



TOPIC 3

FOUR ESSENTIAL TRAITS OF CRITICAL THINKERS

Description: *This topic will introduce four essential traits of critical thinkers through instructor-led presentation and group activities using video vignettes.*

Instructor Script:

Slide 23

Now that you have a basic overview of what is meant by “critical thinking skills,” we are going to take it a step further by discussing the critical traits that strong critical thinkers possess. These unique character traits and skills set effective critical thinkers apart from the rest of the crowd.



Presentation: The Four Essential Traits of Critical Thinkers (Part 1)

Time: 6 minutes

Description: *Review the first two traits of critical thinkers – open-mindedness and self-awareness.*

Instructor Script:

Slide 24; Workbook pages 12 – 13

Let's look at four essential traits that characterize critical thinkers:

- 1) *Open-mindedness,*
- 2) *Self-awareness,*
- 3) *Detail-oriented, and*
- 4) *Independent thinking.*

Think of these four traits as muscles. Even though you all already possess a certain level of critical thinking skills, it's fair to say that some muscles need more strengthening than others. With that in mind, consider how well you already demonstrate these four traits as we discuss them.

I'll give you a personal example:

[Tell a personal story that illustrates a time you could have been more open-minded, self-aware, detail-oriented, or could have thought more independently while drawing a conclusion or making a decision. This shows participants that all of us have room to improve, and that by acknowledging this fact, we strengthen our skill set.]

(Continued on page 38.)



Topic 3: Four Essential Traits of Critical Thinkers

Four Essential Traits of Critical Thinkers



- Open-Minded
- Self-Aware
- Detail-Oriented
- Independent Thinker



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FOUR ESSENTIAL TRAITS OF CRITICAL THINKERS

Critical thinkers have unique character traits and skills that set them apart from the rest of the crowd. In this topic, four essential traits of critical thinkers – open-minded, self-aware, detail-oriented, and independent thinker – and their relevance to the decision-making process will be reviewed.

TRAIT #1
Open-Minded

When making decisions, effective critical thinkers are open-minded. This means that they do the following:

- Make every effort to remain unbiased
- Recognize there is no "right" or "wrong" answer
- Look at situations from different points of view
- Stay open to new alternatives and ideas
- Welcome having their own ideas and opinions challenged by others

Why do critical thinkers do this?

Critical thinkers know that everyone has a unique way of looking at or reacting to situations, and they value those varied perspectives. Perspectives are influenced by each person's

- Background
- Upbringing
- Personal beliefs (religious, political, etc)
- Education
- Experiences

If we look at issues from only a single point of view (our own), we limit our resources and miss the benefit of others' thoughts and ideas.



Think About it! Imagine you work for a manager who is "comfortable with how it's always been done" and doesn't see a need for change. You have a lot of ideas for streamlining processes to improve your patients' experience of care, but your manager won't listen to your suggestions. **How might having an open-minded manager improve this work environment?**

Be open to having your ideas and opinions challenged by others. An open discussion will allow you to think through your supporting facts, articulate your beliefs more clearly, and strengthen your ideas by drawing from the input of others.

TRAIT #2
Self-Aware

Effective critical thinkers are self-aware. This means that they do the following:

- Are honest about what they know and don't know
- Recognize their strengths and weaknesses
- Understand how their own biases and beliefs influence their thinking
- Know their limitations
- Ask questions or do research to find answers to things they don't know

Why do critical thinkers do this?

Critical thinkers understand that they can't be expected to know everything and do everything themselves. Critical thinkers also value new information and insight. They know if they don't ask questions, they may miss something important which could negatively affect their decisions.

Think About it! Imagine that you were just asked by several staff members about the new attendance policy. They don't understand how management will track absences and how many times they are able to call in before the progressive discipline policy takes effect. You haven't seen the new policy. **What will you decide to tell your staff?**



Everyone has personal biases and prejudices – it's a fact of life. Make every effort to be aware of your own preconceptions, and work to limit the impact they have on the decisions you make and the actions you take.

Slide 25; Workbook page 12

Trait 1: Open-Minded

Let's start with the first trait – open-minded. This means that critical thinkers do their best to remain objective and unbiased, and know it's important to look at situations from different points of view.

Everyone has a unique way of looking at, or reacting to, situations. These perspectives can be based on many different factors, such as one's background or upbringing, religious and political beliefs, or past education and work experiences. Critical thinkers know there is no "right" or "wrong" solution or perspective, and they make every effort to remain open to suggestions and viewpoints that differ from their own.

In addition, critical thinkers welcome having their decisions and opinions challenged by others. They recognize that an open discussion will help them to think through the supporting facts and articulate their rationale and beliefs more clearly. And collaborating with others will strengthen their arguments and ideas in ways that could have a positive impact on more people or functions.

How does open-mindedness complement the decision-making process? [Pause.] *It creates objectivity in the midst of biases and opinions. Individuals who are open-minded entertain the ideas of others and are confident when defending their own.*

Slide 26; Workbook page 13

Trait 2: Self-Aware

In addition to being open-minded, critical thinkers are self-aware. This involves being honest with yourself about what you know or don't know. Critical thinkers are self-aware of their own strengths and weaknesses. They recognize their own limitations, admit when they don't understand something, and ask questions or do research to find the answers.

Remember that we said that critical thinkers are open-minded, and try to take the viewpoints of others into account. Well, critical thinkers are also aware of their own biases and beliefs. They understand how their own preconceptions influence their decisions, perceptions, and attitudes.

Here's an example – say you were asked by several staff members about the new human resource (HR) policy related to attendance. They didn't understand how management tracked absences and how many times they could call in before the progressive discipline policy would take effect. You haven't seen the new policy. What would you decide to tell your staff? Would you give them a quick answer – something like, "I think you can miss up to four days, but if you have a note from your doctor, you don't have to worry about a thing." Hopefully not. A critical thinker would be honest about not fully understanding the new policy, and confer with HR to provide staff with a speedy and factual response.

A critical thinker puts his or her own self-interests and ego aside to do what is right – and in this case, to keep staff from misinterpreting the new policy.

Let's stop here for a few minutes and watch a brief video vignette. After the video, we'll discuss how the nurses either exhibited, or did not exhibit, these two traits.

Four Essential Traits of Critical Thinkers



- Open-Minded
- Be objective
- Consider different points of view



Four Essential Traits of Critical Thinkers



- Self-Aware
- Recognize your limitations
- Seek answers



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Video Vignette: Sara, A Frustrated Charge Nurse

Time: 10 minutes

Description: Participants watch a video vignette and then work in groups to analyze the situation and respond to a series of discussion questions. The activity emphasizes two essential traits of critical thinkers: open-mindedness and self-awareness.

Activity Instructions:

- Use the Instructor Script below and follow the slide instructions.
- Divide the class into groups of three to four participants each.
- Allow **5 minutes** for video review and small group discussion.
- Allow **5 minutes** for a debrief with the entire class.

Instructor Script:

Slide 27; Workbook page 14

Now that we have discussed two of the four essential traits of critical thinkers: **open-mindedness and self-awareness**, let's watch a video featuring Charge Nurse Sara. You will work in small groups to analyze the interaction between a frustrated charge nurse and members of her team. Read the questions in your workbook so you'll be prepared to discuss your thoughts after we watch the vignette.

[Play the video vignette embedded in Slide 27. Click in the black area to start the video. After the video plays, advance to Slide 28.]

Slide 28; Workbook page 14

Working with your group, take about five minutes to answer the questions in your workbook. When you are finished, we'll get back together and share your observations and responses with the large group.

[After 3 to 4 minutes, conduct a short debrief. Call on the various groups to share their responses to the discussion questions. See the Answer Key/Suggested Responses for discussion prompts and talking points.]

(Continued on page 42.)

Sara, A Frustrated Charge Nurse



Sara, A Frustrated Charge Nurse

- Was Sara open-minded? Was Scott? Why or why not?
- Does Sara show any signs of self-awareness? How could being more self-aware help Sara react better in this situation?
- What advice would you give Sara to help her see the situation (and respond to Julie and Scott) differently in the future?



PAGE 14 IN PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK



VIDEO VIGNETTE

SARA, A FRUSTRATED CHARGE NURSE

Sara, a charge nurse, is frustrated while talking to another nurse at the nurses' station.

Directions:

- > Watch the video vignette.
- > Working in small groups, answer the discussion questions.
- > Share your group's responses with the rest of the class.

Discussion Questions:

1. Was Sara open-minded? Was Scott? Why or why not? Provide examples to support your response.

2. Does Sara show any signs of self-awareness? How could being more self-aware help Sara react better in this situation?

3. What advice would you give Sara to help her see the situation differently (and respond differently) to Julie and Scott in the future?



Answer Key/Suggested Responses:

NOTE: Participant responses will vary. These are sample responses only.

1. Was Sara open-minded in the vignette? Was Scott? Why or why not?

- Sara shows lack of open-mindedness by neglecting to view two situations from the patients'/families' perspectives. First, she sarcastically asks Julie why the patients expect nurses to know everything. Then, while responding to Scott, she fails to see the situation from Mrs. Davis' perspective, which is that she is feeling ignored. If Sara were being open-minded and viewing the situation from Mrs. Davis' perspective, it is unlikely that she would decide to wait thirty minutes before addressing the challenge.
- Sara also shows a lack of open-mindedness in her outward frustration and bias toward Dr. Harrison. As a result, she is allowing her personal feelings about the physician to negatively affect her demeanor at the nurses' station.
- Sara muttered under her breath, "If Mr. Davis had a different doctor who would respond to our calls, then his wife wouldn't have this problem and be so upset." Sara is showing a bias against the physician rather than seeking to understand the underlying factors that may have contributed to the problem.
- Scott appears to be more open-minded. This is shown when he comments that, "Mr. Davis might not have had a choice in doctors, and it isn't Mrs. Davis's fault that he's not responding."

2. Does Sara show any signs of self-awareness? How could being more self-aware help Sara react better in this situation?

- By not recognizing her own limitations, Sara shows a lack of self-awareness. Perhaps she may need to talk with her manager about her workload. Her perception of being overworked (e.g., having to skip lunch) is influencing her behavior and decisions. If Sara were more self-aware, it is likely she would have considered solutions, such as requesting additional resources.
- If Sara were self-aware, she would recognize that her complaints at the nurses' station do not contribute to a professional or positive environment for the unit staff.
- Recognizing and understanding her own bias against Dr. Harrison could allow Sara to see the situation more clearly, which may improve her interaction with Scott. By being aware, her responses would be more professional and she would refrain from making inappropriate comments about patients and doctors. This would also improve her approachability and value to her team.

3. What advice would you give Sara to help her see the situation (and/or respond to Julie and Scott) differently in the future?

- Remind her to be empathetic (open-minded). In other words, Sara should consider the situation from the patient's perspective.
- Help her to identify the specifics of the situation, and to open her mind to other potential issues that are escalating the Davis' concerns. Avoid jumping to conclusions about the cause of the problem in the absence of seeking additional information.
- Help Sara explore her expressed biases and opinions. Help her to understand that her emotions are standing in the way of objective thinking and decision-making.
- "Dislike the game, not the player." Remind Sara that being opinionated about people, policies, procedures, or guidelines affects how she is perceived by her coworkers and patients.