The Quality of Your Life is Determined by the Quality of Your Thinking
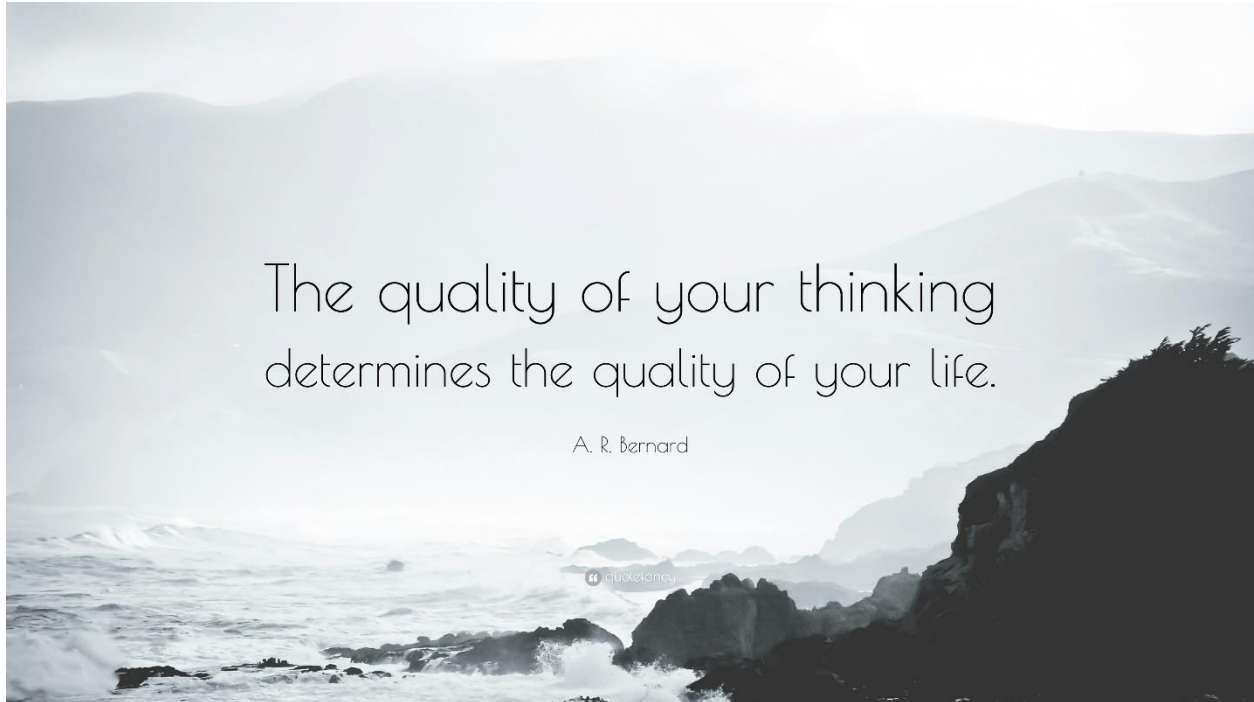

Quality of life is subjective and will have a different meaning for people at different stages of their lives. But if you are young or a millennial today, you have probably noticed that it's hard to get ahead these days.

The lack of economic opportunity that you are experiencing is most likely greater than it was for your parents. In fact, while your generation hold only 7 percent of total wealth in the US, your parents held 22 percent – three times more – when they were your age.[i]

If you are just starting out in your career or trying to advance it, you will be faced with this reality. Quite a few people of your generation find this frustrating, which is understandable. And you could spend a lot of time blaming everything else than yourself.

But why is it that some people win and get ahead every day? It really comes down to *how* you think. If you change your thinking, you can change your life for the better. All action, and thus, all change starts in the mind. And Critical Thinking is one of the most powerful skills that can make a positive impact on all areas of your life.

In one study, more than 90 percent of employers said that they value Critical Thinking over a specific degree,[ii] and while big tech companies have long stopped hiring straight A students, Elon Musk put it more bluntly: "College is basically for fun…not for learning."

The point is that you don't need college to learn as you can learn more important things outside of college or by yourself. A global study found that, while 93 percent of teachers agreed it was important to learn Critical Thinking, only 21 percent said they had the tools to teach the skill.[iii]

The problem is that many people think that they have been teaching or learning Critical Thinking, but very few people understand what it really is. This is partly because there is little agreement on what it means to think critically. But it's also because Critical Thinking is an internal process of the mind, where it's not about what you think, but *how* you think.

Some of the positive effects of Critical Thinking are:

- More creativity
- Better problem solving
- Clearer communication
- Stronger decision making
- Distinguish facts from opinion
- Prioritize important over non-important
- Recognize one's own cognitive biases
- Separate the subjective from the objective
- Evaluate information and its sources critically
- Identify and reject false ideas and conclusions

With these benefits, it is easy to understand how Critical Thinking can improve the quality of your life in many areas. From doing better in school to advancing at work, and from organizing your life to having more successful relationships, Critical thinking is one skill that can improve a multitude of areas in your life.
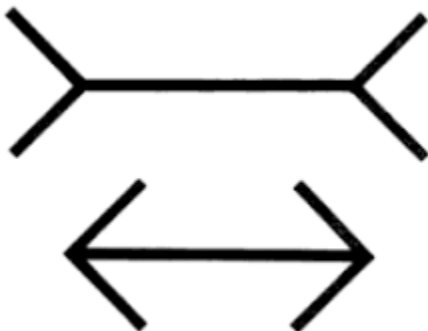
*Which line is longer? This optical illusion is an example how little we can trust our mind

But what is Critical Thinking?

Elon Musk, who is arguably one of the most successful people alive, says that it is important to reason based on first principles. In philosophy, first principles are derived from first causes and first principles thinking is about "boiling things down to the most fundamental truth and then reason up from there."

First principles thinking is closely related to Critical Thinking, which the Oxford Dictionary defines as: "the objective analysis and evaluation of an issue in order to form a judgement." Obviously, if we make bad judgements in our lives, then the quality of our lives will follow in that direction.

This is why Critical Thinking (CT) is all about *how* we form a judgment and learning to make better and more correct judgments. This is where objectivity comes in as the process or the *how* to do the analysis and evaluation that form our judgments. An objective judgment is one that is not influenced by personal feelings, opinions or biases when considering facts.

This is why objectivity starts from a point of not knowing. To be objective we need to come from a neutral starting point, whereby letting go of subjective views, we can truly be open to new information. Critical Thinking is about being humble and open to the fact that we do not know everything.

Cognitive Biases

Here it makes sense to talk about an important part of CT, which is Cognitive Biases. Bias is extremely subjective and can go into the harmful like racism. In total, over 180

Cognitive Biases have been identified and it is impossible to attempt be objective if we are not aware of at least some of our own biases.

One of the most basic and common biases is Confirmation Bias. Confirmation Bias is when you look for ways to justify your existing beliefs. Instead of being objective and keeping an open mind, we narrow our mind to focus on things that will confirm what we already believe.

An example is in politics, where we look for positive information in support of our side and negative information about the opposing side. Or if we have low self-esteem, we will conclude that someone doesn't like us if they don't reply to our text message, instead of them just being busy.

Sounds familiar? Know anyone like that? We all do and we all make this cognitive error. This is because the mind is like water and naturally looks for the path of least resistance. In other words, our minds are lazy and many of us like the easy solution or way out.

Critical Thinking takes both work and courage. Work because we need think more or harder in order to do a thorough analysis and evaluation before forming our judgements. And courage because we need to accept and be open to the possibility that we may be wrong and have error in our judgement.

In our Christian stick and carrot culture, the admission of being wrong is not easy as it sounds for all of us. Just look at the lack of honesty in the zero-sum game of politics today. But Critical Thinking is about being honest to yourself about what you know and what you don't know. And the ability to admit you are wrong goes a long way on your path to thinking critically.

Positivity or Optimism Bias is another Cognitive Bias that is very common. The above photo says it all. Obviously, positive thinking is critical to success and human nature, but it needs to be balanced with critical thinking.

Actor/Observer Bias is one that can get us into trouble at work. If you, as the Actor, are having a bad day and snap at a colleague, you will brush it off with an excuse like you didn't get enough sleep. But if you observe your boss or manager do the same, you can easily as the Observer conclude that the boss or manager is a bad person and that its harassment, etc.

This bias also extends to the relationship between colleagues and yourself. If you decide to take a sick day from work because you really need it, you can easily justify it. But if a colleague does the same, you as the Observer can easily conclude that this person is lazy and just skipping work for another reason.

Cognitive Biases can have a real and serious impact on our careers and relationships. Therefore, it is important to know what these biases are and which ones we have a habit of falling pray to ourselves.

Here are more of some of the most common Cognitive Biases:

- Confirmation Bias
- Anchoring Bias

- Hindsight Bias
- Status Quo Bias
- Halo Effect
- Negativity Bias
- Optimism Bias
- Self-Serving Bias
- Misinformation Effect
- Actor-Observer Bias
- False Consensus Effect
- Framing Bias
- Etc.

Besides a list of Cognitive Biases, you also have to deal with cultural, environmental and psychological factors. Childhood trauma will leave scars and your childhood upbringing likely a few behavioral patterns from your parents etc. Then there is the culture and environment you grew up in too. All of these will leave subjective imprints on you that you need to overcome or see through to be objective.
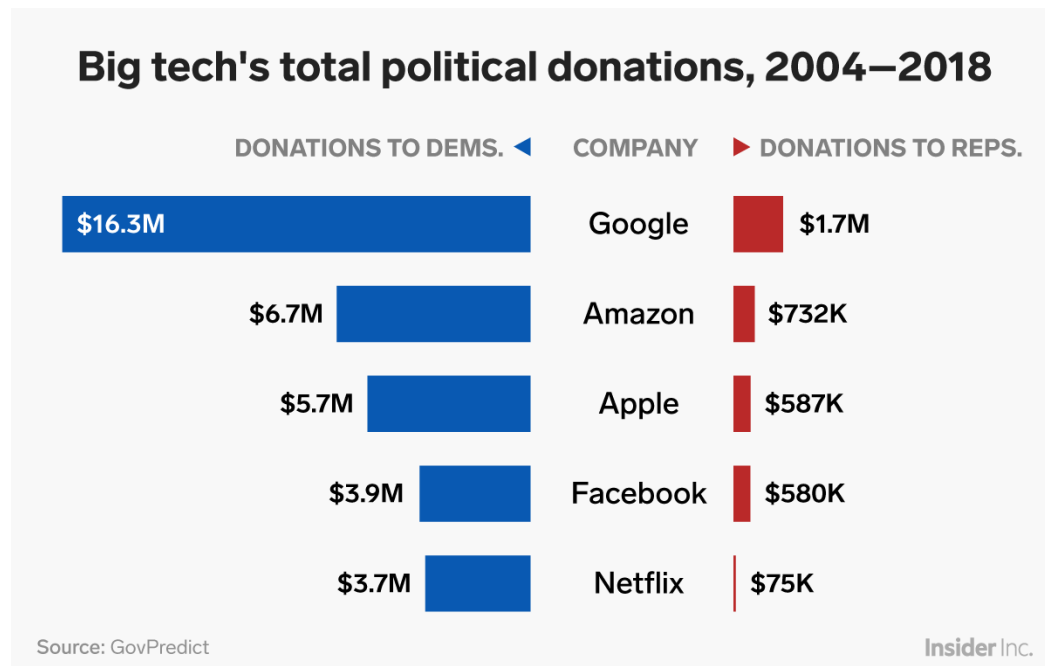

Group Think is also a Cognitive Bias and one that can have huge implications for society. The term was inspired by George Orwell's concept Doublethink from his novel

1984. Group Think happens when a group of people reach a consensus without critical thinking or evaluation of the consequences or alternatives.

The idea is that when people get together in a group, they fall prey to the pressures of conformity in order to not upset the balance of the group and that this bias overshadows their ability to think rationally and clearly.

Hitler's Nazi German is one good example of this. But others have also drawn parallels between this biased conformity and present-day political correctness. People who accept political correctness can be said to surrender their own independent thinking in order to submit to a moral decision making of the system, which is believed to manage things better than the individual.

This if of course what humanity has done with religion for thousands of years, but while in our nature, this is very far from critical thinking.

Big tech's total political donations, 2004—2018

DONATIONS TO DEMS. ◄	COMPANY	► DONATIONS TO REPS.
$16.3M	Google	$1.7M
$6.7M	Amazon	$732K
$5.7M	Apple	$587K
$3.9M	Facebook	$580K
$3.7M	Netflix	$75K

Source: GovPredict   Insider Inc.

Political donations of tech employees show up to 90% of their donations go to the Democrats. Now, that's only natural as tech employees are younger and it would be OK if they could keep their political opinions out of their jobs. But with cancel culture and as Elon Musk's takeover of Twitter has shown, we all know that control is too tempting for anyone with power.

In fact, the whole movement of cancel culture has let to self-censorship. Between 2017 and 2020, the number of people who said that they feel the pressure to self-censor rose by 12 points from 30 percent to 42 percent. And among Liberals, 50 percent support firing Trump donors, while 36 percent of Conservatives support firing Biden donors.[iv]

This is a worrying trend for a democracy, where free speech is a historically proven cornerstone. In fact, 44 percent of young Americans under 30, who have no idea why we have free speech, support firing executives if they donate to Trump. It's OK to be passionate about politics or an issue and to want change. But for a 25-year-old to go against and overrule 2500 years of democratic evolution is pure arrogance. And it is the same authoritarian mind that Putin is using in Ukraine.

So as you can see: we need Critical Thinking. And we need more people to learn to think critically before they do stupid or damaging things. We live in a nuclear age and a time with many challenges, so more ignorance does not help us solve these challenges.

Conformity and censorship is of course not what Critical Thinking is about. The father of Critical Thinking in the west, Socrates was sentenced to death for corrupting the youth by introducing new gods. Also Martin Luther went up against the dogma of the Church and later during The Enlightenment, Kant coined the rallying cry: "Dare to know!" as he challenged us to "Have the courage to use your own understanding."

Critical Thinking is very much about thinking independently and freeing our mind from the past and subjective thinking. And like Elon Musk, who uses first principles thinking to go to Mars with SpaceX, Critical thinking is a skill that can help you solve any problem and gain success in all areas of your life.

Critical Thinking in Your Career

If you feel stuck in your career, you can use Critical Thinking to find better job or advance in your current position. This can start with you asking yourself what is the purpose of your role and why are you in this job?

A study of 22,000 employees found that 37 percent didn't know the mission of the company, and only 20 percent knew the connection between their job duties and the goals the company. Also only a mere 20% were excited about the goals of the company they worked for.

That should tell you how to get ahead at work, or if it's time to find another job that you are passionate about. A job is not an entitlement, it's part of a greater mission to solve a problem. You should always ask: what does success look like in my role?

The value that you can and should add is to help solve a problem in line with the mission of the company you work for. Do a little research and tell that to your boss or put it in your cover letter and you get a career advancement.

I love this tweet from Elon Musk after just taking over Twitter: "Just looking for problem-solvers who get things done with a high sense of urgency. Don't care if or where they went to school."

You can also start a business. Here too, you will need critical thinking about things like product/market fit and building something that people will love. Or you may conclude that the 96 percent failure rate of startups is too much for you and decide to buy an existing business instead.

With a small downpayment, you can borrow the rest against the cashflow of the business and find yourself a business owner in no time. Or maybe you are still in school and feel broke.

Then consider for example getting a job at a restaurant or bar. You can eat and drink at work, while living off your tips. Then you can put all your salary into e.g., buying Crypto. And in one year, I promise you will be in another place than where you are today.

The point is that with a little Will to Success, you can change the circumstances of your life. All you need to do is take action with determination and some critical thinking about how to get ahead.

Want to know more?

You can get access to a Free course on Cognitive Biases and Success here:

https://renejorgensen.com/courses-3/

i https://www.businessinsider.com/millennials-midlife-crisis-spend-divorce-less-value-experiences-boomers-2023-2

ii https://www.aacu.org/research/how-college-contributes-to-workforce-success

iii https://www.cambridge.org/elt/blog/2019/03/07/critical-thinking-survey-results/

iv https://www.cato.org/survey-reports/poll-62-americans-say-they-have-political-views-theyre-afraid-share#50-strong-liberals-support-firing-trump-donors-36-strong-conservatives-support-firing-biden-donors