**Criminal Thinking**

Have you ever noticed that you don’t seem to see things the way other people do?

Have you ever found yourself getting into disagreements or arguments with parents, family members, wives or girlfriends because they disapprove of some of the things that you do?

Have others ever told you that if you don’t stop doing what you’re doing you are going to “hurt yourself or end up in jail”?

If you look back on your life there probably were warning signs that you were going to end up sitting where you are sitting today. These signs may have been obvious to others, but for some reason you ignored them. You told yourself that it wouldn’t happen to you. Sure, you saw others become addicted or get caught committing their crimes, but that’s not going to happen to you….you’re different, you’re smarter than them. You tell yourself things like “I’ll party, but I’ll control my use, I won’t let it get out of hand. You thought you were more intelligent, more clever, more careful than the others and therefore you wouldn’t get caught selling drugs or committing your crime. Then all of a sudden……”POP”, it happened, you got caught, now you sit here wondering what went wrong?

As you reflect back you can’t believe how innocently it all started. Initially being a little rebellious was exciting. It was fun cutting school and hanging out or partying on the weekends and getting “high”. Selling drugs not only got you extra money but it made you feel important. You started to feel like an adult, you were your “own man”. At this time being “an adult” or your “own man” had little to do with accepting responsibility, but really meant “you could do what you wanted to do when you wanted to do it.” At the beginning you may have had to “sneak” around a bit to keep what you were doing from your parents, but you thought you were having a great time. You started partying more and taking more chances. You were “more advanced” than other kids your age who didn’t cut school, steal or get high. What did those kids who followed all the rules know anyway, they were boring and dull. They had their own world and their own names, they were the outcast. They just didn’t know what was happening or how to enjoy life. You started becoming more intrigued with the “fast life and fast money” so you began to hang around with the older guys. This was the life for you, you enjoyed the “partying”, the getting high and the excitement associated with the things they were doing. When people started to confront you about your behaviors you would either ignore them or get angry. You started to believe that you were entitled to this exciting lifestyle. Besides how you lived your life was no one else’s business. You weren’t hurting them and if you got caught or in trouble you were willing to “pay the consequences”. Family and friends tried to warn you but you discounted them. You were convince that they were wrong or were exaggerating the problem. After all they didn’t understand what things were like “in the streets”….Everyone is dealing, stealing or getting high. For every one reason they came up with for you to change you could come up with 5 not to change. You knew there were risks but you were confident that you could avoid the pitfalls that others fell into. You were different than they were. You were not necessarily saying that you were better, but you weren’t going to do anything that would get you “jammed up”. Even now there are times when you sit down and find it hard to believe you are actually in jail.

Perhaps one of the reasons you are here is because you think differently than others. Whether you want to admit it or not CRIMINALS and ADDICTS do think differently than other human beings. This difference in thinking contributes to the way we act. If you are not happy with where your actions have gotten you (JAIL), then you need to change them. I am sure that this is not the first time that you have heard that you need to change behaviors; there may have been times in the past when you did change your behaviors only to find the old behaviors resurfacing a short time later. You may have asked yourself “why did this happen”? One possibility is that you had no real desire to change and only intended to temporarily change your behaviors to avoid immediate negative consequences. If this is true you will resume your old negative behaviors as soon as the immediate threat of these negative consequences are removed. But let’s assume you really do want to change but haven’t been able to do so. Have you ever asked yourself “Why can’t I change once and for all”? Perhaps part of the problem is that you are focusing on changing the behavior and nothing else. When this happens behavioral changes are usually temporary and of short duration. If we want to make long term changes in behavior we must first change our thinking, our attitudes, our beliefs and our values. If these things change our behaviors are sure to change. To illustrate this point think about how you make your decisions. Criminals and addicts usually don’t make their decisions based on what is “right or wrong” but rather on “what you can get away with”. How many times have you been in a situation where you know something is wrong but go ahead and do it anyway because you don’t think you will get caught? When you were deciding to “rip off a car” …what question did you ask? When you were getting ready to burglarize a house….what question did you ask? When you were out there selling drugs….what question did you ask? When you were out there stealing…what question did you ask? This is just one of the criminal thinking errors that criminal and addicts make that directly influences their behaviors. If you can identify with anything said so far, you need to take an honest look at other criminal thinking errors you make. IF YOU DON’T CHANGE YOUR THINKING, ATTITUDES, VALUES AND BELIEFS THEN YOUR BEHAVIORS WILL NOT CHANGE (and look where your behaviors have gotten you thus far).

HOW MANY OF THE FOLLOWING CRIMINAL THINKING ERRORS ARE CHARACTERSISTC OF YOU:

**ACTING LIKE A VICTIM**

We like to feel sorry for ourselves, by feeling cheated or victimized, we can blame others or circumstances for all of our problems. We blame other people, an unfair judge, the system or society in general. By doing so you can avoid accountability for your actions; you take the focus off of your own actions and put it on others. When a criminal is held accountable for his actions he portrays himself as the victim. Criminal thinkers make statements such as:

 Sure I sell drugs….how do you expect me to feed my family, there are no jobs out there. Besides everyone in my neighborhood does it. It’s the only way to survive where I come from. (VICTIM OF CIRCUMSTANCES OR ENVIRONMENT).

Yeah, I got busted for Possession With Intent to Deliver, but I’m not really a dealer. I was only doing a favor for a friend who asked me to cop for him. That judge really socked me out of the box. He gave me way too much time for this offense. You would think that I was a big time dealer the way he nailed me. (VICTIM OF OTHERS).

I’ll Admit I get high once in a while, I can’t help it, I’ve done some pretty slimy things and the guilt gets to me. (VICTM OF SELF)

THE CRIMINAL THINKER ASSUMES THE VICTIMS STANCE WHILE THE RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL EXAMINES THE ROLE HE PLAYED IN THE SITUATION AND TRIES TO IMPORVE THE WAY HE DEALS WITH SIMILAR SITUATIONS IN THE FUTURE.

A RESPONSIBLE PERSON ACCEPTS RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIS ACTIONS AND IS SELF-CRITICAL. THE CRIMINAL THINKER BLAMES OTHERS.

We all find ourselves in situations we do not have control over, it is how we deal with theses misfortunes that is important. Criminal Thinkers perceive themselves as victims, complain about the “unfairness” of the situation, wallow in self-pity and use these incidents to rationalize and justify future inappropriate behaviors. Responsible individuals find ways to cope and grow from adversity. Criminals remain the “victim of adversity”.

**SEE SELF AS POSITIVE GUY**

Criminal thinkers tend to focus on the positive things they have done and minimize or “downplay” the negative harm they have done. Criminal Thinkers make statements such as:

“I use the money I made from dealing drugs to provide for my family and kids. They didn’t want for anything.”

“I was a good father, my kids were always taken care of, I spent time with them, they are the most important thing in the world to me.” Can you be a good father if you are not with your children because you are in jail? What kind of role model are you? Did you really spend more time with them than you did in the streets or with other drug users or dealers? Did your actions indicate to them that they were the most important thing in the world to you or did your actions indicate that “getting high”, money or the “fast life” was more important to you?

**EXTREME IMPATIENCE**

“I want what want when I want it”. I have no desire to wait for any length of time for what I want…I want it and I want it NOW! If I don’t get it I get extremely angry and frequently make hasty, impulsive decisions. This need for immediate gratification drives both the ADDICTS and the CRIMINALS behavior. It is this extreme impatience and need for immediate gratification that results in drug use and offenses such as auto theft, burglary, dealing drugs, robbery, assaultive offenses etc. You need to learn to accept NO as an answer. You need to accept that you can’t always have everything you want when you want it. There are things you may have to work for and earn over a long period of time. This is called “delayed gratification.” You may find out that the harder that you work for something the more you appreciate it.

**SOLVING PROBLEMS WITHOUT REGARD FOR OTHERS**

Criminal thinkers are primarily concerned about themselves and getting their own needs met. They minimize the harm they cause others (e.g. family, wife, children, etc.). They tend to be egotistical and look out for # 1.

**TEND TO ACT ON FEELINGS**

Think about how many times acting on emotions, without considering the consequences, has gotten you in trouble. Usually when we react to feelings we act emotionally and impulsively. You need to ask yourself when do you make your best decisions, is it when your actions are determined by your emotions or your intellect?

**CLOSED THINKING**

Closed thinking is when you are not open or receptive to what others say unless it agrees with your beliefs. Basically you “tune out” what you don’t want to hear. You keep secrets about your actions and behaviors and when questioned you are reluctant to reveal all of the information. Even if you don’t “outright lie” you “lie by omission”, letting out bits and pieces of information that leads others to inaccurate conclusions. A criminal thinker’s first instinct is to quickly respond challenging the information being brought to them by rationalizing, justifying or minimizing their behaviors; by doing so they can dismiss new information. Criminal thinker must realize that “they don’t have all the answers”, for once stop and listen….***Listening is more important than speaking.*** Being unreceptive to new information keeps you from changing.

**ACT AS IF OTHER PEOPLE ARE PROPERTY**

Since our wants are our priorities…our wants should also be everyone else’s priority. IF I WANT IT I EXPECT TO GET IT. If I want to eat now I expect my wife/girlfriend to make me something now. You expect to have things your way. You expect others to stop what they are doing and help you get what you want, and if they don’t you become angry. (Drug abusers not only abuse drugs….they abuse people too.)

**EMPLOYS THE POWER GRAB**

Criminal thinkers want their needs met and have a great deal of difficulty accepting that there are some things you don’t have control over. Surrendering power or control is very difficult for you because you associate it with weakness and vulnerability. You always want to be in control and will go to whatever means necessary to gain and maintain it. You will use manipulation, deceit, anger or physical dominance to gain control. In reality this may merely be an attempt to overcompensate for underlying feelings of inadequacy or low self-worth.

**GIVING UP WHEN THINGS GET HARD**

If things become boring, difficult or we merely don’t like doing them…WE QUIT!!! We may even start looking for excuses to quit (e.g. with my criminal record I’ll never get a job etc.) We say things like I can’t when we really mean I won’t. The plain facts are that some things in life are dull and boring….Responsible people do them anyway.

**CARELESS WITH RESPONSIBILITY**

Think about how many times you have made a promise and then turned around and broke it. Criminal thinkers act like promises are made to be broken….and then frequently believe that an apology should atone for all of their wrong doings. In reality you are only interested in your own wants and needs and show little concern for others (e.g.-broken promises to family members about discontinuing drug use or criminal behaviors, slanderous statements about others and then try to clean it up with an apology, believing that saying you’re sorry should make up for all the pain and harm your behaviors have caused.) Eventually people get tired of hearing you are sorry or of all the good things that “you are going to do.” REMEMBER CHANGE IS MEASURED BY BEHAVIORS…NOT INTENTIONS.

**ONE OF A KIND THINKING**

You act like you’re “ONE OF A KIND”; you think you are different than others. The rules that apply for others don’t necessarily apply to you. You’re special and should be granted the exception. This type of thinking directly affects your behaviors.

For Example:

Sure you see others out there dealing drugs and getting arrested but that’s not going to happen to you. (Unless it was your plan to come to jail you were thinking like this.)

I know people become alcoholics, heroin addicts and crack heads, but that is them, that won’t happen to me, I’m stronger, more controlled….they are weak.

**FAILURE TO ADMIT FEARS**

You equate being afraid with being weak, and the last thing you want is to be perceived as weak. Frequently when afraid you overcompensate with a “tough guy / macho image, hoping others won’t be able to see your fear and take advantage of it. You fear being “put down” or feeling like someone else is in control. You are frequently unwilling to give up control because there is no middle ground, either you are in control or you are weak and a victim. You have learned that the “best defense is a good offense”…so whenever threatened you go on the attack. You believe that you only have two choices, be the victim or the victimizer. Since it is “survival of the fittest” you usually assume the role of the victimizer.

REMEMBER; IF YOU DON’T CHANGE YOUR THINKING, ATTITUDES, VALUES AND BELIEFS, YOUR BEHAVIORS WILL NOT SIGNIFICANTLY CHANGE. YOU ALREADY KNOW WHERE YOUR CURRENT THINKING, ATTITUDES, VALUES, BELIEFS AND BEHAVIORS HAVE GOTTEN YOU…IT’S YOUR CHOICE.

SCI-Camp Hill-1995 Bernie Comiskey