make choices using the six steps of critical thinking.

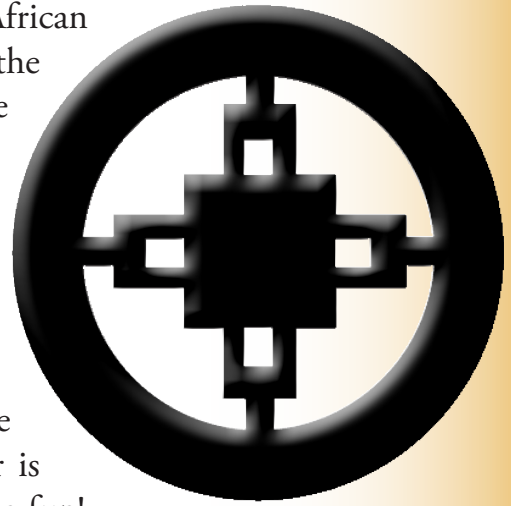
DAMII DAMII

(dah•may dah•may)

The game of checkers is thousands of years old with African origins. The ancient Greeks learned the game from the Egyptians¹. Arabic people from northwest Africa brought the game to Spain when they conquered the region in 711 A.D.² Today, the simple game of circles on squares is played all around the world and is known by many names.

In Ghana, Damii Damii is very much like checkers, but it has a few twists. There are more game pieces. The board is 10 x 10 instead of the 8 x 8 common in the US.³ But like the US, the game is played on two levels. One is the strategy of moving the pieces across the board. The other is talking enough trash to distract your opponent—or just have fun! Both levels require smarts and strategy.

This chapter is about developing a clear thought process to make better decisions. The Adinkra symbol for intelligence and ingenuity,⁴ Damii Damii, represents the spirit of this work.



WHAT'S YOUR STARTING POINT?

Most people don't think about how they make choices. They just do it. They might have steps that they take: talking to a friend, finding someone in a similar situation, or writing a plan. There are adults who do internet research and companies that will do years worth of forecasting before choosing a

new plan. Some people just flip a coin. Maybe you do some of these things. Maybe you do other things without realizing that they are part of your decision making process. Before we explore new methods for making decisions, let's start by looking at your old methods.

Write... When you have to make a big decision, how do you do it?

KEY CONCEPTS

We're going to develop a set of ideas, and in order to do so, we have to be clear about the language we're using. These definitions are based on the Oxford dictionary's,¹ and they're helpful starting points. By the time we finish this chapter, you'll be able to add your own ideas to each definition.

Term	Dictionary	In Your Words
Assumption (n)	Something accepted as truth without proof	
Investigation (n)	An effort to find more details or context about a situation	
Relevant (adj)	Useful or important to the subject	
Skeptical (adj)	Having doubt about something	
Evaluate (v)	To form an idea of the value of something	
Credible (adj)	Having concrete references, valid facts, and true sources of information.	
Integrity (n)	The quality of being honest and having strong principles	

WHAT IS CRITICAL THINKING?

Critical thinking combines a number of skills. Throughout the 180 Degrees Program, we'll focus on these seven. Throughout life, you'll find even more.

Welcoming the chance to look at other points of view, ideas, or positions

Weighing ideas based on the merits, not who presents them or supports them

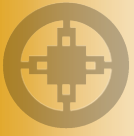
Thinking for yourself rather than accepting what other people want you to believe

Creating questions to drive deeper thinking

Using evaluation skills to judge arguments

Using reasoning skills to work through questions and ideas

Using inquiry skills to form questions about new ideas or information



THINKING STEREOTYPICALLY

Whenever we use stereotypes, we are rejecting the principles of critical thinking. In fact, we use stereotypes to *avoid* thinking. We substitute assumption and belief for facts and evidence. It is a practice that not only limits our understanding of the world, but also makes us mentally weaker.

To strengthen our minds, let's take some time to explore how stereotypes work. In this exercise you'll use the boxes below to list stereotypes of each "type" of person listed. Afterwards, we'll discuss these ideas and how they effect people's judgements.

White Men

Hispanic Men

Asian Men

Black Men

Discuss...

- What do you notice about the qualities that turn into stereotypes?
- What are some "truths" that don't?
- With all of these examples in mind, how would you define "stereotype?"
- How might stereotypes misguide someone's judgment or decision making ability?
- Can you share a story about a time you felt stereotyped?
- Can you share a story about a time you used a stereotype?

TRAYVON MARTIN

“The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.”

- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Trayvon Benjamin Martin was a Florida teenager who was shot and killed during an altercation. Martin, who was unarmed, had been walking home before George Zimmerman shot and killed him. Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch coordinator, had observed Martin walking home at night and called local police to report him as a suspicious person. Before police arrived, an altercation between Martin and Zimmerman occurred with Martin being fatally shot.

Zimmerman was originally arrested and then released after claiming self-defense in the shooting. This was followed by intense local and national protests. Six weeks after the fatal shooting, Zimmerman was charged with murder. Zimmerman was eventually found not guilty of any crime. Martin's death sparked a national conversation about race and stereotypes facing young Black men. Two stories fought for attention during these conversations: one about

the young man Martin was, and another about who he was assumed to be.

Martin's mother and father are both college educated and have good jobs in their community. They are divorced, but they worked well together to raise their son. Still, Martin had some disciplinary issues during his high school years. He got in trouble for vandalism and possessing drug paraphernalia, but he was never charged with any crimes. Overall, he was a regular teen who liked rap music and girls. He was getting ready for the SAT. His friends described him as the type to avoid violence. Others remember him as the type to make people laugh.

After his untimely death, many people focused on the elements that made Martin look like a thug. People hacked his social media and email accounts then posted pictures of his tattoos and grill. Pictures of Martin holding up his middle finger added

to his criminal image.¹ Perhaps the greatest symbol of his “bad boy” lifestyle was his hoodie, which he wore the night he was killed. Many people associated the style of sweater with criminals who are trying to hide their faces, so, to them, Martin's hoodie alone was reason to think he was up to no good. While discussing Martin's attack, Geraldo Rivera, a famous reporter, declared, “A hoodie is like a sign—shoot or stop and frisk me.”²

Today, Trayvon Martin's parents are working to address the violence and stereotypes facing Black youth even as they heal from their loss. They've helped organize marches, rallies, and community conversations across the country. A major project, National Hoodie Day, was held on June 10, 2013. People all over the country wore hoodies, not to hide, but to show the emptiness of a stereotype that may have contributed to the lethal consequences.

Discuss...



- Do you think Zimmerman would have followed:
- A female?
- A person wearing a business suit?
- A non African American male?
- How could this situation have been avoided?
- What could Trayvon have done differently?
- What could George Zimmerman have done differently to avoid a confrontation?

HOW TO ADDRESS STEREOTYPES

Stereotypes are dangerous devices, and they operate both within us and around us. While they are impossible to avoid, if we *practice* dealing with stereotypes, we'll be better prepared to deal with them. Below are three issues with stereotypes. Read all three. Afterward, choose one of the skits to perform in a small group.

Most stereotypes are negative, and all stereotypes have negative effects. Even those that offer compliments like “Asian kids are good at math,” or “Black people can run the fastest” still end up hurting people. How? What if you're the Black person who can't run fast? Or dance well? Or rap? How would you fit in among other Black people who believe that all Black people are supposed to do those things?

On the other side, what if you were great at all of those things? Many professionals—accountants, pharmacists, real estate agents, etc.—have had a hard time proving that they could do more than run, dance, and rap. Many of them can describe how coworkers are surprised that college educated Black people can “speak so well.” These struggles damage their careers, their incomes, and their feelings of accomplishment and belonging. “Complimentary” stereotypes hurt because they set limits and expectations that are difficult to overcome.

When we stereotype others, we often form negative impressions of them for no reason. Once we form those negative impressions, we often interact with them in an inappropriate manor. In other words, we become rude and do rude things. And what do we do after being rude? We do our best to apologize, name our mistake, explain that we understand it hurt the other person, express our regret, and commit to never do it again. That's a mature way to deal with our mistakes.

As Black males we are often stereotyped in a negative way. Not only do we have to make sure we don't stereotype others, but we also can't embrace stereotypes as our reality. We often try to live up to certain stereotypes as a way of proving that we belong to a group, and many of us confuse this with proving our Blackness. There is no one way to be Black in the US, so there is no stereotype that could ever determine who is “really” Black and who isn't.

Create a skit where a character has to face a “complimentary” stereotype from the group discussion. Choose any setting you like. At some point, however, the character must confront the source of the stereotype and make it clear that using the stereotype is unacceptable.

Create a skit where a character has to apologize for acting rudely. The bad behavior can be based on any stereotype from the group discussion.

Create a skit where a character's Blackness is on trial. Have one side try to use stereotypes as evidence against the character. The other side must argue that a person's Blackness can't be measured by stereotypes. PS - The idea that your skin has to be a certain color in order to be Black... that's a stereotype.

AUTOMATIC THINKING

Our work on reflection focused on discovering more about a situation after it happened. Our work on critical thinking is designed to help discover more about a situation as it is happening, or even better, before it happens.

The same way our values shape our behaviors without us thinking about it, so do our thoughts. As we explored stereotypes, we realized just how much the lack of critical thinking affects the world around us and our own behavior. Without a second thought, people often react to situations based on the first conclusion that jumps in their minds. Like it or not, our minds have spent a lifetime practicing how to react. You know that person who gets mad at little things right away? The one who doesn't take responsibility for anything, even when the problem is clearly their fault? What about the person who is always patient and listens no matter how hectic it gets? Everyone of them has been practicing that response so much, they don't even think about doing it. It's automatic.

The same thing is true for you. Let's find out HOW you've been thinking.

Listen to a partner describe his answers to these questions. Listen without interrupting while he talks for two whole minutes, then switch roles.

- *What is your automatic reaction to a problem with a friend?*
- *What about with a teacher?*
- *An adult family member?*

None of us are robots. We don't react the same way to every situation with every person. Some teachers we find easy to talk to, and others are easy to ignore. Friends and family, too. But consider this; our responses are still largely automatic. If the teacher is friendly, we automatically do one thing, if not, we automatically do another. Recognizing your thought patterns is an important step to controlling your life and unlocking your potential.

Discussion Questions

As a group, take the time to discuss the first set of questions before you discuss the last three.

This is huge. Learn from your partner and your group. Share your experiences and ideas. Communication will show you new ideas – ideas that are closed when you think automatically instead of critically.

-
- What are some of your automatic reactions to problems?
 - What are some of the factors that determine which automatic reaction you'll use?
 - How did you learn those automatic reactions?

-
- What cultures are you a part of?
 - How do those cultures influence your thought process?
 - How does society try to determine what you think?

SIX STEPS TO THINKING CRITICALLY

In this chapter we've talked about the importance of thinking critically. Now we'll talk about a process you can use to actually do it. This process is very similar to the scientific method you have been/will be taught in your science class, because both are focused on finding the best answers. The process consists of six steps, each of which are equally important, and cannot be skipped or substituted. If a step is skipped or substituted, you may not reach the results that will be best for you, and you'll find yourself back at step one with a new problem.

We can't fix what we don't know is broken.

1 *Identify the problem.*

We need to reflect over what we're already thinking. We cannot ignore anything that we feel is important and might add a new perspective to examining the problem.

2 *Gather the relevant facts.*

3 *Examine your assumptions.*

We played with this in step three, but here it is the main focus. We need to think about why we thought/felt the way we did and check for blind spots.

4 *Explore your possibilities.*

5 *Reflect on your thinking.*

6 *Make your choice.*

We need all the information we can get to help us solve the issue. It's just the smarter way to go.

Anything can happen, depending on the circumstances or people involved. We don't want to discount any perspectives, thoughts, or feelings that can add to our understanding of the issue. We can also save time and energy by eliminating possibilities not backed by facts.

The previous five steps brings us to the point where we have a choice to make. Hopefully the six-step critical thinking process helps us make the best choice for ourselves *and* others.

Practice...

Recall the "Turn Down for What?" scenario used on page 62. What do you think is the best decision for Tony in this situation? Does he get revenge and continue looking like a bully? Does he ignore it and pursue the young lady he likes? Apply the six steps to thinking critically to determine what the best choice would be for Tony in this situation. Afterwards share your results with the class to show *how* you came up with those results.

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM

To deal with our problems intelligently, we have to separate cause and effect. If we feel bad in an important relationship, that ill feeling is an effect. The cause is something that happened (or didn't happen) that we need to address. We have to go to the root of the issue. The cause isn't always obvious. To find it, we have to examine the problem from a variety of perspectives. Identifying the problem must be the first step in critical thinking because it tells you where to focus your energy in finding a solution.

Read each of the following scenarios. Identify the main problem with a partner. Then write a one-sentence description of the problem in the empty box.

Scenario

Problem Statement

Quan has been asked to join the football team. This makes him proud. He needs to give his answer by tomorrow. His older sister already plays on a winning team that has gone to state competitions, and he has seen how hard it is on his family. The cost of traveling to all of her games has been tough. He could join the high school football team next fall. It would be easier on his family and allow him more time to work on getting good grades.

Antoine wanted to learn to play drums. He has always admired his uncle who plays in a jazz band. He got his parents to rent an instrument for him, and he signed up for the after school band class. Since the weather has turned warm, some friends are putting pressure on him to quit and join them playing ball.

Mark wants to get fit so he can excel on the track team. He has talked to the coach about getting ready for the season, and he went online to find healthy foods to eat. His family are meat, potatoes, pizza, and fast food eaters. He knows that he needs to eat a well-rounded diet, including whole grains, fruits, and vegetables. His brothers are now making fun of him, and his mom doesn't seem to understand.



GATHERING RELEVANT FACTS

Education is the single most consistent and powerful instrument for the advancement of an individual and a people.

- Dr. Johnnetta B. Cole¹

.....
The scenarios are the same, but the task is different. Write three relevant facts for each scenario in the space provided.
.....

Relevant Facts



Good teachers have a way of making you go deeper into a lesson by asking you questions. Any of these sound familiar?

- What can you add to that?
- What does that mean?
- Why do you think so?
- Can you give me an example?

Teachers ask these questions to see how much you know. Your answers determine what happens next. Great answers mean the class keeps going. Weak answers mean we review. Makes sense, right?

We can use the same strategy in our critical thinking. First we get information about the present condition, then we choose what to do next. Like our teachers, we need to ask questions to find relevant facts—the facts that matter to the issue at hand. Having more facts will give us a better sense of what needs to happen, how it can happen, and the effects of each choice.

To gather the relevant facts:

Be curious. Ask questions as though you want to discover what the world has to offer—and not like you’re looking for the answers you want to hear.

Ask questions that use “how” and “why.” These are open-ended questions—questions that allow people to explain themselves. These explanations can lead to more questions and more information.

Use the right sources. Talk to the people involved. Whenever possible, get information about them directly from them—don’t go by what you heard about them. If there is some technical part of your problem—something is broken or you have to submit an application a certain way—talk to people who know what they are doing.

CHECKING ASSUMPTIONS: PART 1

When we make assumptions, we use reasons we don't see to explain the things we do see. Our assumptions often reach into the past to explain why something is happening. They can also go into the future to make us certain of what can and can't, will and won't happen. Even though our assumptions can be right sometimes, they always limit our ability to fully understand a situation or imagine a better outcome.

When we rely on our assumptions to explain a current situation, we can easily make mistakes. Assumptions can end up working the same way as stereotypes and create dangerous shortcuts around critical thought. With only a drop of evidence, assumptions will quickly tell us the who, what, when, why, and how of a story. This

type of fast-forward thinking can cloud the facts, leading us down the wrong path. When we jump to conclusions like this, we use our imaginations to justify how we act in the real world. Not a good idea.

Let's say we got all the facts right. Assumptions can still prevent us from seeing a full range of options moving forward. A long list of possibilities gets cut down because "She'll say no if I ask," "There's no way to pay for it," or "Nobody will help me." If you trick yourself into believing negative assumptions, you'll be 100% right—what you want *will not* happen. But if you recognize your assumptions as self-limitations, you can think your way around them and find a way to get the results you want.

.....
 If you were faced with these situations, what would be your first assumption? After you write it down, think of another explanation and write it in the last column.

Scenario	What is your first assumption?	What might be another reason?
Your teacher passed you in the hallway and didn't smile at you. You have her class next period.		
You turned in your extra credit last week but your grade still hasn't changed.		
Your birthday is next week, and your aunt asks you what size shoes you wear.		
This morning, you sent your friend a text about getting a ride home, but five hours later, he didn't text you back.		
You're the third person to walk in a store. The cashier greeted everybody except you.		

CHECKING ASSUMPTIONS: PART 2

Here are the scenarios from before. Discuss the assumptions each of the characters might make. Write two examples in each box.

Scenario

Quan has been asked to join the football team. This makes him proud. He needs to give his answer by tomorrow. His older sister already plays on a winning team that has gone to state competitions, and he has seen how hard it is on his family. The cost of traveling to all of her games has been tough. He could join the high school football team next fall. It would be easier on his family and allow him more time to work on getting good grades.

Antoine wanted to learn to play drums. He has always admired his uncle who plays in a jazz band. He got his parents to rent an instrument for him, and he signed up for the after school band class. Since the weather has turned warm, some friends are putting pressure on him to quit and join them playing ball.

Mark wants to get fit so he can excel on the track team. He has talked to the coach about getting ready for the season, and he went online to find healthy foods to eat. His family are meat, potatoes, pizza, and fast food eaters. He knows that he needs to eat a well-rounded diet, including whole grains, fruits, and vegetables. His brothers are now making fun of him and his mom doesn't seem to understand.

Assumptions



“Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won't come in.”

—Isaac Asimov



Elizabeth Freeman



As her slave masters were busy discussing the ideas of *The Bill of Rights*, and *The Constitution of Massachusetts*, Mum Bett was busy paying attention. She heard them say the law declared all people born free and equal. She could find no reason why the law didn't apply to her. So, in 1781, she sued her owner in order to secure her freedom.

The strategy was extraordinary, for a few reasons. First of all, she was represented by a Black lawyer. Second, her owner was the county judge! And finally, and most amazingly, it worked.

Mum Bett was declared free eighty years before the 13th Amendment ended slavery in the US. She changed her name to Elizabeth Freeman and lived to the age of 85.¹ Her incredible example of courage and wit teaches us all to gather information and place no limits on the opportunities we explore.

EXPLORING POSSIBILITIES

Critical thinking is a tool to help us get from Point A to Point B in our lives. Exploring possibilities helps us choose which path to take. When we develop the ability to explore possibilities, we increase our awareness of the situations we face. We practice looking beyond what is immediately present and into what could happen. This helps us in at least three important ways. First, it forces us to identify exactly what we want. Second, it forces us to consider the many ways of getting what we want, and third, it makes us recognize that we have choice, control, and power over the situation.

Consider this scenario. Jason overslept. He has seven minutes to make it to the bus stop or he'll miss the last bus that will get him to his job interview on time. The interview is supposed to start in 45 minutes. He takes the immature route. He starts cussing, spends five minutes looking for someone to blame for not waking him up, then decides not to go because his plan is ruined. He spends the rest of the day in a foul mood. But if Jason took control of life, instead of letting life happen to him, he could see many possibilities to win even after his late start.

What are some ways Jason could solve his problem?

Sometimes, like in this example, we can see possibilities just by applying common sense. Other times, we have to ask questions to find out what's possible. Questions that start with "Can I," or "Is there a way to" can help us find excellent solutions we didn't know existed.

Choose any one of the three scenarios from page 83 and write five questions that would help you fully explore the possibilities of the situation.

ICE AGE



Photo by Eva Rinaldi

O'Shea Jackson has spent a lifetime recognizing opportunity. By making spoofs of popular rap songs at age 16, he built his talent for entertaining audiences in South Central L.A. That's how he built recognition for his stage name, Ice Cube. He had been writing rhymes since the fourth grade, so when local talents Eric Wright (AKA Easy-E) and Andre Young (AKA Dr. Dre) needed lyrics for their beats, Cube was the one they called. The group put together a demo album, but Cube didn't rest his hopes on it. He left L.A. to get a degree in architecture in Arizona. When he came back, the group, now called N.W.A., was the hottest thing in California. Two years later, they had three platinum albums and ruled hip hop.

But paradise didn't last long. Ice Cube was troubled when he couldn't get straight answers to simple questions about money. The group's manager, Jerry Heller, kept the numbers to himself. When Ice Cube became more suspicious, Heller presented each member of the group a new contract and a check for \$75,000. The other members accepted. Cube demanded his lawyers look at the contract and the accounts. When they did, they found NWA earned \$650,000 on a recent tour. Heller got \$150,000. Cube got \$23,000. They found that the group's two biggest albums sold three million copies. Cube, who wrote most of those songs, was paid \$32,000. Cube left the group at the height of their popularity and went solo.

What happened to NWA after that? Read *The VIBE History of Hip Hop*¹ to find out. For Cube though, new opportunities were opening up. In June of 1990, his first solo album paved new ground in content and sound. Cube the rapper became both political and gangsta,² like the best of blaxploitation movies. Interestingly, movies would be his next horizon.

Cube was cast to play the role of Doughboy in John Singleton's 1991 classic, *Boyz in Da Hood*. Singleton recognized Ice Cube's talent for telling stories—that's what platinum rappers do—and encouraged him to try writing and producing movies.³ That mentoring experience led him to write *Friday*, which he also starred in. Since then, Ice Cube has written six other movies and tv shows, produced another 25, and acted in 37.⁴ O'Shea Jackson just keeps finding opportunities.



"I think the worst thing you can do about a situation is nothing.

-Ice Cube



N.W.A. from left to right: Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, Easy-E, DJ Yella, and MC Ren

REFLECTING ON YOUR THINKING

Have you ever watched a mystery show like CSI or read a mystery like a Sherlock Holmes story? At the end, the person solving the mystery goes over all of the evidence, explains how he put it together, and then names the guilty person. We get to see the reasoning behind the conclusion so that the final decision makes sense. When we practice critical thinking, we have to do the same thing—we have to review the information, how we processed it, and the conclusions we drew.

This step, reflecting on your thinking, allows us to double-check our thought process *before* we take action. If you've ever done it the other way around (and we all have), you know why this is so important. We need to think through our ideas or we may make a mistake we cannot correct.



Remember the last bad decision you made. Obviously you would want to make a different choice now, so think about what piece of the critical thinking process you could've improved. Be sure to double check that step in future decisions.

This is the last step before taking action, so it's our last chance to improve our decision. Look at the modified version of the graphic that got us started. It shows us the many chances to circle back to other points in our thought process. Step 5 is the most important one because it forces us to check on all the other steps. Here, we must reflect on three key elements:

The Information

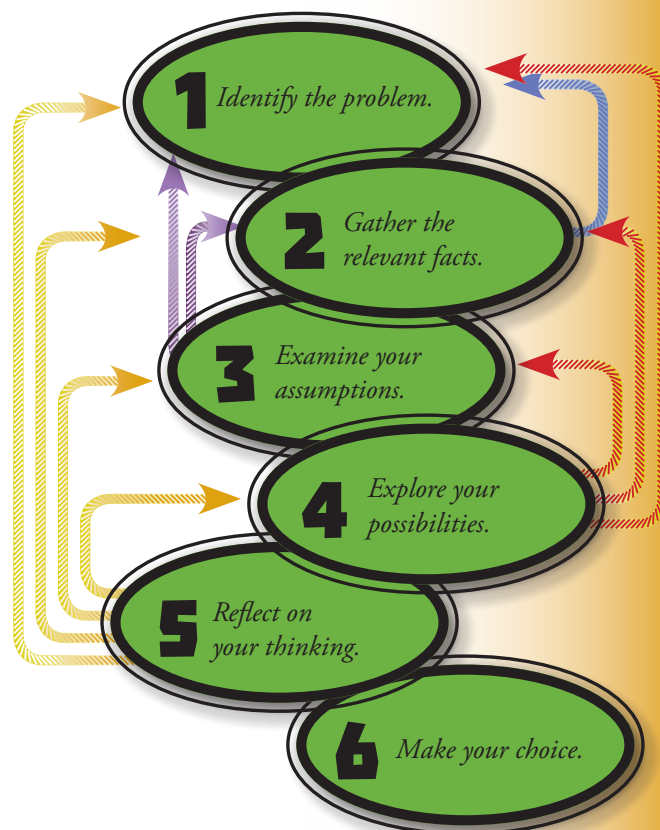
As we go further into the critical thinking process, we are sure to discover questions we didn't expect at the beginning. Make sure you've answered all of your questions—old and new. Also, make sure you have the correct answers. You can't make a smart choice with dumb facts.

The Assumptions

What do you know for certain and what are you assuming? We'll never have all the facts, but we can at least recognize where we're filling in the gaps. Be clear on where you're taking a leap of faith.

The Thought Process

Having to make a decision in a hurry can affect your choice. The same is true if you're tired, hungry, taking medicine, under stress, or otherwise just not yourself. If you were on a mission to "get even" or to impress someone, now is the time to recognize it and be honest about what that will do to your choice. Check that you are being your best self before committing to your decision... or commit to the consequences of not being your best self.



MAKING CHOICES

Now is the time to put your well-thought plan into action. Whatever you choose to do, know that no decision will be perfect, and there are sure to be results that you could never have expected—both good and bad. This reality is what keeps life interesting... and frustrating. Know that your choices will help you develop the wisdom that will lower frustrations in the future. No matter where your decision-making skills are now, the more you actively decide, the better your skills will become.

It's important that you stand by your choices and have the integrity to face the outcomes. There are a few truths to keep in mind:

Whenever you make a choice, you choose all that comes with it.

If a person cheats on a test, he's choosing a strategy to get a higher grade. He's also choosing to take the punishment that comes with his action. If he has no problem accepting the reward, he should have no problem accepting the punishment. We've all seen (and been) the type of person who wants the good without the bad. But when we choose, we choose both.

Whenever you choose one path, you are also choosing not to take other paths.

Recognize that your choices come with sacrifices. Your choice to play video games for two hours means you are not studying algebra for two hours. Your choice to date Paula means you cannot date her best friend, Giselle. No. You can't. Anyone who has tried has learned this much about decisions: If you spend your energy trying to keep all your options, you'll lose *all* your options and your honor. Commit fully to your choice, or make a new choice.

You are not responsible for the entire world.

Even with the best thought process, your choices could create unwanted problems. You may end up causing other people some headaches. Unfortunately, that's life. When that happens, it's important that you recognize your impact on others and work to make them whole. After you've done all you can to fix the problem, some people will stay mad at you. Don't let their negative emotions become yours. You cannot bury yourself in negative emotions like shame, guilt, and regret. These are the forces that can keep you from making future decisions, which will only stall your life. Instead, learn from your mistakes, and commit to doing better in the future.

HOW WILL THIS WORK FOR YOU?

This space is for you to apply the six steps of critical thinking to an issue that you're facing now. Maybe it's the trouble of getting along with a certain teacher, or the irritation of a little brother. Maybe it's a choice to make for winter or summer plans. These steps work well on any size problem. Challenge yourself to work out the biggest problem you're facing right now. Writing out your idea will help focus your thoughts and lead you to a solution. Try it.

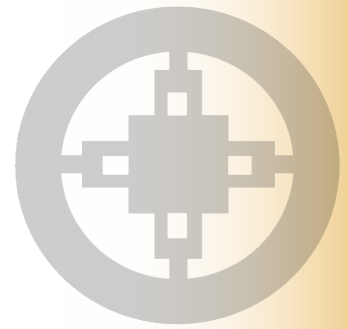
What is the real problem?

What are the relevant facts?

What assumptions are you making?

What are your possibilities?

*Reflect on your thinking overnight. Tomorrow,
look back at what you wrote.
See if it still makes sense to you.
See if your answers are complete.
Then choose.*



What is your choice?

CLOSING REFLECTION

In life, everyone thinks but not everyone is a critical thinker. Are you? Most of our thinking is biased, uninformed and/or based off stereotypes. Yet these flawed thoughts have a direct impact on our quality of life. If we want to live better, we must think better, or should we say think critically. In this chapter we did several activities to help us do just that. Look back at the checklist of goals on the first page of this chapter. Did you accomplish each one? If so, wonderful! If not, speak up! We can review together.

As members of the 180 Degrees Program let's pledge to become men that think critically about our decisions and behavior. If you agree, lift your right hand high and repeat:

“I pledge to think it through, before I act!”

“I pledge to think it through, after I act!”

“I pledge to learn from my mistakes and acknowledge my accomplishments.”

Remember the power of your words.

