
A Problem A Day strategy

Critical thinking is a process of carefully evaluating information (Coombs, 2014, pg. 122). When it comes to everyday life, the majority of people are not their greatest beings. Critical thinking and problem solving are skills that can be developed if a long-range goal is set for changing ones habits of thought. (Paul, 2001)

One of the strategies explained by Paul that can be used daily to help develop critical thinking skills, is A Problem A Day. Paul suggests using the beginning of each day to identify one problem in a person's life to work through. It is noted that it is important to choose a problem that is within ones control and set aside all other problems that are out of their control.

The first step in this process is to identify the problem and state it as clearly and precisely as possible. One of the problems that I deal with on a daily basis is feeling as though there is not enough time in the day to get everything done and have meaningful interactions with those around me. On one level this seems like it may never be a problem that can be fixed. When I lay out all of the items that have to be fit into the 18 hours of the woken day, the feeling is overwhelming. While each of the items can be accomplished in one day, being able to accomplish the important ones without feeling rushed or like a robot is the problem.

In order to accomplish step two and three, I have laid out all of the components, which together make it feel like there is never enough time in the day for meaningful interactions.

1. Waking and getting the kids ready for school.
2. Making breakfast and lunches for two kids.
3. Eating Breakfast together (can add more meaning).
4. Taking the first child to school at 6:30 am (may not result in successful meaning).
5. Getting myself ready for the day.
6. Taking the second child to school 20 minutes away 8:00 am (40 min round trip) (may not result in successful meaning).
7. Dedicate 1 hour to the gym to stay active and healthy.
8. Dedicate 2 hours to school while the kids are not home.
9. Dedicate 4 hours to work while the kids are not home (needs more meaning).
10. Do house chores.
11. Pick-up the first child from school 1:20 pm (can add more meaning).
12. Pick-up the second child from school 2:40 pm (can add more meaning).
13. Run errands.
14. Dedicate 1 hour to do homework with the kids (needs more meaning).
15. Take kids to sports activities (football and baseball).
16. Make and eat dinner with family (needs more meaning).
17. Evening bed routines (needs more meaning).

After being able to carefully layout all of the items that are needed in order to maintain a functioning household throughout the week, I was better able to approach step four. I was able to look at each of the items and see where in my life I feel like there needs to be more meaning. I was able to see that there are four areas where I feel need to get more meaning out of the

time spent.

I wanted to be able to find areas where I could gain the much needed meaning from moments that I felt I needed without imposing those needs on the others in the family. By looking through this I was able to identify that this was a problem or need that I felt I needed fixed and that may not be the case for others it may affect. I found this to be an interesting realization, that I cannot just focus on my needs, but it must incorporate the needs of others as well. Just because I feel like I need more meaningful interactions, perhaps my children feel like they need more free time to unwind from the rigors of school and sports.

I wanted to be able to look at the information and find a plan for long term action that could be sustained. Fortunately for this problem and step five, there was less to do with money and power, and more to do with time.

For step six I began to evaluate how I could add more time to the items I deemed as needing to be more meaningful. But, time is hard to come up with more of. This led me to look back at what I do throughout the day. I was able to then identify five additional areas where I would be able to better develop a way to get more meaning out of those items.

After careful evaluation and remembering that my needs affect others, I removed two of those items. I determined that they would probably not provide a successful amount of meaning and the attempt to get it may outweigh the needs of others.

For step seven I decided that I would use the three new times I identified as an opportunity to change my behavior in order to find more meaning. Those three times I was able to identify were; during breakfast with the kids and on the way home from school with both children. I had first also identified the ride to school with the children as potential opportunities, but decided that the children may need the time as a transition to get ready for school.

I decided I would make a conscious effort to use the time during breakfast to ask the kids if they were prepared for the week, if they had any worries or concerns and to go over the day before and what we enjoyed. I began to think of it similar to dinner time. If I feel like I have been able to get meaning out of that time, how could I make breakfast the same? I did the same for the rides home with each child. Having questions that would engage the kids rather than just, "how was your day?".

I felt as though it was easier to look at new opportunities and find ways to draw meaning than it was for me to look at the remaining four items where I felt there was meaning but I needed more.

The first step that I am going to put in place in order to draw more meaning is to limit the amount of multi-tasking I felt I had to do. One instance of this is when I talk to clients. If I begin to designate a specific time of day for work, I can better ensure that I am at a desk available to give full attention to the conversation. I would be able to build better relationships on my end, as it would be easier for me to absorb exactly what the client was saying. I had been finding it hard to take absorb information when I am driving or, chasing kids.

I also decided that when it was dinner time, it was exactly that. I would begin to ensure that when I sit down for dinner with the family, I didn't need to be responding to emails or cleaning up the dishes while others were still eating. Taking time to enjoy the tasks at hand whether it

can be dinner or work would benefit from clearer focus.

I plan on addressing step eight as I go through this process of drawing more meaningful moments from life. I acknowledge that everyday will probably not work in the way I have laid out, as life is ever changing. Being able to lay out the problem and think about the ways I can change my habits of thought will have long range benefits that will leave me more fulfilled.

Conclusion

When people strive to be their greatest beings, critical thinking is an essential part of that process. It helps us understand that there are potentially better solutions to problems if we are open to constant questioning, analysis and reasonable interpretation.

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