



Thinking Critically: The Job of Leaders

Forget what you learned in high school or college about thinking and how to go about it. It won't help. At least that's scholar Author Sternberg concludes in his work, "Teaching Critical Thinking, Part 1: Are We Making Critical Mistakes?" Sternberg says there's not much that we've learned in college that transfers and applies to the context of adulthood. In a nutshell, the world of academics and the world outside it are so vastly different that former students are largely unprepared to assume their roles as decision makers and leaders in business and organizational settings.

Critical thinking is, by and large, the only way we progress, move forward, develop and improve. Whenever we refuse to accept our current state of affairs as satisfactory, believe there must be a better solution, we become critical thinkers. Stephen Brookfield, one of the foremost scholars in the field of adult learning has identified the four key components of critical thinking as:

1. Identifying and challenging assumptions. Asking questions like, *Why do we do it this way?*, and, *Can we find a better way?*, are assumption-challenging questions asked by critical thinkers.
2. Challenging the importance of context. Critical thinkers are aware that assumptions are always rooted in some contextual form, usually a specific organizational setting, and that they rarely work outside that context. Context also may be an influencer of behavior and without it, the behavior may seem absurd.

3. Imagine and explore alternatives. Since context shapes what we consider to be normal and natural, critical thinkers imagine life outside the constraints of context.
4. Develop a *reflective skepticism*. Once critical thinkers realize that context influences their current belief system, they become skeptical claims of the universal applicability of entrenched beliefs, social systems, and, expressions like, *That's the way it is and always will be*.