



*Changing lives...
...one mind at a time!*

Controlling The Beast Within - Part 2

Question: How many Psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb?

Answer: Only one! However, the light bulb has to really want to change.

Author Unknown

In the first part of this two-part section, we examined how important it is to control emotions. It's possible that you ended that article thinking that being in control of your emotions might only make you a happier person, or someone who is simply easier to live with if anger, sadness, rage, love, fear don't hold sway in your life. Well, those are certainly two good reasons to be in control, but for our overall purpose of controlling what we think about and for establishing worthy goals in our lives, there is at least one more extremely important reason for controlling our emotions - for controlling the "beast" that gnaws at the door of our souls:

It is only by controlling our emotions that we can liberate our minds to perform what called critical thinking. And, it is only by being able to perform critical analysis that we can logically begin to control what we think about, to find worthy goals for ourselves, and to begin to take the actions necessary to achieve those goals. As long as we allow ourselves to be bound up in the ropes and chains of immediate and instantaneous reaction to the events of our lives, the longer it will be before we are able to lean back in the peacefulness of a moment, an hour, or a day and contemplate and plan our responses, if any, to events.

Just why would we want to control our emotions in the first place? Haven't we been told that anger can be justified? Isn't love good? First, we should make it abundantly clear that we are only writing here about responses to life's moderate and reasonable events. And we are not advocating that there is merit in being a stoic, somehow immune to any emotions. There are certainly those occasions where quick and pronounced responses are necessary. If we see someone about to be run over

by a truck, we're not going to lean back and contemplate the possible outcomes of this situation. No, we're going to scream as loudly and as quickly as we can for the individual to get out of the way. And, we're not writing here about the issues that are of true major or crises proportion and which often require professional help; issues such as terminal illness, the death of a parent or a child, destructive events like 9/11, or mass genocide that has happened in world wars or in countries like Darfur. Those kinds of events are beyond the scope of what we are trying to do here.



Courtesy: Schulzmuseum.org

The focus of this article is to help in those situations where any emotion such as anger or sadness has taken over your life to the point that you have difficulty functioning well at work or in a relationship, or are simply consumed by whatever feeling is assaulting you. Let's take a more common situation: midlife crises might make a good example. You've reached 50, or more, and you begin to feel that there is more of life behind you than there is in front of you.

Or, perhaps your supervisor has offered painful criticism of your work results, and in a weakened economy, you begin to have great fear for your job and livelihood. Is this your situation? Do you find yourself rather consumed by fear, sadness, anxiety, worry, or any other emotion that keeps you from operating at what you know is your full potential?

If you've come this far in our articles, then, like the light bulb in the joke at the introduction of this one, we will assume that you already "want" to change. But, there is little from the outside world that will be the change you are looking for. It's not in drugs, or alcohol, or fast cars, horses, or women, a new

economy, or even a new president. The change is inside of you. Maybe you've already found words earlier, either from the quotes on this website, or from some of the wonderful books and CD programs we've located for you. Or, maybe you're convinced of the need to change your thinking, but are still just a bit "stuck" and can't quite pull your mind out of the emotional mud your stuck in. However, you can see the need for doing this. Like the light bulb, you want to change.

Does that describe your situation? Then, here's one more clue that might help you finally unstick yourself and get back on the road of life: Until you free yourself from the overwhelming and smothering effect of your emotional state, you will probably not be able to see any solutions or goals, even if they are right in front of you.

Until you break free of the hold that your emotions have on you, then you will not only find it difficult – perhaps impossible – to think about the good aspects of life, but you may find that you can't even sort out the good from the bad. The love and care of friends and family may begin to look bad. Isolation, reclusiveness, agoraphobia, even suicide may begin to look like the good alternatives in life.

Here's the bottom line: Emotions shut down one's ability to perform critical thinking, and critical thinking is the only process by which one can effectively, perhaps even honestly, examine their thoughts, recognize them for what they are, accept or reject them, plan, organize, execute, monitor, and adjust.

There are seven basic steps to critical thinking or analysis that will help us control the things we think about. However, when you are buried in grief, anger, sadness, even love...the ability to perform beyond the first step is diminished, and perhaps even eliminated.

Critical Thinking:

1. Identifying the problem: As long as our emotions are in control of us, this is usually where we stay stuck. Often, we can recognize a problem: we're sad...we're angry...we're anxious. However, that's about as easy as it gets. From that point on, critical thinking is shut down completely or greatly minimized, and our ability to pull ourselves out of the situation and return to normalcy with our family, friends, and co-workers is just about nil. If you have determined by this point to control what you think about, then as mentioned in the very first article, you are going to have to decide just who is in charge of this situation; you, or your emotion. If it is you, then you are going to have to do whatever is necessary to banish the emotion, at least for a little while at a time,

so that you can move on to critical thinking skill #2, and eventually pull yourself out of this ditch.

2. Clarifying the issue: It is in this second step, the one that is almost impossible to get to as long as our emotions are in control of us, that we can begin to see the wisdom or silliness of what's going on in our heads. In order to begin clarifying the issue and deciding whether our current thoughts are worth holding on to, there are some underlying questions we can begin asking ourselves:

- How did the thoughts and feelings arise?
- How do our thoughts and feelings affect people or our environment now?
- How might it affect them in the future, if our thoughts and feelings continue?
- Does anyone benefit from the status quo, and if so, how?
- Is anyone disadvantaged by the status quo, and if so, how?

By getting our emotions under control, we can begin to hold our scary thoughts and feelings up to the clear light of day. And, by asking ourselves the clarifying questions presented here, it should be quickly, and perhaps refreshingly obvious, which thoughts are true and should be kept, and which



Courtesy: www.wileytoons.com

thoughts are patently false and should be simply eliminated and banished forever.

Clarification may show that holding on to them is simply ridiculous. They clutter our minds. They assault us. They drain us of energy. They are a cloud on our future horizons. Can you get rid of them? Can you tell them to go away? It's as simple and as difficult as that: You are in control. Once you have control of your thinking space...your wonderful brain...then you can start to move on to step three of critical thinking.

3. Developing a vision: Now, we're getting somewhere. Having spent my own substantial amount of time struggling even to get to step 1, I can tell you that there is not much that I have experienced that compares with the emptiness, tiredness, and hopelessness of losing control to emotions.

I've recently had a close relative commit what he must have thought was the ultimate "good" for himself and take his own life. Of course, there was no "good" for those of us who were left behind. He left a void for his wife and family to contend with. And, though he may be at peace now, he has left much un-peace behind him.

In gaining the ability to develop a vision, hope blossoms. The vale of despair is lifted, and it becomes apparent that there is something beyond the ditch we find ourselves in. It is in this step that we can begin to ask ourselves the questions that give us hope, make us smile again, bring back the lights to our eyes, the spring in our step, and the happiness in our voices.

The important self-assessment questions of step 3:

- What alternatives currently exist to the status quo?
- What other alternatives can we imagine?
- What benefit would any of these alternatives offer to us, our family, our friends, or even our country and world?

This is often the step of energy and invention. The "Ah-ha" moments often arrive in step #3, and if you have or are currently experiencing one of these moments, then those around you may find that they

don't even recognize this person who has arrived in their midst. It's an exhilarating step. Enjoy it.

4. Exploring possible solutions: Was it the boss's comment? If it was true, then, perhaps the solution is to work much harder to prove yourself. Was it lack of education? Was it true? Then, maybe advanced education, a new certification, or an entirely new field is what you choose. Were you fretting over lack of accomplishment? Is it true? Then, is that long-contemplated novel the answer? Or, will you create a website finally? Perhaps you'll become involved with charity work.

Whatever you choose as an alternative to the feelings that haunted you before you got to these critical thinking steps, you'll find that your energy is increased, your relationships are better, the sky seems bluer and the sun warmer. And, it's not just your imagination. By finding a better you, you will find a better world out there. And, with your new visions of a positive future, you'll begin to ask yourself questions that will lead you to the next steps:

- What changes will bring you closer to your vision of yourself? (changes in ourselves, our class, community, society)
- What actions can you take right now...today...to lead you to that change?

5. Planning the action: Here's where the fun begins...(or, returns), finally. Planning, action, organization, recording...these are just a few of the words that describe this step. From the ashes and lifelessness of before, we begin to see the building process of goal achievement. Not only do we finalize goals in this step, but we begin to put "meat on the bones" of the actions that will get us to those goals.

There is one caution here, however. It's important that we don't let the exuberance, joy, and happiness that often lives in this step to send us off in wild, unplanned directions. Like a pilot without a flight plan, we can find ourselves airborne with no place to go, maybe without even enough fuel for the trip. Without proper planning, we can find ourselves crashing in very short order. To avoid this, there are some questions that should be asked before moving to the next step:

- What do you need to help you make these changes?
- Are there any barriers to the changes you want to make? If so, what are they?
- What actions will you initiate to carry out your plan? Write them down!
- How will you record the plan and the steps you take?

6. Taking critical action: Implement your plan

7. Monitoring and reflecting on your results: A pilot records her intended flight on an aeronautical sectional map. Along the way, she makes certain to compare what she sees out of the window with what is marked on the map. It is only by doing this that she can be certain of arriving at her destination. We should do nothing less with out plan, making sure that we are on track, comparing expected results with actual results. And, this is

- What did we achieve?
- What have we learned?
- Is there anything we could have done differently?
- Are there other issues we should consider or address?

not done just at the end of the journey. If we are to achieve our goals, not only must they be clear and definite, but we must calibrate and adjust along the way, to make sure that we stay on track.

What have we learned so far?

1. We learned that we have to be in control of our minds, not the other way around.
2. We clarified that some of our thoughts might be in error. Not everything we think is necessarily true, just because we thought of it.
3. We learned that our emotions have to be kept in check and under control. We simply cannot allow ourselves to be ruled by by them. And, in this step, we have begun the process of slowing life down long enough to take our thoughts and hold them up for critical analysis.
4. It was in this 4th step that we began to build the foundation for the work that is yet to come.

What's next?

In the next step, we're going to begin to control our memory. You will notice here that I wrote, "control our memory." We're not going to be able to eliminate memories, even the dark ones. Anyone who tells you to just "fuh-getta 'bout it", doesn't understand how memory works. It's true that we are still going to remember things, some of them even painful and embarrassing. But, I have some very good news for you. With your new-found skills from this section on emotions, you are going to be able to do two things with your memory:

First: You're going to learn how to re-record what is already in your memory banks. Just like the word processor I'm using as I write this article, you're going to pull a "memory document" from storage, modify it, edit it, clean it up, and finalize it. Then, when you're satisfied with it, you're going to store it away again for later recall, if you ever need it. However, when you need it, and when you recall it from memory, it will be the corrected version, not the one you've carried around in your brain for all these years....the one filled with errors and mis-recordings.

Second: When a new memory comes along, you're going to learn how to make sure that it's edited before it is stored away. No more GIGO...garbage in/garbage out. From step 5 on, the new acronym is going to be: GSI/GSO...good stuff in/good stuff out.

In the meantime, I hope that this article, along with the previous one, have killed the beast of emotions that have haunted (and literally stalked) you. If they are not quite dead, then perhaps you have learned to build a mental cage strong enough to hold them forever. If they ever get loose again, just remember how destructive they were, and you'll put them back in their proper cages immediately.