Critical Thinking Skills

for the
HR Professional

Presented with pleasure by
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“Fortune favors the prepared mind.”
- Louis Pasteur

Why does this matter?

“More and more, employees are hired, and paid, for the thinking they do rather than the labors they perform.”

The success of an organization is determined largely by the quality of the decisions made within it.
Why does this matter for HR?

1. adding value with the metrics we collect
2. our role in the selection of talent
3. the concepts of learning vs. training
4. we serve as a connector of disciplines
5. making good decisions is good business

About thinking...

5 ways we ‘know’:

✓ knowledge of the experts
✓ the world as a formula (all situations are linked)
✓ there are multiple realities from different ‘lenses’
✓ conflict (prosecution and the defense)
✓ unbounded (NEW) thinking
What it means:

- know what to absorb, what to ignore
- information must be gained *actively* and deliberately
- there are a lot more rocks than gems
  (all data are not information)
- not all information is useful or relevant

About *critical* thinking...

When you are not aware of your thinking you have no chance of ‘correcting’ it.

When thinking is passive, you are in no position to see any problems with it.

If you don’t see any problems with it, you won’t be motivated to change it.
So...how does one think critically? It requires:

The ability to recognize and challenge assumptions.

Stopping to consider what you take for granted.

Identifying the conclusions drawn from the assumptions.
Let’s consider an example:

The hiring manager is frustrated with the HR department.

No matter how many people he/she hires, they don’t stay long.

Why can’t they [HR] figure out how to improve their hiring process?

Assumptions made:
- the manager is necessarily equipped to recognize competency
- there is a correlation between competency and length of service
- selection processes need improvement, not management practices

Conclusions drawn:
- there is a competency deficiency
- the longer an employee stays, the more competent he/she is
- this problem lies with employee selection

SOME POINTS TO CONSIDER:
Insurance costs for the medical plan continue to increase at double-digit rates.

Leadership has directed HR to find a more financially acceptable alternative as the benefits budget can no longer accommodate the costs.

Assumptions made:
- the double-digit increase is the problem
- the current program is not acceptable
- limiting benefits cost increases this year will avert financial crisis
- examining other areas of employee-costs aren’t necessary

Conclusions drawn:
- the health plan [as a separate benefits plan equity] must be amended
- some alternate plan would be better
- reducing medical plan investments is the best choice toward controlling employee-related costs
- investing in benefits does not assist in keeping other costs down

**SOME POINTS TO CONSIDER:**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Let’s examine some ways to check for the existence of critical thinking:</th>
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</table>
| 1. What are the ‘facts’?  
  [the case of the tardy employee] |
| 2. Is there real or perceived causality?  
  [the case of the bank] |
| 3. Are words or phrases ambiguous?  
  Statistics deceptive?  
  [improved, increased] |
| 4. Is the problem statement limiting our thinking? |
| 5. Is faulty thinking cultivated? |

Because the load is so heavy, we need to find an alternate vehicle to transport it.

vs.

What options do we have to transport a heavy load?
It’s true because:

1. WE AGREE: others are correct when they agree with us and incorrect when they do not

2. WE KNOW: we assume that we have a unique insight into the truth

3. WE HAVE KNOWN: we more readily believe what coincides with beliefs we have long held

4. IT MAKES SENSE

In a small room with a locked door and a small open window there is a table, a bed, a chair and broken glass on the floor. Next to the glass, Romeo and Juliet lie dead.

How did they die?
Take the Pulse in Your Organization

1. Are leaders threatened by thinking that diverges from their own?
2. Are all informed parties involved?
3. Is short-range thinking dominant?
4. Are some [fundamental] subjects off-limits?
4. Is a quick decision better than the right one?
5. Is thinking that challenges the status-quo stifled?
Handy Dandy Tips for Being a Catalyst

- play with a new idea for a while
- pilot solutions
- host debates
- upset the time line (what if we started tomorrow?)
- don’t react by agreeing or disagreeing immediately
- pursue alternative viewpoints

Recent budget constraints have resulted in the reduction of supervisors on the 11pm-7am shift. Additionally, there has been an increase in work injury reports during that shift.

What can we do to reduce worker’s compensation claims during the overnights?

LET’S TRY ONE MORE EXAMPLE:
### SOME POINTS TO CONSIDER:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumptions made:</th>
<th>Conclusions drawn:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• the work injury claims are valid</td>
<td>• employees are getting injured at a higher rate</td>
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<tr>
<td>• there is a causal relationship between a reduction in supervision and hazardous environments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• reinstating supervisors will impact work related injuries</td>
<td>• the reduction in supervision is the only factor</td>
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<tr>
<td>• there is value evaluating the problem</td>
<td>• the ROI for investigating the problem is positive</td>
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</tbody>
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### Rule #1:
There is always a way.

### Rule #2:
There is always another way.
### References and suggested readings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Authors/Editors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Asking the Right Questions, A Guide to Critical Thinking</em></td>
<td>M. Neil Browne, Stuart M. Keeley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Unbounded Mind, Breaking the Chains of Traditional Business Thinking</em></td>
<td>Ian I. Mitroff &amp; Harold A. Linstone</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Freakonomics</em></td>
<td>Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Open Your Mind, The 7 Keys to Thinking Critically</em></td>
<td>Francesco Sofo</td>
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### Questions? Comments?

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Thank you!