

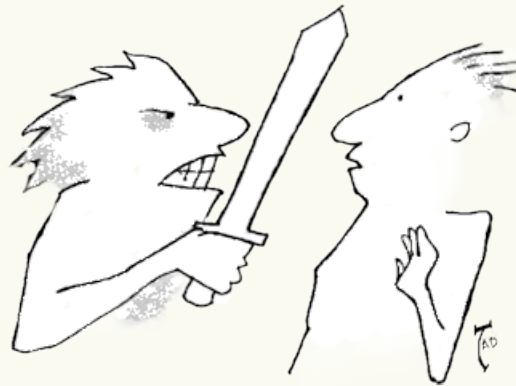
Critical Healing & Offenses

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Last week we focused on thinking critically about our own thinking. We saw how biases (five of them) and irrational assumptions can keep us narrow-minded. This kind of critical thinking helps you spot the unique sorts of blocks that prevent you from learning in certain areas.

But there's more. The more clearly you see how these blocks work in yourself, the more likely you can deal with people who offend you. These offenses may be challenges, insults, threats, or heavy demands. They may be the subtle rebuffs that push you away or belittle your contribution. They may be in-your-face pressure to say something or do something.

Our reactions to offenses like these can differ. Some people get offensive right back: "Since when do you tell me what to do?" Some get defensive: "I was just doing what I was asked to do!" Some try to please: "I'm terribly sorry. What can I do to make it up to you?" Some withdraw: "I apologize. It's won't happen again."



Who's the Victim?

All of these are "reactions"—the spontaneous way we deal with offenses. What is needed is a "response"—a thoughtful, imaginative and responsible action.

Moreover, if at all possible, a response should aim at "healing" what critical thinking reveals about your offender.

Consider, then, this thought:

Your offender is being offended.

Offended by what?

By his or her own bias or irrational assumptions.

A boss neurotically obsessed with cleanliness and order will bawl you out for your messy desk. A self-absorbed woman will mock you for your ideas and accomplishments. People with *unquestioning* loyalty to their group will trash the "other" department, company, political party, gender, age-group, faith, nationality, sexual orientation, or race. People who assume common sense is all we need will pressure to get you to act without

thinking. If you mention anything about faith, secular-minded people will mockingly dismiss your concern as sheer myth—and then change the subject. Likewise, people with irrational assumptions (Lecture 7B) will offend you despite the fact that they are driven by an assumption about life that really has nothing to do with you personally.

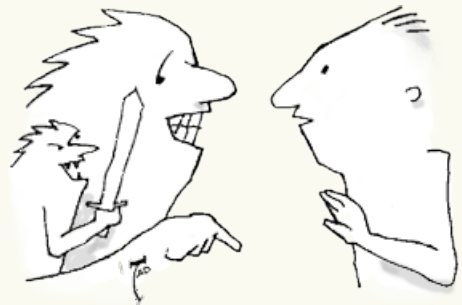
In return, you can go on the offense, or the defense, or withdraw to the sidelines. But life isn't a football game. "Critical thinking" can "reframe" the event altogether. We can say to ourselves, "This is not a battle *between* people; I'm witnessing a battle *inside* a person. My offender is the victim!" In other words, think of life as a sharing in the struggle against bias and irrationality. You are vulnerable, and so is your offender. But you are companions in the struggle.

Healing Responding

See the difference? You don't need to react at all. You can "respond." A good first response is to really listen. Hang in there with the person. Change your stance from over-against to side-by-side. Let yourself love your offender. To charge in to people's vulnerability against their will only convinces them to build stronger defenses.

"Seek first to understand" is a habit of highly effective people. If you don't understand right away what's offending your offender, give yourself the time to wonder. Move on, but

"bookmark" the event for further reflection later, when you're somewhat removed from the immediate situation. Consider what bias or irrational assumption may be victimizing your offender. Ask yourself, "Where is my offenders heart right now?"



In most cases your insight into your offender will be provisional; sometimes it will be entirely wrong. A "response" here will mean simply continuing to keep company. This delivers the strong, but nonverbal message, "I don't take your sarcasm/attacks/mockery seriously. I'm not afraid of you. I like being/working with you." I say "strong" because it plants a relevant question in the mind of your offender: "Why am I always making such nasty comments to people who care for me?" When a question like this takes root, then healing begins from within.

Exercise

It takes some "exercise" to learn this aspect of critical healing. The best exercise is quite simple. Any time you feel offended, instead of *reacting*, you can *respond* by "reframing" the experience.

- A response is thoughtful, so think to yourself, "This isn't football. I'm not playing offense. I won't play defense. And I will not slink off to the sidelines. "
- A response is imaginative, so picture the images I've provided above. Brainstorm many options.
- A response is responsible, so be prepared to care for this person if the opportunity presents itself. To be genuinely responsible is to take responsibility for healing, as far as you can.
- A response is healing, so be prepared to help heal whatever bias or irrational assumptions about life may lie behind your offenders behavior.

Later, reflect on the event with this question: "What particular bias or irrational assumption has narrowed his/her outlook? The more attuned you are to these inner events in others, the better companion you will be on this journey of the vulnerable.

- Tad Dunne, Fellow Learner, Company in our Struggle