

CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR BETTER
DECISION MAKING, PROBLEM-SOLVING
AND GOAL SETTING



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Critical Thinking Skills

Practical Strategies for Better Decision making, Problem-Solving and Goal Setting

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Introduction

I would like to thank you for purchasing this book. “Critical Thinking: Practical strategies for better decision making, problem solving and goal setting.”

This book is an excellent introduction to the basic principles of critical thinking. It will provide you with insightful tips, and easy steps that you can follow to solve problems efficiently. The tips presented in this book aren't restricted to just one scenario and can be made use of in every aspect of the life. Critical thinking is the ability to think objectively and rationally about a particular situation without letting your emotions rule you. This is an important skill that's quite important in life if you want to be successful. Like any other skill, this one can be easily learned! All it needs is a little bit of practice and patience.

In this book, you will learn about critical thinking, the skills essential for critical thinking, strategies for better decision-making, and tips for problem solving, and the strategies needed for setting goals. The tips and various strategies mentioned in this book are not only easy to understand but can be followed quite easily as well. Let us get started without any further ado.

Chapter 1: About Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is the ability to be objective, rational and analytical about situations and problems. This is a process, and it is an ongoing effort for improving your cognitive skills. The ability for critical thinking varies significantly from one individual to another, but it can be developed with some help and effort. The first area that you should explore will be your cognitive process to help you in understanding how you tend to err. Critical thinking can be traced back to ancient Greece, to the times of Socrates. The popular Socratic method of thinking encourages the students to question something before accepting it as it is. This is still considered to be an excellent tool for facilitating critical thinking. The principles of critical thinking offer suggestions for improving your cognitive abilities by questioning - the goals and purposes, keys concepts, core ideas, the nature of a problem you are faced with, whether you have sufficient information or not, the alternative interpretations at your disposal, checking if any unwarranted assumptions exist, the implications of a particular solution and alternative views.

No one is capable of acting objectively and rationally all the time. Human beings are inherently selfish. Who doesn't like to gossip, boast, exaggerate, or even equivocate? It is nothing but "human" to want to validate our prior knowledge, to want to vindicate all our previous decisions, or to wish to sustain all our beliefs. In our bid to satiate our egos, we tend to forego intellectual growth as well as opportunities. You might not always want to apply the principles of critical thinking to your life, but it is essential to have these skills in your arsenal.

Characteristics of critical thinkers

Critical thinking is made up of different skills, and its main features are as follows.

Rationality:

You can say you are rational when you rely on reason and not emotion when you need evidence, and you consider that before concluding and you want to find the best explanation possible instead of just accepting whatever is given to you.

Self-awareness:

You are thinking critically when you start weighing the influence your motives and bias have on the way you function and acknowledge your assumptions, perspectives and prejudices.

Honesty:

You can think critically once you have gained the ability to recognize your emotional impulses, your motivations or any other illusions you might have about yourself.

Open-mindedness:

Your ability to be reasonable while evaluating inferences, of taking into consideration multiple points of views and perspectives, of being an option towards alternative interpretations, of accepting an explanation that is well-suited for accepting new priorities and of being tolerant towards yourself and others makes you open-minded.

Discipline:

Being disciplined means being able to resist irrational temptations, avoid manipulations, think clearly, avoid jumping to conclusions and be meticulous and comprehensive while functioning.

Judgement:

You will start thinking critically when you avoid being judgmental and start being rational while taking into consideration the evidence or perspectives available before forming an opinion.

Benefits of Critical thinking***Approach:***

Critical thinking helps in increasing your awareness of the different methods that you can make use of when it comes to problem-solving and assists in assessing each of these approaches critically. Instead of relying blindly on a standard or uniform method of problem solving, you will be able to identify other approaches and improve your chances of success as well.

Saves time:

It will help you in differentiating between relevant and irrelevant information. It also helps in prioritizing the resources and time available to you.

Appreciation for different worldviews:

Critical thinking will help you in empathizing with others and in seeing beyond the usual norms without judging. It helps you in developing a tolerance for others and their views.

Better communication:

Critical thinking will help you in analyzing and building evidence for any premise that's given, and therefore it will help you in becoming a better communicator. When you have the necessary information to support your point of view, then you can communicate or express your thoughts in a better manner.

Better decision-making:

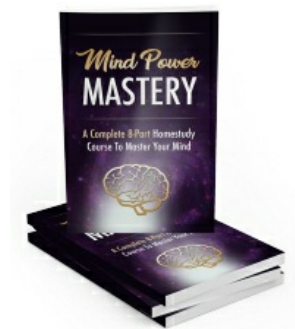
Critical thinking encourages out of the box thinking. Instead of relying on intuition and guesswork to make decisions, you will depend on logic, reasoning and evidence. This means that you will be able to make better decisions. When you start thinking critically, you can come up with numerous solutions instead of the existing ones and, therefore, it promotes creativity as well. When you start being analytical and logical while thinking about a problem, the decisions you take will be better.

Reason:

You will learn to start looking at reason while solving a problem. Two types of reasoning (inductive and deductive) are made use of.

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Chapter 2: Critical Thinking in Everyday Life

We all have great potential within us, but we don't make use of it. Most of it is lying dormant within us, or it is underdeveloped. Any improvement in thinking cannot take place if there is no conscious commitment towards learning. You cannot improve your game in basketball if you don't put in some effort to do so and the same stands true for critical thinking as well. Like any other skill, the effort is essential for its development. As long as you take your thinking for granted, there is no way in which you can unlock your true potential. Development in your thinking process is gradual, and there are several plateaus of learning that you will have to overcome and hard work is a precondition for all of this. You cannot become an excellent thinker by just wanting to become one. You will have to make a conscious decision of changing certain habits, and this will take some time. So, be patient and don't expect any change to occur overnight.

If you are interested in developing the skill of critical thinking, then you need to understand the different changes that one needs to go through in this process.

Stage 1: You are still unaware of the significant problems or pitfalls in your thinking. You aren't a reflective thinker. Most of us are stuck in this stage.

Stage2: You start developing awareness of the problems in your thinking.

Stage 3: You try working on yourself but not regularly.

Stage 4: You realize the need for regular practice.

Stage 5: You start noticing a change in the way you think.

Stage 6: You develop the ability to become insightful in your thinking.

You can progress through these stages by accepting the fact that there are specific problems in the way you think and you start putting in conscious effort to improve yourself.

In this chapter, you will learn about the nine simple strategies that you can follow for developing yourself as a thinker.

Making use of “wasted” time

All human beings tend to waste time; That is, we fail to make productive use

of all the time we have at our disposal. Sometimes we flit from one form of diversion to another, without actually enjoying any of them. At times we get irritated about matters that are clearly beyond our control. At times, we don't plan well, and this causes a butterfly effect of negative consequences that could all have been easily avoided by simple planning. How many times have you been stuck in the rush hour traffic when you could have easily avoided this by leaving an hour earlier? Apart from all the time that we waste doing nothing, we start worrying about unnecessary things. Sometimes we regret the way we functioned in the past, or we just end up daydreaming about "what could have been" and "what can be," instead of putting in some effort to achieve results. Well, you need to realize that there is no way in which you can get all the lost time again. Instead, try focusing on all the time that you have at your disposal now. One way in which you can develop the habit of critical thinking is to make use of the time that would have normally been "wasted." Instead of spending an hour in front of the TV flipping through channels and getting bored, you can make use of this time or at least a part of it for reflecting on the day you had, the tasks you accomplished, and all that you need to achieve. Spend this time to contemplate your productivity. Here are a couple of questions that you can ask yourself:

When did I do my worst and best thinking today? What was it that I was thinking about all day long? Did I manage to come to a logical conclusion or was it all in vain? Did I indulge in any negative thinking? Did the negative thoughts just create a lot of unnecessary frustration? If I could repeat this day all over again, what would I change? Did I do something that will help me in achieving my goals? Did I accomplish anything that's worth remembering?

Spend some time answering these questions and record your observations. Over a period of time, you will notice that you have a specific pattern of thinking.

One problem per day

Every morning, you should select one problem that you would like to work on during your spare time. Identify the different elements it is made up of for figuring out a logical solution to it. To put it simply, you should go through the following questions in a systematic order: What is the real problem? How does this problem obstruct my goals, purposes and needs in general? Here are the steps that will help you with problem solving.

Whenever it is possible, try tackling problems one by one. State the problem as precisely and as clearly as you possibly can. Then study the problem to understand its nature. For instance, you will need to figure out the kind of problems that you can solve. Differentiate between those problems that you have control over and those that you don't. Learn to set aside those problems that you have no control over. Think of the information that you will need and actively start looking for the same. Analyze and interpret the information you gather and draw reasonable conclusions from it. Think of the different options you have - long-term and short-term solutions. Once you know the options that are available, the next step is to evaluate all the pros and cons each of these options offer. Select an approach and follow it. Once you have implemented your plan of action, you should monitor the implications of the same. Depending on how the plan functions, make changes as need be.

Internalizing intellectual standards

Universal intellectual standards include clarity, precision, accuracy, relevance, depth, breadth, logic and significance. Every week, select any one of these standards and try to increase your awareness of the same. For instance, you can focus on clarity for a week, then shift towards precision, and so on. If you are focusing on clarity, observe the way you communicate with others and see for yourself if you are clear or not. Also, notice when others aren't being clear in what they are saying. Whenever you are reading, see if you are clear about the content you have been reading. While expressing yourself orally or while writing your thoughts down, check for yourself if there is some clarity in what you are trying to convey. There are four simple things that you can make use of to test whether you have some clarity or not. You have to explicitly state what you are trying to say, elaborate on it, give examples for facilitating better understanding and make use of analogies as well. So, you are supposed to state, then elaborate, illustrate and lastly exemplify yourself.

Maintain an intellectual journal

Start maintaining an intellectual journal where you record specific information on a weekly basis. Here is the basic format that you should follow. The first step is to list down the situation that was or is significant to you, emotionally. It should be something that you care about and you need to focus on one situation. After this, record your response to that situation. Try

being as specific and accurate as you can. Once you have done this, then you need to analyze the situation and your reaction and analyze what you have written. The final step is to assess what you have been through. Assess the implications - what have you learned about yourself? And if given a chance, what would you do differently in that situation?

Reshaping your character

Select an intellectual trait like perseverance, empathy, independence, courage, humility and so on. Once you have selected a feature, try to focus on it for an entire month and cultivate it in yourself. If the trait you have opted for is humility, then start noticing whenever you admit that you are wrong. Notice if you refuse to admit this, even if the evidence points out that you are wrong. Notice when you start becoming defensive when someone tries to point out your mistake or make any corrections to your work. Observe when your arrogance is preventing you from learning something new. Whenever you notice yourself indulging in any form of negative behavior or thinking, squash such thoughts. Start reshaping your character and start incorporating desirable behavioral traits while giving up on the negative ones. You are your worst enemy, and you can prevent your growth unknowingly. So, learn to let go of all things negative.

Dealing with your egocentrism

Human beings are inherently egocentric. While thinking about something, we tend to favor ourselves before anyone else subconsciously. Yes, we are biased towards ourselves. In fact, you can notice your egocentric behavior on a daily basis by thinking about the following questions:

What are the circumstances under which you would favor yourself? Do I become irritable or cranky over small things? Did I do or say something that is “irrational” for merely getting my way? Did I try to impose my opinion on others? Did I ever fail to speak my mind about something I feel strongly about and then regret not doing it later on? Once you have identified the egocentric traits, you can start actively working on rationalizing yourself. Whenever you feel like you are egocentric, think what a rational person would say or do in a similar situation and the way in which that compares to what you are doing.

Redefining the way in which you see things

The world that we live in is social as well as private, and every situation is “defined.” The manner in which a situation is defined not only determines how you feel, but the way you act, and its implications. However, every situation can be described in multiple ways. This means that you have the power to make yourself happy and your life more fulfilling. This means that all those situations to which you attach a negative meaning can be transformed into something favorable if you want to. This strategy is about finding something positive in everything that you would have considered to be negative. Try to see the silver lining in every aspect of your life. It is all about perspectives and perceptions. If you think that something is positive, then you will feel good about it, and if you think it’s negative, then you will naturally harbor negative feelings towards it.

Get in touch with your emotions

Whenever you start feeling some negative emotion, ask yourself the following:

What line of thinking has led to this emotion? For instance, if you are angry, then ask yourself, what were you thinking about that has caused the anger you are feeling? What are the other ways in which I can view this situation? Every situation seems different depending on your perspective. A negative aspect makes everything seem dull and bleak, and on the other hand, a positive outlook does brighten things up. Whenever you feel a negative emotion creeping up, try to see some humor in it or rationalize it. Concentrate on the thought process that produced the negative emotion, and you can find a solution to your problem.

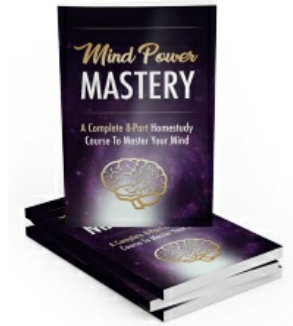
Analyzing the influence of a group on your life

Carefully observe the way your behavior is influenced by the group you are in. For instance, any group would have specific unwritten rules of conduct that all the members follow. There will be some form of conformity that will be enforced. Check for yourself how much this influences you and the manner in which it impacts you. Check if you are bowing too much to the pressure that is being exerted and if you are doing something just because others expect it of you.

You don't have to start practicing all the steps at once. Start out slowly and try following as many as you can. Initially, you will need to put in the conscious effort for critical thinking and, over a period, these skills will come naturally to you.

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Chapter 3: Better Decision Making

Do you think you are a decisive person? Well, if you say yes immediately, then you are. However, if your answer is “I don’t know,” then you probably aren’t. Not many people fall into the former category. There are some who are better at decision making than others. Then there are some who can make the RIGHT decision easily when compared to others, and then there are those who need a little help in this department. Regardless of the category that you fall into, decision-making is a skill that comes in handy in every aspect of life. Being able to make right decisions is crucial if you want to succeed in life. Being able to make decisions quickly is equally important. We always have different options and knowing how to select one can have a severe impact on your life. In this chapter, you will learn about the six various steps that you can make use of for making better decisions.

Don’t try to be a perfectionist

Stop trying to be a perfectionist. There is nothing wrong with wanting to do your best. However, you need to know when it is the right time to stop. It doesn’t mean that you should settle for less if it isn’t the best. It simply means that you should set criteria and stick to it. A perfectionist always thinks, “Maybe I can do better than this” and keeps gathering information instead of acting. There will always be a different way in which you can improve upon your action. However, you will never know if you don’t try. A perfectionist hesitates while taking the first step and this can be a significant deterrent when it comes to decision-making. A perfectionist always believes that there are only two possible outcomes in any given situation, either success or failure. This isn’t how the world works. It is great that you want to be good at something, but it is equally important to understand where to draw the line as well. Don’t think that a task isn’t completed just because it isn’t perfect. Also, this mentality can prevent you from starting something. Not just starting, but even finishing it as well. Instead of chasing perfection, you should focus on being better and completing the task.

Start thinking like Franklin

Franklin used to make use of a method he referred to as moral algebra, whenever he had to make a decision. This is a very simple yet useful

technique that can help you in making decisions. Take a piece of paper and fold it in half. On one half of it, list down the pros and on the other, write down the cons. Think about it for a while and then start listing down these things. Once you have listed everything out, strike off a pro and con that are of equal weightage. In the end, whatever is left will help you to find a solution and assist you in making a decision.

Listen to your gut

We all have an inner voice that tries helping us in deciding what is right and wrong. However, more often than not, we tend to ignore this inner voice. We ignore it so much that it starts becoming feeble. We are all born with an instinctual compass that can help us determine what the best course of action is for us. This compass is your conscience. Whenever you think you are doing something wrong, don't you feel a sinking sensation in your gut that tells you that something is amiss? Learn to listen to your gut. If you have a bad feeling about something, then it probably is bad. Your intuition can guide you through a difficult decision; just learn to listen to it. In our process of growing up, we often tend to ignore our intuition because of what others say and do.

Understanding cognitive bias

Perhaps one of the most clichéd questions that a therapist will ask their patient is “tell me more about your childhood.” Human beings collect their experiences. Depending on whether a particular incident or situation is positive or negative, our minds start creating biases. For instance, if you were ever mugged on a specific street, it is very likely that you will try to avoid that street in the future. Or perhaps you were in a relationship with an unfaithful partner and this will create trust issues and will make you question how faithful any potential partner is. These are instances of negative cognitive bias that your brain develops. Such biases can have a lasting impact on your ability to decide. In the same sense, your brain can favor certain things just because of the positive experience you might have had while growing up. Bias can impair your sense of decision-making and prevent you from thinking rationally.

Choosing your timing wisely

You should be mindful of the time when you are deciding as well. For instance, it isn't advisable that you make a big decision after an argument with your partner. This is bound to affect your ability to think clearly, and you will end up doing something impulsively. We often tend to make decisions when we aren't in the right frame of mind. When you are feeling angry, it is likely that you will end up doing something rashly without thinking things through and without thinking about the repercussions of your actions. Always make decisions when your mind isn't foggy. However, spending too much time thinking or overanalyzing is a dangerous thing as well. When in a bad mood, don't make a quick decision. Sleep on it or spend some time to think it through.

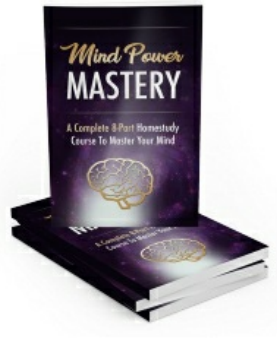
Decide on things that are important

Regardless of your age or profession, you will be faced with numerous decisions every day. However, not every decision needs to be given the same weight. For instance, having to decide the theme for a project needs to be given more weight than the choosing what you should have for your next meal. Learn to differentiate between the decisions that are important and the ones that aren't. You obviously shouldn't spend the same amount of time trying to research about a particular lawn fertilizer when compared to learning about a specific health condition. Learn to prioritize your tasks and spend more time while deciding something of significance. When you learn to prioritize your ability to make decisions, you can divert most of your energy towards things that are worth something.

There are some who are naturally good decision makers, some who like surrounding themselves with good decision makers, and others who aren't that good at it. Well, like any other skill, even this can be acquired and developed. Follow the simple strategies mentioned in this chapter for making better decisions.

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Chapter 4: Skills for Critical Thinking

Has anyone ever told you that critical thinking skills are essential to create a successful career for yourself? It is very likely that you will have heard this before. But do you know anything about the skills that you should develop to do this? If you start looking for critical thinking skills online, you will find more than a million results that provide different information. Well, that's not helpful, is it? You don't have to worry about that anymore. In this chapter, you will learn about the six actionable steps that you can take for developing your critical thinking skills.

Interpretation

This not only includes the ability to understand the information that you have been presented with but also includes your ability to be able to communicate its meaning to others. You will find yourself in different situations where you will need to make use of this critical skill. Interpretational skills will help you in getting a better understanding of the information that you have been presented with, and it also helps in decoding the same. Doing this will provide you some clarity.

Application exercise: Make a list of 10 facial expressions that can be equated to different emotions. For instance, a smile means happiness; a frown can mean confusion and so on. Try analyzing the different emotions you can gauge by looking at someone else's expressions.

Analysis

Being able to connect the different pieces of information that you have been provided with and determining the intended meaning of the same is known as analysis. This skill lends its user the ability to read between the lines and will help you in understanding the actual meaning of something. Analysis is an easy skill to acquire, but it does take a while to master.

Application exercise: If you are interested in starting to practice this skill, then try to understand the meaning of this Chinese proverb "Be the first to the field and the last to the couch." Did you understand what this proverb is trying to convey? We will obviously all have a different interpretation, but this proverb is essentially talking about hard work.

Inference

The ability to conclude by understanding and recognizing the different elements that you are presented with is known as inference. Well, most people tend to jump to a conclusion without taking into consideration all the information that is available. Doing this will lead to faulty assumptions and, in turn, it can affect your ability to take decisions. Think of a scenario where you are the business manager, and you are looking at the sales forecast. You notice that the sales have dropped. It is essential that you can take into consideration other additional information to determine the exact reason for the decrease in sales. There can be internal and external issues that led to the decline in the sales.

Application exercise: Select a crime show and watch one episode per week. Notice and observe the different clues that they drop and see if you can figure out on your own who the culprit is, before the end of the show. This will help you with your inferential skills.

Evaluation

This refers to the skill of being able to evaluate the credibility of a statement or the information that you have been presented. This skill comes in handy when you have measured the validity of the information on hand.

Application exercise: There is a very easy way in which you can hone this skill. Just open your laptop and search for tests for evaluation skills and voila! You will have plenty of tests to choose from, and this will help you in developing your evaluation skills.

Explanation

Explanation is the skill of being able to restate the information in such a way that it adds clarity and perspective to it. This is needed so that such information can be adequately understood. For instance, think of a scenario where you have to give two presentations about a new product idea - one for the board of directors of the company and other to the product engineers. Both the parties will be keen on listening to what you have to say. However, the way you present the information before these two groups will be significantly different. The board will probably be interested in only the high-level idea whereas the team of product engineers will be interested in learning

about the specific details of the product. Your ability to explain your idea while taking into consideration the audience you are presenting to is quintessential to make sure that the information is not just well received but is understood as well.

A really simple way in which you can hone this skill is by explaining a rather complicated concept to two different people. You can use your kids and your spouse for this. The way you explain a particular concept to your spouse will be different from the way in which you will explain it to your children. The goal is quite simple - the audience should understand what you are saying.

Self-regulation

This refers to having an awareness of your thinking process and the elements that you make use of for finding the results that you did. Well, think of a scenario where you are on a call with a customer and are trying to help the customer fix a problem with the company's software that they are using. Also, this is your first week at the job. The problem that you are trying to rectify is a difficult one, but you want to assist the customer in making a good impression. Well, the ideal thing to do is to transfer that call to a co-worker with prior experience in the same, and this will help the customer obtain the best results. This is about learning to differentiate between your personal biases while making a decision related to your work. Don't let your self-interests hinder your ability to decide what is best for your work.

Well, these skills can be cultivated quite easily, but if you want to master them, then you will need to put in considerable time and effort for doing the same.

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Chapter 5: Problem Solving Technique

In this chapter, you will learn about the seven-step problem-solving technique that you can make use of in your personal and your professional lives for diffusing any problem or hurdle that you come across. Have you ever been in a situation where you thought to yourself “I wish I didn’t jump to that conclusion so quickly,” “maybe I didn’t solve the right problem,” “perhaps I acted too quickly without all the necessary information,” or something along the same lines? Well, we all have come across such situations. And therefore, it is essential to understand how to solve a problem.

Finding the right problem to solve

Well, does it seem surprising that we are starting with this step? This is a simple, yet a crucial step. Think about all the time, energy and resources that we end up dedicating towards problems that don’t necessarily need all that attention. Ask yourself a simple question “Is this the right problem to solve?” More often than not, the usual approach towards solving a problem happens to be reactive. We wait for a problem to arise before thinking of a solution. The first step towards practical problem solving is that you should start being proactive. Find a problem and address it before it can ever arise. Look at all the likely issues that might come up and go about fixing them one after the other.

Defining the problem

This might seem like a very simple thing to do. But like the previous step, this is very important, and you shouldn’t skip it. This is, in fact, the key to solving problems efficiently. By combining problems that are valuable to solve and then defining what you are trying to solve, will dramatically help in improving your problem-solving efficiency. Attitude is the key to determining a problem. Try to look for an opportunity in every hurdle you are faced with. Look for the silver lining. This is very important, and it helps you in defining the problem in such a manner that it will help you in focusing on the potential that’s available in every situation you come across. Start starving your problems and start feeding all the opportunities you have. Well, you might not see it right away, but every problem is a learning opportunity. When you stop thinking of a problem as an obstacle and instead view it as an

opportunity, you will be able to deal with it effectively. So, try framing your problem with a positive attitude, and it will not seem dreadful anymore.

Analyzing the problem

Analysis comprises of the process of discovering facts and finding out all the relevant information about the situation that you are in. You can even make a checklist of different bits of information that you will require and then go about collecting the same. You will need to dig deep and try to analyze what the problem is and isn't. A critical aspect of this step is to make sure that you involve the right people. You can make use of these three simple questions while selecting the people who can be brought on board for helping you solve the problem.

- Who knows? Who are all the people who know about the situation and have information or something of value to contribute?
- Who cares? Who are all those who would care if something is being done to rectify the problem on hand?
- Who can? Who can help you in finding a solution?

These questions are quite fundamental and can come in handy when you are trying to identify all those who can help you in solving a problem. Analysis often needs a detailed examination of a given situation, and this step shouldn't be skipped at any cost. If you don't analyze a situation thoroughly, you never know what it is and what it isn't. When you don't have this basic information, it does become quite difficult to think of an ideal solution.

Developing possibilities

Once you have understood the problem that has to be solved, the next step is to take some time and come up with creative solutions for the problem. It is essential not just to acknowledge the ideas that you come up with, but also the ideas that others put forward. You cannot be a good leader if you don't listen to what others also have to say. You will first need to find the right problem to solve and then think of all the opportunities that such a problem can create. But how exactly will you be able to focus on these opportunities? There will be more than one solution for solving a problem. The idea of this step is to get you to brainstorm on your own or with others to come up with different possibilities. There will always be plenty of alternatives to choose from. It is an important skill to understand the various alternatives that are at

your disposal.

Selecting the best solution

The next step is to find the best solution for the problem on hand. Now that you have multiple alternatives to choose from, you need to pick one solution and get started with it. It might seem slightly overwhelming when you have different options to choose from, and that's why you need to think about this step carefully. There will be various pros and cons of selecting a particular method. There will be specific constraints that you should take into consideration, and all the likely solutions should be thoroughly evaluated. There are three simple steps that you can follow while selecting a solution.

The first step is to gauge the operational validity it offers. Are you capable of acting on this idea or is it just something that you talk about? Will you be able to do something immediately for bringing in the future you truly desire? Can this solution be implemented efficiently? The second step is to check its economic validity. Certain solutions are good, but then when you start looking at their economic viability, it defeats the purpose of even trying to solve the problem. The investment you are making for solving a problem shouldn't be greater than the result you are expecting. If this isn't the case, then you should certainly evaluate other solutions. The third step is to think about the personal commitment you will need to make. Do you honestly believe that this idea will work and can you vouch for its viability?

Take some time and think about these questions. All the alternatives wouldn't answer all the three questions. If you find a solution that answers the three questions positively, then you have your final solution that needs to be implemented.

Start implementing

This is the most crucial step. If you don't execute an idea, then there is no point in even thinking about solving a problem. However, before you implement a particular idea, make sure that you have carefully defined the problem and the outcome you desire, the problem has been thoroughly analyzed, all the information that you will need is at your disposal, and you have indeed opted for the best course of action that's available to you. If the idea you have zeroed in on doesn't answer any of the above points in the affirmative, then retrace your steps and make the necessary changes.

Evaluate and learn

When you are done executing all the steps mentioned above, you will need to evaluate the work that's been done. Check if the desired results have been achieved. If not, then check what went wrong. Make a list of all the things that you can improve on the next time around. Every opportunity to solve a problem will teach you something. Be open to learning and evaluate it all yourself.

Make use of these simple steps for solving all the problems that you will come across.

Chapter 6: Setting Goals

Well, who doesn't want to live his or her best life? The thing that you should focus on is what "best" means to you and how you plan on achieving it. If you have ever watched the Oprah Winfrey show, then you would have heard her talking about the "best life" all the time. However, what is the first step in this process? It is essential that you realize that there is a process and the goal setting is just a part of it. For instance, you have put in considerable time and effort for figuring out your ideal goal, but then your attitude towards everything, in general, is negative, achieving your goal would be quite difficult. It isn't just about what we know, but it is also about what we practice.

Keep a simple thing in mind before learning about setting goals: Do not worry for even a minute if your objective seems irrational to others. It doesn't matter. Well, if it doesn't scare you a little, it isn't worth doing. Also, the crazy ideas are the ones that can revolutionize the world. Here are certain things that you should keep in mind while setting goals for yourself.

Always start with the ideal situation

Here's your chance to dream. Imagine that you have a blank slate and you get to decide who you can be what you want to do. Don't worry about the obstacles immediately, just start with your dreams. There may be various things that you want to do in your life. Start with the possibilities and then you can move onto the practicality of your idea. Yes, don't worry about the bills, the mortgages, or other burdens while dreaming. Think about the ideal version of "you" and then you will have to think of how you can make it a reality.

Always write down your goals

When you start writing down your goals, you will start seeing the direction you want to head in, and this makes the process of decision making quite simple. This might sound old school, but writing down your goals is very helpful. People usually like keeping everything in their brain instead of writing it down. When you write something down, it provides a sense of clarity. Once you have written your goal or goals down, you should place that paper in a place where you will see it daily. Place a copy of it in your

refrigerator or the mirror. This will act as a reminder and will encourage you to think about your goal. This form of repeated exposure helps in focusing your conscious and subconscious mind on what you want to achieve.

Determine its importance

You need to be clear when it comes to setting your goals. Why is the goal essential for you? Is it important because your family wants you to do it or because you want to? Your goals shouldn't be the "should be" ones. Well, there are plenty of things that you "should be" doing according to others and the society that we live in. Instead, think about the things that you want to do. For instance, your goal is to lose weight. Now, why is this important for you? Will you take the necessary steps and make the sacrifices required to attain this goal? We often have to make difficult choices while setting goals. That is a part of the process. So, you will need to prioritize.

The primary question that you should be able to answer is whether you will feel a sense of achievement when you achieve the goal or not. For instance, you might have the goal to become the best business in your niche market. But if you want to stay connected to your child and coach your child's softball team, achieving your business goal might or might not leave you feeling satisfied. Yes, you do have to consider such questions, even if they seem tough. So, sit down and start brainstorming for ideas. Don't worry about what you are writing; just write everything down that pops into your mind. Here are a couple of questions that you can ask yourself for figuring out what matters the most to you.

What would I do if I only have six months left to live? What would I do if I never had to worry about my finances? What would I do if I knew that I would never fail?

Once you have answered these questions, sleep on it for 24 hours. Come back after a day and see how you feel about the things that you have written down. Whatever still makes sense to you should be left as it is and now you have a goal to work towards.

Your goals should add some meaning to your life

Your goals should never be vague. A vague goal can derail you faster than anything else. If you want to become a better basketball player, exercise

frequently, or become a better leader, then your goal needs to be certain. Announce your goal and be honest with yourself about whether it lends a sense of clarity or not. Once your goal is clear, then you need to make sure that it is something that you care about and not what others around you care about. Many goals might seem specific, but they, in fact, are quite vague. For instance, a goal that says make getting in shape doesn't make specific if you want to lower your cholesterol levels, reduce weight, improve your stamina, or run a marathon. Getting in shape is vague. Instead, a goal that says, "I want to lose 15 pounds in 3 months" is a specific goal. Building business is an example of a vague goal along with spending more time with friends. The more uncertain your goal sounds, the more likely it is that you will abandon it. A specific goal will provide you with a sense of purpose.

Prioritize and pursue your goal

It is very likely that you will have plenty of important things in your life. So, make a list of all your goals and then select the three most important goals from that list. These three would make up your tier-one goals: the ones that have the potential of altering your life drastically. They aren't necessarily the goals that will help you in minting money or earn you fame, but they are the goals that will lend some meaning to your life. These goals can be big or small and could be something like changing your profession, completing your college, or paying off your student loans. The only condition is that the goals mentioned in tier-one should be of some significance to you.

Setting a target date

This is one of the toughest steps, but you need to do it. Listing down a specific goal is just one step, but that doesn't mean anything if you don't create a deadline for yourself. For instance, a goal that says, "I want to lose 15 pounds" is a specific goal but something that says, "I want to lose 15 pounds within three months" makes your goal seem actionable. It gives you a target to work with. When you don't set a deadline for yourself, it is very likely that you will end up procrastinating. Procrastinating is a fundamental human tendency and, without a target, you wouldn't achieve your target. And not just that, having a target also allows you to measure your progress and adjust the pace at which you are going.

Taking small steps

You don't need to do everything at once. Take it slow and steady. Once you have managed to finalize on a goal that is not just important to you, but excites you as well, the next step is to start taking small steps that will help you in achieving your goal. Stay away from all the strategies that advocate "all-or-nothing." For instance, you want to start your own business, then a simple step that you can take is registering your domain name or even ordering business cards. One small step a day can help you in achieving excellent results. Achieving your goals is a process and not magic, so it does take a while.

You can create a one-step-a-day rule for yourself. This means that every day you will be doing something, regardless of how small or significant it is, that will help you in achieving your goals. However, give yourself a couple of "off days" as well. There are bound to be some days on which you haven't managed to do anything, or you honestly didn't have the time to do anything. It is okay and don't be too hard on yourself. Every day offers you a new opportunity and go ahead and grab it.

Less is more

The more goals that you have, the less time and energy you will have at your disposal for each one. So, it would be wise to limit the number of goals that you have set for yourself. One single goal would be great because it means that you will be able to dedicate all your time, energy, and focus towards that one goal. Every aspect of your life like health, career, education and so on can be goal oriented, but you will indeed be spreading yourself to think if you try this approach. Try working on one goal before moving on to the next one. This is the best way in which you can achieve success.

Make a to-do list

Making a to-do list is quite helpful. Take a sheet of paper and list down all the things that you have to do on that particular day. You can either do this as soon as you wake up in the morning, or you can make your to-do list on the previous night before going to bed. So, when you wake up in the morning, you will have a sense of direction, and you will know what needs to be accomplished by the end of the day. A to-do list also helps in relieving your

anxiety about a particular task. A to-do list is convenient, and it will help in making sure that you don't forget anything. For instance, if you have got to spend about three hours attending meetings and have got eight hours of work after that, then it is unlikely that you will be able to get everything done. A to-do list will merely tell you the number of things you will need to get done, but it won't tell you the number of hours you have got for completing these tasks. If you want your to-do list to be of some value, then you will need to make sure that you have allocated your time for different things. When you have assigned your time for various tasks, then you will realize the tasks that are feasible and the ones that aren't. By doing this, you will be able to prioritize your day and get started with the tasks that are a priority and leave the rest for later. Setting goals will not do you any good if you don't monitor your progress. Keep an eye on your performance and see what you have done so far in the day. If you feel that you are lagging behind, then you can tweak your goals in such a way that you will be able to get done with your work.

Option to go public or staying private

Well, do you want to tell others about the goals you have set for yourself? The answer to this question depends on whether the added pressure will help you or just hinder your progress. When you start telling others about your goals, you start making yourself accountable to others, and this can help you in achieving your goals. But it certainly doesn't make the process more enjoyable. If you like working on your own and you like keeping things to yourself, then you don't have to announce your goals to the rest of the world.

Plan of action

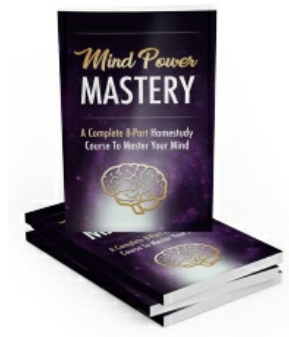
Once you have decided the goal for yourself, you will need a plan of action that will help you in achieving that goal. A goal without a plan of action will not get you too far. It is all well and good that you have set a goal for yourself, but what good is that goal, if you don't know how to achieve it? You don't need to know all the steps beforehand. But you certainly should know the step that you should be taking at present to bring yourself a bit closer to your goal. Spend some time and create a plan of action for yourself. Learn to plan your day so that you are making the most efficient use of the time that's available to you.

Adjust and adapt

You can indeed have a specific goal for yourself, and you would have created a strategy for yourself that will allow you to achieve the goal you want. Well, your approach should allow for changes and adjustments. At times you will have to re-evaluate plans, re-trace your steps, and overcome certain obstacles that you couldn't foresee. All these things will take up extra time and might delay the attainment of your goals. So, leave some space in your plans for adjustments and adaptations.

Make use of the different steps mentioned in this chapter for achieving your goals! When you are setting goals for yourself, make sure that the goals are realistic and attainable. You will be setting yourself up for failure if you set unrealistic goals. This will increase the negative feelings, and you will ultimately succumb to procrastination.

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Conclusion

I would like to thank you for purchasing this book.

By now you will have realized the importance of critical thinking. This skill comes in handy not just in your professional life, but your personal life as well. Critical thinking promotes better decision making, and by making use of the strategies for better decision making that have been provided in this book, you will be able to take right decisions quickly. Goals are incredibly necessary if you want to achieve success. Simple strategies have been listed in this book that will help you in setting goals for yourself. By following the simple advice that's been provided in this book, you can see a positive change in your productivity and efficiency. You will need to make some conscious effort to start making use of the various strategies mentioned in this book, and you will be able to see a positive change in your ability to make decisions.

All the best!

I need your help.....



Thank you for purchasing and reading this book, I sincerely hope that you find value in the techniques and implement them into your life.

I created this book to help people start the journey of self-development and improving their critical thinking skills.

If you did find value in the book please take a minute to review the book and give your feedback as to what was good about and where it could improve.

This will help me in 2 ways:

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