

## ON CRITICAL THINKING

WE HAVE REVIEWED, EVEN HAD A COUPLE OF LAUGHS, THE SUBJECT OF CRITICAL THINKING.

- But what is “critical thinking”?
- What’s the sine qua non of critical thinking?
- What is it that’s indispensable to critical thinking?

CRITICAL THINKING IS BASED ON *QUESTIONING* MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE—BUT WHY?

- Because the right answers change from day to day and year to year.
- But the right questions produce useful answers for any time.
- What kinds of questions?
  1. What’s the larger context of the situation I’m confronting?
  2. What are the competing forces that are driving the situation?
  3. What are the various interests in the outcomes of the situation?
  4. What’s my overall objective in dealing with the situation?
  5. What specific part of the situation is my primary concern?
- How do you generate analytical questions?
  1. Doing research on the situation
  2. Talking with colleagues about the situation
  3. Examining the experiences of people caught up in the situation

WHAT, AS A PRACTICAL MATTER, IS AN EXAMPLE OF “CRITICAL THINKING”?

- To some extent, critical thinking involves a dialogue in our heads by which we review a series of questioning-steps:
  1. *Mentally clarifying the specific subject*—for example, high school dropouts;
  2. *Breaking the subject down* into its discrete parts based on what you know about it—differential drop-out rates by grade, socio-economic level, location of school, etc.;
  3. *Generating questions about each discrete aspect* of the subject—for example, why are dropout rates lower in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade than they are in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade?
  4. *Attempting to answer your own questions*, based on your personal knowledge or from academic and professional sources—for example, maybe once students get beyond the first year of high school, they have more confidence they can complete the whole thing.

WHAT’S THE TAKE-AWAY FROM ALL THIS:

- Your first instinct in challenging situations should *not* be to think about the best *answers*.
- Your first instinct should be to think about the best *questions*!