

# CRITICISM - OUR DISEASE

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TEACH--TEACH--TEACH

## INTRODUCTION

When someone asked me why I would write a book on criticism and call it ““Criticism - Our Disease”, I told them that criticism was the silent psychological disease. It is a disease of epidemic proportions in our society and one that has the greatest effects on more people than any other single interaction that occurs to each one of us. We have all been criticized in our upbringing and I am fascinated by the variety of ways that we handle criticism. I am amazed at how instrumental criticism has been in forming our personalities and in forming our psychological defenses. The effects of criticism are so quietly devastating at very deep psychological levels that if it were abolished we would raise much healthier children and have a society with individuals with a much stronger sense of positive self-regard. There is a strong need for each of us to be aware of our use of criticism, to amend it, and to reduce it.

In this world of varying beliefs and multiple “truths“, it is my purpose to bring forth a few universal truths that can be applied to the greater understanding of mankind and that hopefully, these truths will have some universal application in personality development and personal interactions. In my first book, “The Nature of Human Feelings”, I focused primarily on the description of the six natural and universal feelings that occur in all societies under very predictable circumstances. The contribution of that particular book was intended to simplify human feelings to the point where we can predictably understand and communicate about feelings by understanding the cause and the effect of each of our Human feelings.

In this book the focus will be on the interaction effects between individuals when criticism is the focus of the interaction. The effects of criticism are insidious. When people are around someone being criticized or are being critical there is always DIS-EASE.

Criticism, rejection, and abandonment are the three most traumatizing psychological effects on an individual. The most pervasive of these three is criticism. It exists in repeated fashion over years of an individual’s life. As such it is constantly reinforcing to the individual and his or her psyche because of the never-ending incidents in our families, education and society. Because of the repetitiveness of criticism it continuously reinforces the negative self-image of the individual being criticized. Only the crimes of physical and sexual abuse have a stronger affect on a person’s life. The frequency and universality of criticism in our society has a much greater overall effect on humans in our society than the isolated incidents of the other types of abuse. It is for this reason that I believe that criticism is the most universal and most negatively destructive force in our society.

In only one instance does criticism ever have a positive effect. That one instance is where the individual is

sufficiently matured to be able to weigh the value of the criticism in a positive way, without any of the emotional overlay of the effects of criticism. That is, the individual must be developmentally mature enough to emotionally detach from the criticism itself and from the person being critical. For the majority of us, however, criticism feeds our negative self-image and our ever-present doubts about ourselves. Criticism almost always has negative emotions attached to it. It is as much the negative emotion attached to criticism as the criticism itself, which affects the person thoughts and feelings toward himself. When yelling or screaming or finger pointing accompany criticism, as it often does, the emotional consequences are extreme. None of us likes to have another person feeling negatively towards us or to be sitting in judgment against us. Criticism places you in that position.

This book will discuss and explain the consequences of criticism and will bring the reader some means of understanding and coping with this ever present destructive problem. Once we have an understanding of the dynamics of criticism, there will hopefully be greater motivation to overcome our critical ways. I believe that everything that we do in a critical way can be done better and without the devastating psychological effects if it is done in an educational manner.

My style of writing is such that I am basically a person of few words and I do not like to make elaborate examples and explanations about what it is that I am trying to convey. I have a tendency to write very heavy thoughts. As such, it would help the reader to slowly read the contents of this book, taking time in between sections to reflect and ponder the particular issues at hand in regard to him or herself. Only through reflective thinking will you get the most out of what you're about to read. This is not a quick skimming book. It is not one that you can read while watching television or doing other things; it will require a certain degree of thought.

## CHAPTER 1

To better understand criticism it is important to have a few definitions.

Since most criticism involves interaction of two people we will name these people the “Demander” and the “Perceiver.” The Demander is the person from whom criticism comes. The Perceiver is the person who perceives the demand in a critical way. In fact, criticism is a demand for someone to do something.

Developmentally, this exchange between the demander and perceiver has its origin in the parent-child relationship. In later life it continues as the perceiver sees the demander as a person in power. The perceiver gives the power to the demander who is viewed as an unequal and in a superior position.

All criticism, regardless of the form in which it is expressed, has its origins in one fundamental principle. This single principle is what I have called the Truth- Imposition Dilemma of Mankind. I believe that this concept needs a slight expansion for the origins of criticism. In order for criticism to be perceived or intended there has to be a basic “Truth” as believed by the demander. This “Truth” will have an Expectation carried along with it. In addition, the demander will have a belief that his Truth and Expectation can be imposed on the intended person.

The universality of this “Truth” (belief) - Expectation - Imposition sequence comes from the fact that we all grow up having certain beliefs which we are convinced are true. The generational effect is that all parents impose these truths on their children and they are passed down from generation to generation -- often with no or only slight modification.

For example, in our culture we have had a belief that one shouldn't hurt others feelings. While this belief is based upon a false assumption, i.e., that it is possible not to hurt others feelings, nevertheless it is still held by parents as a Truth. It is taught (imposed) on the child with the expectation that the child will conform and not hurt others feelings. The result of this misteaching is that teens and younger adults will go to many extremes to avoid the expected criticism from breaking this belief if they reject a partner which inevitably hurts the feelings of the one rejected. This often results in the unpleasant situation of staying with partners only to avoid hurting their feelings. How many of you have seen a teenager stay in an unhealthy relationship only because they were afraid of the effects of the rejection. Indeed, they also are often bothered by guilt from having violated the misteaching because the rejection did, in fact, hurt the others feelings.

. So, not only do we set ourself up for criticism from the Demander but also we set ourself up for criticism within ourself for having broken the rule.

## CHAPTER 2

### Criticism is An Attitude

It is difficult to write about criticism without some form of definition in the ways that we express criticism. For the purposes of this book I am going to define criticism in its broadest sense. Criticism takes many forms. Fundamentally, it is an attitude that can be shown in a variety of ways.

For many of us, we are totally unaware of the critical tone that exists in our expressions whether it is verbal or physical. Criticism has become so automatic in our society that many of you as you read this will be surprised to hear that what you are doing is defined by me as criticism. When I say that criticism can be manifested by a look, most of us understand right away what I mean. The critical look usually involves some form of disdain by the person being critical. It may include a raised eyebrow or a glance up into the sky or even a turn of the head looking over ones shoulder. The critical look has as much power as any verbalization. It can be seen across the room and in a knowing way it is a clear message that parents give children when they have misbehaved. For a child the look of criticism is something that has to have been preceded by some form of verbal correction done in the past. Frequent scolding by the parent for a specific task sets the child up for the awareness that when the behavior is repeated, only a look from the parent is necessary to replace the spoken word.

With the advent of television, nonverbal forms of criticism have become more prevalent in our society. We as frequent viewers, have become more aware of an increasing amount of nonverbal types of criticism. A thumbs down gesture is only one example. Gestures and a variety of different forms of body language have become commonplace signs of criticism. Sighs of exasperation are another common form of criticism. Whatever the physical manifestation of criticism, it is ordinarily the underlying attitude of the individual who is giving this criticism that makes it clear to the receiver that he indeed is being critical.

By the time each of us has finished the first grade we have been over- exposed to criticism. Those of us who have been raised with the English language have experienced criticism to a much greater degree than someone raised in the tradition of a foreign language. To us criticism is a function of the structure of our English language. While criticism can be expressed nonverbally by a look of disapproval or doubt, most criticism comes to us verbally by the use of the future conditional form of the verb. This verb is almost always preceded by the pronoun “you” and a pointed finger that feels like it is going right through you. This combination of verbal and physical expression of criticism is perhaps the most powerful. The following are examples of this type of verbal criticism:

“You should do this.”

“You shouldn’t do that”

“You must do this.”

“Right lane must turn.”

“You have to do this.”

“You better do this.”

“You better not do this.”

“You know what you ought to do”

“You need to do it this way”

Direct commands not to do something are also a source of criticism that seriously effects a person’s behavior. How many times do you remember being told “Don’t hurt people’s feelings,” “Don’t be selfish,” “Don’t tell a lie,” “Don’t have too much fun,” “Don’t do that, because what will the neighbors think if they find out?” Each of the above direct commands has as their basis a fundamental belief that becomes part of the child as he grows up. Each of these beliefs becomes so deeply ingrained in us that they may contain an anticipation of criticism if we violate them. Each of us has innumerable significant and insignificant beliefs which have formed part of our behavior. “Don’t take the last cookie on the plate” may be one of those socially unacceptable admonitions that we have grown up with. “Don’t put the napkin on the table before you have finished eating,” “Clean your plate or you can’t have desert”, “You better do what your mother says”, may be other admonitions. By the time that we are adults these admonitions and many others like them have become part of our automatic behavior, which if we inadvertently violate them, makes us feel a twinge of guilt. And indeed, that critical watchful eye of the parent remains ever-present even into our adulthood and later years.

How many times have you been told that you shouldn’t make too much noise, you better come in before 10:00 or something bad can happen to you, you must pick up your dirty dishes, you have to call me if you’re going to be late, you need to go by and see your grandmother, you better not miss church today, you have to be quiet around your father when he’s sleeping, and you better do your homework. While each of these commands are not critical in and of themselves, a violation of any one of them can make you critical of yourself and can contribute to your feelings of guilt from not following these well indoctrinated teachings that have become part of your belief system.

Most parents with strong beliefs indoctrinate the children very early in those beliefs. These strong beliefs often lead to greater potential criticism. For most of us, early upbringing has been so full of actual and implied criticisms, that it is surprising that we do not have many more psychological problems because of it. In every family there is an elder, a mother, father, grandparent, aunt or uncle who is known for being critical -- if not to one of us then of others around us -- the neighbor who lets his dog run all over, the teacher who never gives homework or who gives too much homework, the brother who is too lazy, the sister who is irresponsible and cousin who is stupid. We have heard it all, over and over, to the point where criticism becomes deafening. Being told what to do isn’t in itself criticism, but being told how badly, incorrectly, or imperfectly it was done is where we’ve gotten most of our criticism.

In families where both parents are very critical the negative results on the child’s psyche are astounding. Not only does it cause a negative self-image and feelings of worthlessness in the child but it also can set up behavioral defenses that effect that child well into adulthood if not all of his life. Other than abandonment, rejection or abuse, criticism is the greatest negative influence in the developing psyche and personality of the child. It is certainly the most all-encompassing influence in our society because of the structure of our language and the spread from generation to generation, which exposes everyone in our society to criticism. It is for these reasons that criticism exists throughout our society. Indeed, it is an extremely serious “disease” of epidemic proportions. I hope to show that criticism, like no other single type of behavior, effects people negatively at their very roots of character and personality development.

## Chapter III

### The Generational Illness

It is a generational disease very much like a genetic disease except that this one is strictly learned. It will never be attached to a gene and as such, it can be unlearned and modified to a certain degree. Because of so many factors which I will discuss later, I do not believe that it can become extinct in our society -- only reduced -- and even that can only be done by great personal effort, motivation and determination. Unlike other authors who see criticism as positive, I submit that if one perceives another's interactions as critical, it never is positive. It always causes a "nick" in the receiver's self-worth and creates a little doubt about themselves, even if it is the most minimal of nicks.

It has the least effect on the strongest personality and ego, and the greatest effect on those egos that are undeveloped, weak, shaky or those who already have serious doubts about their worth. Because of the automatic nature of the response to criticism, it has to be the subtlest ongoing effect on the personality that lasts all of a person's life.

When someone is perceived as being critical of you there are only three responses that one can make. Two of these are the most common while the third requires a high level of maturation. When criticized the two most typical responses are 1. To adapt i.e., to do what the demander says or, to rebel i.e., to do the opposite or something different than what the demander says. The person who adapts typically says "OK you are right I'll do it your way", thus denying the validity of whatever he believed was best. For example, if I say "you should put your coat on before going out" and the other person adapts and puts on a coat, he overrides his self-knowledge about his tolerance for the particular weather and his hardiness to disease, which he may know better than anyone else. The little "nick" that occurs creates self-doubt and acknowledgment that the other person really knows what's best for him and that he "can't take care of himself". It also contributes to his feelings of being controlled and may make him angry.

The person who rebels basically says "you think you are right, I'll show you" and does the opposite. In the above case, he goes without a coat because he was told he should put on a coat. This response like the adaptive response is automatic without any thought but often with angry feelings over someone telling him what to do. The negative self-worth may come to him later when he realizes that he did not make a wise decision in doing what he knew what's best for him. The "nick" is in self-assurance and he begins to wonder whether or not he can really take care of himself.

In both the automatically adaptive and rebellious reactions to the demand "put on the coat" the demander has placed himself in the role of determining what the other person's behavior "should" be. He is in the One-up position and basically is conveying the message "I really do know what is better for you than you do." The irony of the receiver is that he too is acknowledging that the demander controls whatever his automatic response is. That is, if he adapts and wears the coat, his behavior is automatically determined by the acknowledged superior person. If he automatically rebels, his behavior is also a function of the demander even though the rebel often thinks that he is independent of "others" telling him what to do because he is doing the opposite.

The third possible response, which requires considerable self-knowledge, independence and maturity on the part of the person being told what to do, also requires that the response not be in an automatic mode. In this case when I say "you should put your coat on before going outside", you pause and move from the automatic emotional response to a logical

and rational response where you weigh all the facts at your disposal i.e., what is the weather like, what is my tolerance for this weather, and am I prone to getting colds, do I believe that colds come from exposure to the anticipated weather and historically have I been able to handle the weather and exposure time without ill effects. At that point you make a knowledgeable decision that is totally different from the adaptive or rebellious decision. Your self-concept remains intact and your worth stays as it was without any “nick” -- indeed you become a little stronger because you have determined what is best for you. You have made the best decision for you even though there may be a resultant conflict with the demander. Rationally choosing not to wear the coat may well establish your integrity, but it is also a clear statement to the demander that you will determine what is best for you and not the other person. From the demander’s perspective you have rejected his “demand” or his “suggestion” and if he “expects” you to do as he says he then will have one of two emotional reactions to you.

If he “expects” you to do what he says because he believes he knows what’s best for you, he may feel disappointed and hurt that you didn’t do what he said you “should” do. If you did wear the coat because of the third choice he will never know the difference and may feel that you have done what he expected. If, on the other hand the demander perceived his “should” as a “demand” in a controlling way and you chose not to wear the coat he will probably get angry at you and you will have to deal with his anger. If that is the case your cognitive decision not to wear the coat becomes a clear statement that you will not be controlled by others unless you determine that coincidentally the coat wearing is the best thing for you. That may lead the person who is controlling to feel that he again had the upper hand and you in fact will do what he says. It will take other situations to further clarify this type of interaction for both the perceiver and the demander.

In this example as in most situations involving a demand there are several aspects, which can be examined: 1. The intent of the person levying the demand. Is this person simply on “automatic” using the structure of our language to bring about change in someone else’s behavior i.e., “wear your coat”? Is the person being parental or authoritarian in his attempt to change the other person’s behavior? Is the person continuing or attempting to create a one-up -- one-down relationship where the message is clearly “I know what’s best for you and you don’t”. Or is the person simply trying to be helpful or protective in attempting to warn the other person of the cold weather outside?

Obviously, each of these intentions are different but all are conveyed by the same critical statement “You should put your coat on before you go outside”. The recipient on the other hand has his own agenda upon hearing this simple statement. This agenda will be a function of his age and maturation, the relationship that he has with the other person (a son may respond quite differently than an adult visitor from a warm climate), the baggage that he carries with him, the extent that he has been criticized in the past and by whom in his family, and finally the particular mood that he may be in at the time. If he is in a receptive mood he may simply adapt or reflect and if he is in a hostile mood may rebel.

In summary, both the intent and perception of what is critically said are important factors in the interaction. We know that perceived criticism generally causes hurt feelings as a primary initial feeling state. In our society it is common for men to do what I call a hurt -- anger sequence. In this sequence they respond so quickly that the hurt is missed and the anger is expressed. By the same token women are more likely to stay in the “hurt” position and respond on a feeling level from there. The important thing is that perceived criticism causes feelings in the person being criticized. Neither hurt nor anger are positive feelings therefore there are bad feelings evoked each time that there is a demand statement made that is perceived in a critical manner. For this reason alone, anything that each of us can do to correct this kind of communication that we have with the people around us can only make our relationships better.

Misteachings or mislearnings are a favorite area of concern of mine also. A misteaching is usually a demand or warning that our parents or teachers taught us with good intention but bad results. Oftentimes they result in mislearnings that are considered truths and that are devastating and affect us for our entire life. For example, most of us have been taught to “never hurt others feelings”. While this seems at first blush to be a well intended harmless warning, the effects of this learned belief is much more negative and destructive than positive.

Now some of you will immediately think “this guy believes in hurting other’s feelings”. In a similar way to challenge the misteaching “don’t ever lie” may be misinterpreted as “he thinks it’s OK to lie”. In my defense, what I’m attempting to do is make us aware that we have automatically taught a number of beliefs without thinking through the intent or the consequences of these beliefs once they have been mistaught and mislearned. Most of these teachings have been passed on from generation to generation and will continue to be, unless we become aware of the effects and choose to do differently.

The original intent of “don’t hurt others feelings” was quite different than its abbreviated passed down admonition. From the Christian ethic of “turn the other cheek” and “love one another” came the original teaching of “don’t purposefully do or say things to people with the intent of hurting their feelings”. Basically, it was “don’t do intentionally malicious things to others”. Now that teaching is significantly different than what has commonly come to be believed when one hears the admonition “Don’t hurt others feelings”. As I have stated elsewhere (The Nature of Human Feelings), we know that both criticism and rejection will hurt other feelings. We also know that each one of us has been hurt by rejection and we have rejected and hurt others, often with tremendous guilt for having violated our belief which we learned from the misteaching. In a similar manner we have all been criticized and have in time criticized others which also leads to the hurt feeling that we have been taught never to do.

In essence we have created this cultural “catch 22” no-win situation where we are not supposed to hurt others and where we have the impossible task of trying to live out this belief in a culture whose language is oriented toward criticism and where rejection is a way of life in selecting appropriate partners, employees, employers, college students etc. I have also discussed in The Nature of Human Feelings the fact that one of the major causes of guilt is a violation of our beliefs. Thus, if we believed in this teaching -- which most of us do -- and we criticize or reject someone we cannot escape the resulting guilt. In a worst-case scenario, which often happens in adolescents, when we adhere to the belief of not hurting others feelings and we stay in relationships to avoid hurting the other one and to avoid our own guilt we make unwise choices that can effect us for our entire life. This often happens at the expense of violating oneself at our very core. We violate ourselves in doing what we fundamentally know is not right, in order to avoid the hurt. By adhering to our belief we invariably prolong the relationship which eventually will end with the hurt that was only delayed.

I have also said in the other writings that I estimate 20 to 30 percent of our marriages occur because one person knows that the marriage should not occur but let’s it go on in order not to “hurt” the other person’s feelings. In my clinical practice I have had many men and women tell me this as their marriage was gradually coming apart. I even had one woman tell me that she went through with their marriage not to hurt her husband’s parent’s feelings. I often wonder how many stories there are like this.

Developmentally, there are predictable stages that all relationships go through. At the end of each stage there is a decision-making process by both individuals as to whether or not they will continue the relationship. I have found that at the death of the last or most influential parent there is often a major developmental change that goes on quietly within the adult

child of that parent. I cannot help to think that in the above example of the marriage in order not to hurt the prospective in-laws feelings that if the marriage did not end before, there would be a much greater chance of the relationship ending upon the death of the in-law since she would no longer have to worry about hurting her feelings.

With our current divorce rate at plus or minus 50 percent, it is my belief and experience that over 90 percent of those individuals who marry and adhere to the “don’t hurt others feelings” ultimately end up in a divorce. The exceptional relationship that continues often does so because there is a stronger belief that prevails. A belief that “you married for life in the eyes of God” can often sustain the relationship where one or the other originally knew that their marriage wasn’t right for them.

I have found that most of these beliefs which were mistaught, and which we accept as a mislearning, function throughout our lives in spite of our growing maturity and ability to reason logically. Because of our ability to logically reason in adulthood you would think that one could easily undo the belief. Unfortunately, beliefs that are so automatic and that have never been challenged do not function on the basis of reason. For example, in the Roman Catholic Church to believe in not eating meat on Friday was taught to all young Catholics by model and instruction for centuries. When this rule was modified by the church a few decades ago it was extremely difficult for many people to “violate” the old belief and adopt the new teaching regardless of the new logic that was presented. Even today there are many people who still adhere to the belief which they grew up with from early life. In a similar way many people who are intelligent and mature continue to struggle with their early mislearnings whatever they are.

At the risk of challenging such fundamental Washingtonian Americana about lies and cherry trees, it may be helpful to understand the dynamics of lies. I must reiterate that this understanding is not to condone lies but to help us become more aware of when and why we lie. As with beliefs about hurt feelings, the beliefs about not lying are firmly taught early in life, usually during the first decade of one’s life. By the time we are preadolescent we do not lie and we try not to hurt others feelings. These beliefs first become challenged by us when we reach adolescence. The belief about hurt seems to become more firmly entrenched as we go through our adolescent relationships. Teenagers really struggle with this mystique and suffer greatly as they find that rejection happens to them (which is much easier for most to handle) but they are unable to reject and hurt their male or female friends. There is a much greater adherence to this belief during adolescence than there is to the belief about never lying. There are some very interesting psychological reasons for this. First the adolescent begins to naturally pull away from the parents belief system. As part of the first natural challenge to those beliefs coupled with a tendency toward rebellion we have the foundation for a challenge to the admonition about lying.

The dynamics of lies is quite simple once you think about it.

Over and over again you hear me talk about the importance of our beliefs in our individual life and our life decisions. Our beliefs effect all of our relationships. Our beliefs are so important to us that it only takes one major belief difference to end a relationship or to not continue with that relationship. The depth and strength of these beliefs determines our actions. The deeper and stronger the belief the more likely this difference with another person could end the relationship. For example, if one believes in abortion and the other one doesn’t and pregnancy occurs, the relationship can and often will end if this difference is not reconcilable. In a similar way we may choose not to have a relationship with someone who smokes, someone who steals, someone who is a Republican, Catholic, or simply one who believes a different religion than we do.

As we go through adolescence those beliefs of the parents are often challenged as the natural part of adolescent

rebellion. It is not at all uncommon for the teenager to do the opposite of what the parent wants just because he is being oppositional. When two people (such as a father and son) have a difference in beliefs there are only three possible interactions once both sides acknowledge their differences in beliefs. The first choice is to openly confront the differences. The father and son will sit down and confront and discuss their differences openly. The consequences of doing this are too great and the father has the ultimate power and may “win” the confrontation each time. This confrontation usually isn’t a “fair” confrontation because of the natural parental-child one up - one down interaction. While we teach that confrontation is the most mature way of dealing with beliefs system differences, this works best when the two people are on an equal footing. They have to be equal in maturity and respect to the other one and generally open and accepting of the other person in spite of the differences in beliefs. It has been my experience that this type of equality is rare. If it is rare, then we will have very few direct confrontations of when there are differing beliefs.

Every presidential election year it is interesting to me to watch how Republican and Democratic candidates avoid confrontation with each other. There are the “change the subject” confronters, the physical “avoiders” of each other, the “I’ll take a shot at you and you take a shot at me” confronters, and the “Don’t get me going or you’ll regret it” confronters. There are a very few who sit down and try to define party differences or reconcile party difference that they each have.

Returning to the typical father and son example, if they are unwilling, are unable to confront there are only two options left: one is to go underground (usually the son) but possibly the father as well. For example, Dad doesn’t believe in using pot and his son only smokes behind the barn or out with his friends. The son may go underground if he believes in using pot and doesn’t want the father to know. Going underground works as long as neither party really finds out about the son’s differing behavior.

The option that is left when one discovers the others “secret“, assuming that confrontation and irrational discussion about belief differences won’t work, is for the person most vulnerable (son in this case ) to lie about his behavior: (Who me? I wasn’t smoking pot” you must get the cigarette smell from my friend who I spent time with yesterday”, or “that wasn’t my roach that you found, it was Bills - I was holding it for him”). It doesn’t matter what you’ve learned about never telling a lie, there are other consequences more dangerous than violating that particular belief.

In summary, when there are belief differences between two people there are only three choices, Confrontation, Going Underground or Lying. Strengthened with this information it is safe to say that at one time or another, usually during our earlier years, we have all lied. The purpose of lying then is simply to avoid pain -the physical pain that can happen to you, the emotional pain from rejection or the pain of hurting someone else’s feelings whom you care about. We may also lie just to avoid the hassle that these differences create. We may also lie to avoid the anticipated criticism that these differences bring about. When you think about our lies and recognize these motivations, we will have a much better understanding of how and why lies originate. Once again - at no time have I said that it is OK to lie or OK to hurt others feelings, only that these two mislearnings will be violated and that teaching others how to handle this breach will be much more profitable than threatening others to never lie or hurt others feelings. To become less critical and more understanding of the process of a child differing with you and telling the child over and over as he grows up that you know that he will differ from you, will allow the child to risk and discuss with you instead of driving him underground or encouraging him to lie.

It is when other teachings and beliefs violate some basic principles that we hold, thus producing a conflict, that understanding and modifying these misteachings becomes necessary. For example, “Don’t hurt others feelings” will naturally

be violated by each one of us and modifying this belief into something like “limit your rejection and criticism because you know that it will hurt others” may be more acceptable.

When I am working with a couple, one of the early assessment techniques that I use at the beginning is to see what each individual's beliefs and expectations are about accepting the other one as they are or about changing the other one to become “like I would like them to be”. In our society we have many families who raise their daughters to believe that it is their function to choose a partner who “needs” to be changed. Why this is more of a female role than a male role is difficult to explain. Our slogans say “behind every successful man there is a woman” implying that the woman helped make him successful. We don't seem to have the opposite belief about men “changing” women to be “better” or “different” people. The implication in our society is that women are the keepers of our morality (and thus the determiners of our morality); the “one up sex” who knows what's best for a man and will make it happen her way. Men tend to be portrayed as cognitive, non-feeling, somewhat unreligious, business and sports oriented individuals who bumble along in these areas of feelings, morality, and religious beliefs until a woman straightens them out.

If you place all relationships on a continuous scale with Change on one end and Unconditional Acceptance on the other end, it is possible to get an estimate of where each individual is in regard to Change and Acceptance.

Change    -5   -4   -3   -2   -1   0   1   2   3   4   5   Unconditional Acceptance

In my therapy with couples, I find more men obviously accepting of the relationship and more women wanting change - unless the issue being discussed is sex. When sex becomes the issue, this polarity reverses itself and men generally verbalize wanting change and women verbalizing that they are willing to accept their sexual life as it is. This usually comes about when there is a mismatch in sex drive. Please understand that this mismatch can just as easily go the other direction where the woman has the higher drive than the man.

Regardless of who wants what, there are a number of very predictable consequences in a relationship predicated upon change versus a relationship in which the couple accepts each other as they are. As you can imagine, whenever there is dissatisfaction in a relationship, the person who wants the most change is in the “one-up position” - the position of having determined what has to change and usually will have been increasingly critical of the partner over a period of time in an attempt to get the other person to change. This criticism alone will have had many negative effects on the relationship by the time the couple has sought outside help.

If both parties have reached the point where changing the other one in order to improve the relationship is of paramount importance, then criticism, either quietly to oneself or openly toward the other, has created a significant degree of tension in the relationship.

A relationship is a very live organism. I see it as a third party, unique in itself because it is a function of the two individuals who come together to create this entity. This concept of a relationship being a third entity has been extremely helpful in dealing with couples and especially with couples who are adept at “the blame game”. I further conceptualize the relationship as an entity with a life of its own following very predictable developmental stages. A relationship follows a very interesting growth curve conceptualized in the diagram. A relationship that is in trouble, or that is dying has a definite decline that often takes several years. The early years of decline are often very quiet and silent for one of the two individuals. While this process most often doesn't occur in both parties simultaneously - i.e. one is satisfied and one is not - it can do so. For the individual who is becoming increasingly dissatisfied, the decline in the positiveness of the relationship finally crosses a point of

no return. In the early process of marital counseling I look to see if either party has crossed that line and usually ask each person in the initial single interview. The outcome of those relationships which have been so damaged by excessive criticism, successive breaches of trust, lies, irresponsibility, physical or verbal abuse, absence of any positive strength in the relationship, prolonged silences and communication gaps, has already been determined by the offended individual. The couple has really come for divorce counseling which is very different than marital counseling. They may also have come to help prepare the unsuspecting spouse that the relationship is over or they may come for confirmation that the relationship is over. They come to the marital therapy often without any knowledge of the developmentally predictable nature of relationships. College courses have not prepared most couples for the development, growth and sustenance or decline of relationships.

## CHAPTER IV

### Purposes of Criticism

Most of us have some beliefs that allow us to be critical and indeed, almost demand that we be critical, if we are to “walk the talk” or live out our own beliefs. The precedence for criticism goes back to the origin of man. God, who initially determined our first rule - here is a garden of fruit - but don't eat it - a belief and injunction which was imposed on man with lifelong and generational consequences (known as Original Sin) if you don't obey and with guilt for failure to obey.

Thus, the first purpose of the demander was to establish a “truth” and impose that truth and value on others. I suppose it is one thing for God to establish the truth and consequences, but unfortunately this modeled a form of behavior for all humans which we seem to have taken as permission to do the same. Sorting out our issues of responsibility in establishing values and passing on those values to our children has been a very difficult human task. It is as if each one of us are born into a family, culture and society with a set of rules and beliefs which we readily accept as our own - quite automatically. These rules, values and beliefs then become our standard to live by and eventually to “impose” on those around us as the best way possible to live. While the form of imposition may be lesser or greater in some families, the experience of imposition on us as children allows us to assume that it is alright to do the same to others around us. It is not unusual to see a child of 4 or 5 correcting another child and telling him or her how life “should” be just like Mom said. Indeed, this belief - imposition is so firmly learned that we spend a good part of our life re-learning when we can do this and when it is not appropriate to do this.

Few people really “re-learn” this difference. I suppose this is because of our increasingly complex society which seems to define more and more what we “should” do or what we “should not” do. The natural order of things seems to be to increase the imposition of beliefs on us as we become older or more complex instead of defining life more simply around fewer more generic beliefs. For example, we have legally defined a multitude of ways that we may not interfere with another person's life instead of the very simple Golden Rule of treating others as you would like to be treated.

From early childhood those beliefs which we have learned and which we accept as “truth” are quickly challenged once we enter school. It is when we see others act differently than what we have learned that we become critical and judgmental of their differing behaviors. Early in our growth we all believe that our way is right and differences in others behavior from our “right” behavior is wrong. We also “know” that if our way is right, the world would be a better place if we could make others believe like we do. This process sets us up naturally to be the judge and jury of others differing behaviors and from this one-up position it is extremely easy to be critical of those who don't know or act “the truth”. Thus, a major purpose in criticism is to make others be like us, to believe and act like I do. Since my way is “right” the world would be a better place if everyone could see it and live it my way.

In “The Nature Of Human Feelings” I called this the dilemma of mankind. It is from this “Truth -Imposition Belief” that every war has begun, from which every religion promises eternity to their followers, from which great national debates on morality over slavery, and abortion have arisen. Even in personal interactions in our adult relationships the extent to which we impose our beliefs on the other will make or break that relationship. It is also the major stressor of the parent-adolescent interaction.

From the perspective of the parent-child interaction, criticism of children has several other purposes. The first of

these is to create the child in “my” image or to create the child in “a better image than me because I don’t want him to go through as many hard times as I’ve had to”. So, if I am critical of any behavior that looks like what I did when I was young then I must correct it. We may also want the child to not be as bad as Uncle John or Aunt Emily. It is from the fear of my child developing like these less desirable relatives that we take on this extremely critical attitude in raising our children. Criticism of our children is often motivated by as many different fears as we are capable of conjuring. Criticism of our children can be because: We are afraid that we won’t be a perfect parent and that we might be criticized; something terribly disastrous might happen to the child if we are not critical enough to warn them.; The child will make the same mistakes that we did in not getting an education or not choosing the right spouse; The child will succumb to drugs, alcohol or sex and ruin his/her life; the child will have too much fun and not be responsible enough; The child will never be successful (however that is defined); The child will not be able to support himself and will always have to live with us; The child will be a “bad” adult, a mean or evil adult; the child will go to Hell if we don’t stop him; The child will be liked more than I am and my criticism of the child will make sure that doesn’t happen, etc. etc.

Basically, we criticize our children to either make something good happen to them or to stop something bad from happening to them. Most parental criticism is done so automatically with these fearful or good intentions, not realizing at the time the consequences of the criticism. Since criticism always causes a nick in the self-image and creates some feeling of worthlessness we create the opposite of what our true motivation is without being aware of it.

In many families, criticism comes from one parent’s fear and insecurity that they will be blamed for something that their child does. Criticizing the child to avoid blame is a very common motivation for adults emerging from dysfunctional families where they, as children, got the blame or expected to be blamed for the bad things that were happening in the family, the father’s alcoholism, sexual abuse, divorce or a parent’s mental illness.

During many of my workshops on criticism, I frequently hear that without criticism we wouldn’t maintain law and order. Some people believe that criticism is necessary to both create and maintain law and order. I am amused whenever I am driving and I come upon the sign “Right lane MUST exit”. It is as if the highway department believes that the critical demand “must” will make drivers exit only out of the right lane thus maintaining the law. As we will see later on, anything that is said critically can also be said in a more positive way. “Right lane exit only” causes a much less reactive feeling than “Right lane MUST exit”. I quietly say to myself each time I pass one of those signs “Right lane wants to exit”, seemingly giving me more control over the act of exiting. There are many other examples of critical demand which is used to maintain law and order.

Other reasons for criticism include some parents belief that criticizing their children will make them “tough” and better able to handle the world. Also a parent may feel that he/she isn’t doing their job unless they are criticizing their children’s behavior. The most common guise for criticism is that the parent is “teaching” his child the correct behavior. Without criticism the child would never learn what is right and what is wrong. I really believe that the goal is correct but the method is the problem. We certainly have the obligation to teach our children values and behavior that will help them get along in this difficult world. Indeed, with a major change in the language that we use, we can convert criticism into teaching with a much greater positive reception by the one being taught. Even teaching can be done in very different ways. Let’s take the example of a child running across public streets. From the critical authoritarian position we say “You shouldn’t run across the street and if I catch you doing it I’ll punish you.” From the protective teaching position we say “I don’t want you to run across the street because you can get hurt if you fall when traffic is coming”. From the nurturing teaching position we say, “Running

across the street can result in you falling and getting hurt by oncoming traffic. I love you a lot and I don't want anything bad to happen to you, please remember that before you cross the street".

Finally, parents who are perfectionistic often believe that they must raise children who are perfect. One way to do that is to become overly critical of each of the child's imperfections. On the one hand the parent can say "see I taught him the way to be right and therefore I'm not responsible for him not being perfect." Thus the parent believes that not having the perfect child was not his or her fault. This fundamental reason to be critical can be an attacking way to cover up the parents areas of perceived failure wherein he or she was criticized during her upbringing. Ultimately, this purpose of criticism is to cover up the parents feelings of inadequacy.

## CHAPTER V

### Who Does It?

As I have said before, criticism is throughout our society. It is in all realms including the home, church, school, sports and the workplace. It is so prevalent that small children by the age of three or four have picked it up and use it with their peers. It knows no bounds to age. The elderly are as prone to criticize as those in early or middle life. However, it is true that some people appear to be especially prone to criticize. This chapter will identify those people and discuss some of the reasons for their being so critical. Many of the examples and the information will be surprising to you. Let's start with one of the most perplexing offenders.

Individuals with the strongest beliefs are often the most critical. That's a powerful statement. First, it is not that everyone who has deep strong beliefs is critical but it does mean that in order to be critical many times you have a powerful belief system. This is particularly true if you are convinced that your beliefs are right and the only way to live. It is doubly true if you believe that it is your job to correct all of those who don't believe like you.

Those who fit this scheme are politicians, religious leaders, educators, doctors, parents, spouses, the reform groups, gay rights, men's rights, women's rights., born again Christians, etc, etc. People who fit this description almost always are those over 30.

It is from this group that the "Truth - Imposition" dilemma arises. A major characteristic of people who fit this description is that they are committed to what they believe. It is one thing to believe strongly and be committed to your beliefs which can lead you to teaching others about your beliefs, but it is another thing to be very critical of those who don't hold the same beliefs and to take it upon yourself to reform the world, remaking it in your image.

One of the problems is that people who believe this strongly are passionate in their belief. That passion can lead to wonderfully positive and great things or it can lead to very disastrous situations such as the Jim Jones Cult and the passion of the Waco group who went to their death for their beliefs. This passion has also led to the Crusades, Communism, Democracy, the Jihad Holy War and other strong passions. These are the proselytizers - those who believe that they have the truth and must impose it on others.

In a family setting it is the parent or parents whose beliefs in education are so passionate that they find nothing right about our public school system. Their criticism creates great difficulty for the child who must attend this system. It is also the parent who is unusually forceful against his or her child using drugs or alcohol and who preaches it so often in a critical way that the child reacts and tries these substances. It is the parent who forces their adolescent to go to church only to see the child drop out of religion as soon as he/she moves out of the house. It is also the parent who believes so strongly in education and the good grades required for further education that studies become a battleground between the parent and child often alienating the child from education. Criticism of grades is one of the most common parental errors. The belief is that 1. If you don't "push enough" the child won't care on his own to do the work 2. If you aren't critical your fears will be realized and the child won't be able to enter higher education. The fact is that if you get a GED or a high school diploma you can enter college. It may be a Junior College or an "open door" four-year college but you can go to college. What you may not do is enter a superior college of your choice having met these minimal High School completion requirements. It is possible to transfer to a more

preferred college if you excel in the first year of the “open door” college. The point is that there are many, many critical hours and days spent with children over academics. In addition, parents create many untruths in an attempt to frighten their child into good academics. It is amazing to me that more damage isn’t done to our children and their desire to learn than there appears to be.

These groups of “strong believers” who are critical of others who have different behaviors have a subsection of extremists who account for a significant amount of criticism. These extremists have a common personality characteristic that can best be described as rigidity. Rigidity in this extreme is defined as someone who has them self in a box with no doors. They are absolutely stuck to the extreme belief that they have -whatever it may be - religious, political, activist, social, or otherwise. They are incapable of seeing a different perspective or another person’s perspective and rigidly adhere to their position often being extremely critical of anyone who does not agree with their belief in its entirety.

Perhaps the best example of this extreme is those who would take it upon themselves to kill personnel in abortion clinics because they believe that abortion is immoral. This rigid extreme in belief is carried out to the ultimate even ignoring or overruling other moral issues, which says that murder of the person is immoral. This is the ultimate criticism - obliteration of the opposition. We have seen this in Nazi Germany and recently in Africa and Eastern Europe as well as in the volatile Middle East. While such extremism is rare in numbers, it makes the greatest amount of noise with the press and often creates the greatest amount of destruction as it did on Sept 11, 2001. Such extreme rigidity is often a sign of emotional disturbance when it goes beyond socially appropriate behavior and when it effects judgment to the extent that all factors cannot be evaluated in the execution of the belief.

Another group of most critical people are those with the most fears. Fearful people are afraid that all kinds of bad things will happen to their children and loved ones. They are afraid that their kids will be shot in a drive-by shooting so they may not let them go out and become very critical if the child doesn’t come home immediately after school. They are afraid of drugs, of pregnancy, of accidents, of gangs, of trouble with the police, of injury or death and finally of life itself. Each one of these fears becomes the focus of criticism. “You shouldn’t let a boy kiss you”; “you better watch your drinks at the party so others don’t slip you some drugs”; “you must be home at 9:00”; “you shouldn’t drive at night or when it’s raining”; “you have to lock your car whenever you are in it, or whenever you get out of it”; “you must keep your room clean or you’ll never make a good wife or husband when you grow up”, etc.

Critical people in this second group may have a poor self-image, poor self-worth and basic insecurities. Their criticism is usually oriented toward making others different than they are. For example, the mother who is afraid that her son will grow up without social skills like her may be very critical of the son not joining social clubs at school. The father who is unsure of his masculinity may be very critical if his son does not fight physically.

One of the ironies of individuals who fall into this category is that they too have been very heavily berated and criticized in their upbringing. It is this severe criticism which they have received that, for the most part, has created their poor self-image and uncertainty. It is as if being criticized begets poor self-worth, which begets criticism. As I have mentioned earlier criticism is a non-genetic generational disease which becomes automatic and perpetuates itself from one age to the other.

I would venture to say that if criticism was removed from our society, we would have one of the psychologically healthiest populations who felt good about themselves, worthy as individuals and capable of creating and using whatever their

given gifts may be. The power of this Utopian population would be enormous and there would be nothing that they couldn't do. It would be such a powerfully positive society out of which true greatness would evolve.

There is another group of critical individuals. This group is primarily motivated by the belief that controlling others behavior is their right and/or duty and the means by which this is to be done is by criticism. Criticism is exercised in an attempt to control another person's behavior. "You shouldn't do this or you will grow hair on the palm of your hands." Criticism becomes a threat with the hope that it will stop (or start) certain kinds of behavior. You better study math an hour a night or you'll never get a B in it. Indeed, you'll probably flunk it if you don't". "You better visit your mother or you may never see her alive again." Criticism given in this manner is the cause of learned guilt which I've discussed before in "The Nature of Human Feelings". These become the "shoulds" of the world with dire consequences if these "shoulds" are not adhered to. Unfortunately, we have all grown up with these "shoulds" and they automatically guide much of our adult behavior. We have never challenged most of them as adults and we automatically continue with them believing each of them as we did when we were children.

I believe that it is not psychologically healthy for us to teach our children behavior that is not possible, and that has such horrific lifelong effects. Since this book is primarily about criticism there will seem to be an overemphasis on the effects of criticism. These effects are basically to cause a primary feeling of hurt. Criticism may cause secondary feelings of anger and fear but the primary feeling is always hurt.

Here are the facts: Hurt as a human emotion will occur naturally under very predictable circumstances. In any relationship that has some closeness, criticism and rejection will always cause hurt feelings to the person being criticized or rejected. Whether it is a handicapped child being criticized by other children or the end of your first "love" in adolescence - there will always be hurt. Over the years beginning seriously in adolescence, I have watched and helped young people work through the guilt from having violated what is now part of their belief system. I have seen people of all ages stretch out relationships, often for years, in order to avoid the inevitable hurt because they don't want to "hurt" the other person's feelings. I have seen marriages occur because one doesn't want to hurt the feelings of the other - only for the relationship to end several years later after children are brought into the world and financial commitments made. I have seen marriages occur because one of the couple did not want to "hurt" the feelings of the parents of his bride-to-be. This relationship also ended many years later. In The Nature of Human Feelings, I said that I was currently estimating that one in five (now more like one in four) marriages occur in which one person of the couple did not want to reject and subsequently "hurt" the other one. The divorce rate of this group is estimated to be 90+%.

If truth is so difficult to maintain because of a "misteaching" we had better do some serious thinking about revising this misteaching. It is ironic that rejection becomes so hard to do in order to avoid hurting others while criticism runs rampant in its wholesale onslaught of hurting others in a non-purposeful manner. This is truly an example of the blind (those not wanting to reject in order to avoid hurt) leading the blind (those whose wholesale criticism devastates others).

Perhaps we need to spend more time teaching our children that criticism hurts and rejection hurts; teaching our children not to criticize and to reject those people with whom who you do not want to have an intimate relationship in the hope that they will find the right person with whom to have an intimate relationship. Perhaps we need to teach our children how to deal with the inevitable hurt that they, like all of us, have experienced. If only one marriage could be saved that would end in divorce after children were born, our efforts to correctly teach feelings would be worthwhile and the automatic perpetuation of

a misteaching would cease. If we want truth in our society, this kind of honesty is essential.

We have so many misteachings that have such lifelong effects that have to be challenged and modified that one could write a book attempting to correct each one of these. For example, “Be perfect in what you do”, “always try hard”, “please other people first and yourself last”, “be strong and show no emotions”, and finally “hurry up”. Each one of these “drivers” have been taught in families to be the ultimate way or ways to success. Each of these drivers have been learned in order for us, as the child, to get love, attention and affection and to avoid criticism, rejection and abandonment. If we do not obey any of these teachings we will certainly be steeped in failure and guilt. To falsely teach these ideals as reality and not something to strive toward, leads to dishonesty and guilt.

To teach a child the dynamics of lies does not teach a child to lie, but merely be more honest with himself and others. This is very different than teaching the child never to lie. While we all agree that hurting others purposefully and lying are not behaviors that we condone, let us understand when and why people lie. Except for the chronic and habitual liar who does so automatically and without thinking most of the time, let’s talk about most of us. Most of us learned growing up that to lie had dire consequences. It causes such a personal breach of trust and feelings of anger, plus feelings of gullibility and being made a fool of to the person being lied to. Meanwhile the liar seldom seems upset although a little guilty on occasion. The liar has to be poker faced and emotionless just to pull off the lie. Invariably, he will justify and dodge whether he is telling a lie if confronted, for the very reason that he would lie in the first place, i.e., to avoid criticism, rejection or abandonment either real or anticipated. While there are a fair number of people who lie to protect the other person’s feelings and stop them from being hurt, avoiding being criticized and being rejected is the most common reason for lying. Closely related to these reasons for the liar to lie is his desire to protect himself from bad consequences.

Once again I would like to reiterate that lies generally occur whenever there is a perceived or real difference in beliefs between the two people. That is really all that it takes to set the stage for a lie. When there are these perceived or real differences in beliefs, there are only three options that anyone can do; the person can confront the differences and talk them out, something that requires a high level of maturity for both parties, the person can go underground and attempt to avoid the confrontation of differences of beliefs; or the person can lie to avoid the differences in beliefs and the consequences of those differences.

In a family where either one or both of the parents are critical of the child’s behavior, lying by the children will begin at a very early age. By adolescence it is epidemic in form and can cause much more criticism, mistrust and estrangement than already exists. To say that criticism causes a greater degree of lying may be both an oversimplification and lets us really miss the point. Remember it is the difference in belief that causes the confrontation and avoidance of criticism that causes the lie. A prior history of criticism increases the avoidance between the two who have the different beliefs and ultimately this increases the tendency to lie. Avoidance of criticism is an extremely powerful motivation for anyone to lie. Thus, we return full circle to the power of criticism and the detrimental effect that it has on our relationships.

As a final statement for this chapter on who does the criticism, I would like to share this observation with you. It is a very central observation on human development. From infancy we are driven to seek pleasure and to avoid pain. An elaboration of the greatest psychological pleasures and pains are seen in the following diagram. It appears to me that the worst psychological pain to an infant growing into adulthood is rejection, abandonment (a form of rejection) and criticism (the words and language of rejection). In a similar manner the greatest psychological pleasure is to gain unconditional acceptance (love), nurturance,

support and protection.

Each one of us has grown up trying to gain acceptance (in varying degrees and strengths) and trying to avoid that pain. If our mother modeled acceptance and nurturance then we would grow up wanting more of that good stuff.

The problem is that we must have a vehicle for getting the psychological pleasure and avoiding the psychological pain. When we observe enough people there begins to emerge only a finite number of vehicles to do this. These vehicles are also taught or modeled by the parent and the young child learns very quickly on which of these vehicles he wants to hitch a ride on in order to get the good stuff and avoid the bad.

These vehicles, appropriately enough, are called “drivers”. These drivers become our mislearnings from the inadvertent (usually) misteaching of our parents. So far there have been five “drivers” clearly identified as the primary way children in our society try to get the good stuff and avoid the bad. These drivers were mentioned a few paragraphs ago. They are; Hurry Up, Be Strong, Please Others, Try Hard and Be Perfect. All of us have an identifiable degree of these drivers that motivate us as kids and adolescents to get the good stuff and avoid the bad. Often as adults you will find us spinning our wheels desperately trying to be perfect in all that we do, hoping that someone will appreciate and love us for it or that they will not fire us or reject us if we are not perfect.

Misteachings are very powerful and produce early mislearnings. In those families where there is extreme criticism by one or both parents the predominant theme of the developing child is to avoid the bad stuff. Much of his life will be spent riding one of the drivers trying to avoid the criticism. There will be little energy left to try to get the good stuff. Throughout his life he will have a solid familiarity with this kind of pain and he will choose people to help him continue his avoidance of the criticism and rejection. They may choose very docile partners or repeatedly find themselves in a rejecting relationship. Familiarity tends to foster repetitiveness in his choice of negative people. He is uncomfortable with the good stuff and he does not seek out these unfamiliar positive relationships until later in life - if at all.

By the same token, the person who was raised with very little criticism by both parents and by unconditional acceptance, nurturance and support may seek out that type of partner and be totally devastated if he or she receives criticism and rejection from that partner.

He has never had to deal with it growing up and is not equipped to deal with it in early life and in his relationships. This individual will tend to see the world in a positive way, and they often will believe that everyone will treat him as they treat others or as this parent has treated him. Unfortunately, these expectations are also unrealistic. In this case the absence of criticism has a very positive effect on the child but does not prepare him to meet the “real world”. He may also be frequently disappointed and hurt because his expectations are not met.

If one parent is critical and the other is accepting an entirely different set of behaviors are learned by the child. The degree and frequency of either of these behaviors leads to varying results in the child. Presumably this combination better prepares the child for the real world. The effect of the dominant parent may have serious effects in his choice of a mate of the same sex as the dominant parent. For example, a very critical mother to a son may unconsciously encourage the son to avoid critical women and seek more accepting women or because of the familiarity, he may choose a woman of similar nature to his critical mother.

The predictability of effects of choices of mates in our society has not reached a high degree of success because of

many other variables in the selection process. Theoretically, this model of pleasure and avoiding pain could lead to some measures that would quantify each of these variables. The effects of being raised by parents in any combination of pleasure seeking parents or pain inducing parents might then be able to be studied thus producing patterns of choice in children of these parents. Do totally accepting, non-critical parents produce well-rounded stable children or are those children who have apparently had a difficult time fending off criticism and rejection become more adept at life and relationships? While these are serious questions for the research scientist, suffice it to be said here that each type of modeled behavior by one or both parents has a marked effect on the children of those parents. There are none of us who have been spared the effects of criticism and consequently those who do criticize include every one of us.

## CHAPTER VI

### The Effects of Criticism

The effects of criticism can be looked at from three different levels. First, what are the effects on our feelings; secondly, what are the effects in ego development and finally what are the behavioral effects of criticism.

The greatest cause of hurt feelings is criticism. Not one of us has survived the hurt feelings caused by criticism. Whether it is the hurt of our children disapproving of us, the criticism by a parent because we did not live their values in the manner that they expected or whether it is the self-imposed criticism of how we look from something we have done to ourself.

Often, in this day of divorce, children who become a pawn in the middle of the divorce, take sides. Without knowing or understanding the reasons of the divorce, they can become extremely critical of one or the other parent to the point where there is total rejection and severe hurt feelings. In the same manner the parent may reject or be critical of the child who takes the side of the other parent thus rejecting him with the same degree of hurt felt by that child.

Parents often have a firm set of values that their children do not follow. For example, the belief that you should pay all your debts before you do anything nice for yourself, can quickly become an area of criticism if the child does something nice for himself before he pays all of his debts. This type of criticism may be verbal or non-verbal or simply an attitude of disapproval by the parent toward the child causing significant hurt feelings and a strain in their relationship. It could also lead to decisions by the parent about how capable the child is in administering the parents trust or executorship of his will.

During the holiday season - from Halloween to New Years, it is customary for most of us to enjoy the bounty and the specialties of the holiday season. The closer to the New Year we get the more critical we become of our overindulgence and the weight gain that has occurred. The extreme of this self-criticism is the personal hurt that turns into depression over our physical state. Healthier individuals may accept the fact of their overindulgence and quickly develop a plan to correct it thus using their self-criticism positively. In using their self-criticism to develop a positive plan of action, they have used their creative potential effectively.

Many never come to grips with their problem, get more withdrawn and depressed for several months either adapting to their weight gain or gradually doing something about it. Self-criticism can seriously effect a person's mental health. Whenever someone criticizes us it not only hurts our feelings but it makes us feel bad about ourself. This is particularly true when the criticism comes from someone who is important to us. In fact, the more we revere the person being critical, the greater the effect on our self-worth. It NEVER feels good to be criticized and it ALWAYS feels bad if criticism comes from a significant other. As a psychologist, I have learned not to use "Never" and "Always" in my statements, but the universal effects of criticism are so predictable that "Never" and "Always" are appropriate in this case. I do not know anyone, not even the masochist, who says "boy, that criticism really felt good."

An additional effect of criticism is to make us feel powerless. It takes the wind out of our sails. It renders us speechless. It makes us think and often we instantly become defensive. For those who have constantly been criticized it does not take much to go from hurt to fear. In this case we become aware that anything we do is open to criticism so we become afraid of life. We become afraid to live in a day to day manner and we become afraid of all the pitfalls that the critical parent warned us about. Fear can be a significant sequence of feeling from the primary feeling of hurt.

By the same token males translate hurt to anger very easily. Males have a particularly difficult time dealing with hurt feelings and they often deny the hurt and go right to anger. Often people who appear angry all the time are those who have been frequently criticized or who anticipate criticism a lot. It is easier to look and be angry which often fends off the critical person than it is to be pleasant and get clobbered by criticism.

Another common criticism feeling sequence ( see The Nature of Human Feelings for Developmental Sequences of Feelings) often comes from a large or powerful figure being critical. This figure may be a parent or an important peer. Loud and angry criticism from this kind of person not only hurts your feelings but this hurt quickly gets translated into fear. It can be a very frightening experience for a small child to get yelled at over things that he or she has not adequately done. Fear of the critical person can cause withdrawal, avoidance and isolation. If the loud critical person is a significant person to the child this can set up a great deal of anticipatory fear whenever the child confronts another adult of the same sex or demeanor as the critical parent. In extremes, the child can develop a phobia in dealing with the outside world with anxiety reactions to anyone resembling the critical parent.

The effects of criticism on ego-development are very significant. Criticism from a meaningful figure always causes the person to feel badly about him or herself. Prolonged criticism seriously effects the self-worth of the child or the one being criticized. A negative self-image is also the result of repeated criticism from important figures in our life. As I mentioned earlier, this is absolutely devastating to the psyche of a child if it is not balanced with positive strokes. Positive statements about the behavior, performance or even the existence of the child ( ex. "I am so glad to have you" or "I am so glad that you are alive" or "I am so glad that you are a part of my life"), is the main reason that we all survive a heavily critical environment. It does not take a one-for-one balance of positive strokes for most people to overcome the effects of criticism. The proportion depends on the character and ego strength of the particular child. The stronger the character and ego strength of the individual, the least necessary the proportion of criticism and positive strokes be equal.

A really strong character structure may find a 5 or 6 to 1 ratio sufficient to not effect him significantly, whereas a child who is more sensitive may need a 1 to 1 or a 1 to 3 or 4 ratio of criticism to strokes. A child who is like this often has the parents tip-toeing around him trying very hard not to "hurt" his feelings. By the same token I have seen fathers who do not want sensitive sons decide that the only way to "make them tough" is to give him an overdose of criticism. The child may create a tough outer shell, but internally he is devastated and develops serious personality issues and dubious feelings of worth.

Lower self-confidence and self-doubt are common effects of criticism. Feelings of insecurity and doubts about their ability to do anything right are frequent effects of unbalanced criticism. Children with lower self-confidence often see themselves at fault not only for things that they may do wrong, but also for the things that go wrong in their environment. It is as if their presence makes things go badly and they take the fault upon themselves. It isn't long before they start believing that the problems in their family are their fault. One can say that this egocentric child-like thinking is often typical of childhood and it is. The problem begins when excessive criticism has led to strong beliefs and egocentric child-like thinking that persist into adolescence and even into adulthood. There are many adults who persist in believing that their world and the things that are wrong in it are indeed their fault. These things can include a failed marriage (which the person often believes was bound to fail because of their inability to do anything right), failed business (I can never do anything right), failed education (I'm stupid and can't ever learn anything right) and failed parenting (wait until you have kids and see what a mess you'll make out of their lives).

These parental admonitions (criticisms) if done over and over become a solid part of the developing child's belief system that effects his entire outlook on life. These beliefs become so entrenched that intensive and extensive psychotherapy and education have limited success in turning them around. What is put in the child as a child lasts much longer and is much more deeply entrenched than the wisdom of adulthood can set free. The consequences of criticism on the affective and ego-development of the child go way beyond the greatest imagination of most individuals. These effects are seen over and over by those of us in the helping fields. The devastation, the crippling of thought, the inappropriateness of these ego debilitating beliefs create such artificial limitations in individuals lives that an enormous amount of our creative and productive abilities go unfulfilled. As an educated guess, I would venture to say that our society could be 30-40% more productive and more creative if criticism was significantly reduced so as not to effect the ego-development of the children we are raising. When you take these figures on an annual basis during most of our adult life the result in output - that is what many people tell themselves that they "can not" do because they believe that they can not - would be 30-40% greater every year of their adulthood.

This estimate does not even touch the amount of limiting energy that gets routed into proving and substantiating that the beliefs wrongly held, are true. The undoing of the effects of this erroneously directed energy would cost another 20% of waste that could have been productive psychological energy.

The enormity of these figures on a national basis, all resulting from extensive and inappropriate criticism which led to ego-beliefs wrongly held, cannot be overemphasized. There are enormous generational effects of having parents whose self-confidence was eroded by parents whose self-confidence and poor self-esteem led to them being critical. The current parent can only negatively effect the next generation who will then effect the next generation until there is some significant educational interruption in this cycle to finally reduce the amount of criticism in our society. It has to begin in our schools and in correction of the simplest of our symbols "Right lane must Exit."

#### Mandela Speech

While the above ego-development effects are profound, individuals suffering from these deficits, can and do manifest many behavioral effects from these beliefs.

Perhaps the greatest behavioral effect is in the area of communication. Those who have been criticized the most without positive strokes, tend to verbally withdraw. They do not risk sticking their neck out with their opinions. Now the greatest example of this is in the classroom of junior high and early high school. A very significant percent of the students will not volunteer to answer teachers questions for fear of being wrong or being made fun of by their peers. While this is in part an emerging adolescent thing, it is also a comment on how significant the threat of criticism is on a nation of adolescents. This hesitance is another example of the creative and educational loss caused by the inhibitory effects of criticism. Many people never get beyond this adolescent fear and thus stop their possible growth that would come from asking questions and learning from the discussion of answers to the questions. They sell their own power down the tube with significant behavioral effects. In extreme examples we not only do not venture forth, but we question our own knowledge in self-perpetuating self-criticism which only reinforces our negative beliefs about ourself.

Surprisingly, excessive criticism and the anticipation of criticism cause a marked increase in lying. The connection between the two, criticism and lying, is based on the fact of different beliefs about a specific topic by two individuals as was

discussed in an earlier chapter. This is a very significant behavioral effect of criticism.

In families with one or more parent who is very critical, the communication between the child or budding adolescent gradually decreases as the individual progresses through pre-adolescence and then adolescence. The child works harder and harder at staying underground in order to avoid criticism.. Staying underground, by definition, means little or no communication whenever he anticipates criticism whether or not it would happen.

In adult marital relationships it is not uncommon for one person to be in the one-up or critical position in the relationship. As the marriage progresses and each of our beliefs become more known, these differences in beliefs set up this one-up one-down type of communication. This is particularly true if one of the two people believe or “know” that they are right and the partner is wrong. As this type of relationship matures in age, there almost always is a marked reduction in communication. The partner who is always “wrong” stops talking. He or she is not about to expose them self to criticism. This kind of relationship, which is more the norm than the exception in our society, is headed for serious other problems which often culminate in divorce.

There are only a few ways that a relationship like this can be improved. The critical, always right, person has to grow up and beyond that belief. This is something that is highly unlikely because if you believe that you are “right”, most of the time there is no need to change (and become like those who are wrong). It is a powerfully reinforcing belief that most often the person dies with, to the regret of all those around him.

The second way that this kind of relationship may change is for the one-down person to grow. The longer the one-down person stays in this relationship without growing, the less likely they are to grow simply because time in such a relationship, fosters significant feelings of low self-esteem and poor self- concept. As these identity issues progress, growth becomes more difficult. The result is many relationships are produced with little or no communication all stemming from “Criticism - Our Disease”. This of course, is one of the reasons why poor communication is the leading complaint in marriages.

Behavioral effects on individuals and on relationships from criticism, beliefs and the imposition of our beliefs on others in a critical manner, cause what I would estimate to be 80-90% of our interpersonal problems. If this is true then this is an enormous issue which must be dealt with in our society through education at very early ages.

## CHAPTER VII

### Defenses to Criticism

This chapter, Defenses to Criticism, is really an elaboration on the prior chapter. Character formation and our ego-development have to develop a number of protective devices in order to survive psychologically. This issue was best described in a book written by Sigmund Freud's daughter Anna: "The Ego and Mechanisms of Defense". The emphasis in her book was to describe each of the defenses and how they protect the ego. The emphasis was also on the development of radical defenses due to severe trauma to the child, either physical or psychological trauma; often sudden and intense trauma such as child abuse, death, or exposure to trauma that the child was unable to handle.

The defenses that I am referring to, from the effects of criticism, are usually longer term, slower in evolving and more insidious. None-the-less they have a marked effect on the development of the character and ego of the developing child. These defenses are quite specific to varying degrees of criticism - most often from one or both parents or an adult who has played a predominant role in raising the child in question.

At early ages of 2-6 the best and most easily accepted defense is withdrawal, physical and emotional withdrawal. While this occurs more in female children than male children, it is more accepted in girls than boys and thus becomes a very significant defense for them. When it occurs in boys, our societal attitude toward boys is such that this is not considered as an acceptable defense as boys are supposed to be more aggressive and outgoing. Please do not misunderstand, what I am describing is simply descriptive of how it is. It is not condoning nor do I believe that it reflects the healthy attitudes of child rearing in our society. Physical and emotional withdrawal also leads to less risk taking, less exposure in the environment and it reduces the opportunities for growth and learning. However, it is a good protective device which works for the child. In boys, however, it may not work as well and indeed could lead to greater criticism either in the family or in the school once the child reaches school age. No risk behavior often leads to children developing in isolation without friends.

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When both parents are critical specific individual defenses become essential for survival. When one parent is significantly more critical than the other manipulation, divisiveness, debate and secretiveness contributes to the family alignments and the defenses become matched by the less critical parent in alignment against the very critical parent. In families where there are more than one child this alignment may not be with all the children. Often one child is singled out as the object of criticism and the defenses and alignments occur with this particularly criticized child.

Since the primary feeling from criticism is hurt feelings a protective defense could be tearfulness. Again there are sexual differences in the development of this defense, but it may become a very effective defense if it results in reduced criticism.

Closely related to tearfulness as a defense is anger. Our kids (males especially) grow up with what I call a hurt > anger sequence. When a boy is heavily criticized, society does not allow verbalization of his hurt feelings. As such they often go directly to anger where the hurt is never acknowledged. In children the hurt is always there, but in boys it is common for it to go unacknowledged, because anger for a boy is more accepted and because anger toward someone being critical is a good defense. We often see it emerge in excess as a defense. Once again if the criticism is perceived as unjust or controlling then

the anger is always the primary feeling and it will naturally and predictably occur. In these cases the anger is not a defense, but simply the natural reaction to injustice and control issues. In summary, criticism causes hurt feelings as a primary feeling, but criticism which is perceived as unjust or controlling then will cause angry feelings. Either of these feelings in excess can become a protective defense against the criticizers.

One of the most frequently used defenses in children of heavily critical and punitive parents is the “blame game”. Because of the fear of physical punishment or of severe criticism, the blame game is mastered early in life. It is most efficient if there are siblings close in age. The primary feeling is fear and the defense starts with denial. The child basically denies that whatever went wrong was his fault. The defense might be sufficient in itself and stop there. Usually there are parental accusations of lying which may or may not be true. If the denial works sufficiently well to protect the child, then the defense may not progress further. If it doesn’t work then the next step is to find a scapegoat. So we have denial “I didn’t do it”, followed by blame “Jessica did it”. The highest level of defense which usually does not occur until adolescence is to anticipate the criticism and slip out of the loop completely by aggressively becoming critical of other things or people to keep the blame or fault away from you. This defense brings the generational disease of criticism full circle. Now the adolescent has become the critical one and often the drive to be perfect in the eyes of the parent, sets this teenager up to seek perfection in those around him and to be very critical of those who do not match his beliefs, expectations or standards.

In an earlier chapter we discussed the five “drivers” or motivations to avoid criticism and gain acceptance and love. The “Be Perfect” driver mentioned above, often develops in “families of severity”. Severely critical parents, physically, sexually or emotionally abusive families. Drug and alcohol involved families and finally families where one or both parents are irrational, unpredictable and explosively violent. The children in these families quickly learn that “perfect” behavior is their only hope in avoiding the painful severity of the parent whatever that severity might be. The defenses of denial, blame, aggressive criticism and perfectionism frequently emerge from such “families of severity”.

I have also found an interesting non-defense that has emerged from these “severe” family backgrounds. In the “normal” non-severe family nurturance, support and protection of the children is quite common. In the “severe” family usually one or both parents are very self-centered, ego-centered or self indulging. That is, they have so many of their own problems that they can not get out of themselves and step into the shoes or feelings of others around them. Their problems feel so intense that it is all that they can do to fend off the bad effects of their own problems. As a result the children never feel protected, supported or nurtured and indeed, maybe they have not been. But this “non-defense” which emerges, is the absence of the process or even the thought of self-protection. This “defenseless” person grows up repeatedly being taken advantage of and putting them-self in very vulnerable positions where they can get psychologically or physically destroyed. The person whose repeated selection of abusive mates or abusive friends almost always has an absence of this “protective” process.

I am amazed over and over how individuals simply do not know how to protect themselves and never even think about protecting themself. This non-defense (absence of protection) has never been modeled by the parents and has never been learned in the growth process. To be picked on, abused and criticized has become an accepted and expected way of life. It has become a way of life where there are no other options, and if protection and acceptance are experienced by another it is so unexpected that it feels uncomfortable and often worse than not having it.

## CHAPTER VIII

### If I Wanted to Change How Would I Do It?

I am a firm believer in three things about changing our society from a critical one to an accepting one. First, it has to be an enormous effort done in the educational system during the first six grades. Secondly, it will take two or three generations of concerted effort simply to begin the process. Thirdly, each one of us, through purposefulness, can significantly reduce criticism in our lives, but we can never eliminate it completely.

As a psychotherapist, family therapist, sex therapist etc. - I have had a unique opportunity to purposefully work on the reduction or elimination of criticism in my work. Hour after hour I can tell myself to 1. avoid the language of criticism, 2. know my beliefs well enough that I don't impose them on others and 3. educate instead of criticize. In doing this I have to understand others beliefs without having to change them unless they want to change them.. I can and have made this purposeful commitment to modify, eliminate, eradicate, criticism from what I do. I have no doubt that I have reduced my use of criticism and my thought process of a critical nature. I have restructured my use of the language that leads to criticism. I have become more accepting where appropriate, more nurturing and supportive and I have helped people learn how to better protect themselves. What I have not done is eliminate criticism. Each day I can think of several instances where I was unsuccessful in eliminating criticism.

. The above scheme has been my outline for change. If I were to give two words that would set the stage for reducing criticism, they would simply be "become mature", as if we could easily and willfully do this. Since this is a developmental process and may or may not be age related, it is of course not something that we can "will" to be done. If you study the great wise men of the past few centuries the absence of criticism seems to be a major characteristic of each one. Their approach to spreading their wisdom is to teach and not to be critical. They are fully aware of man's weaknesses, they do not focus on the negative, but instead they focus on how to extract ourselves from the negative. As part of a mature approach to avoiding criticism, looking for the positive and offering wisdom in a positive way, in a supportive or nurturing manner is very helpful. Indeed, anything that ordinarily would be said critically can be said in a supportive or nurturing manner with much greater effectiveness. For example, "You shouldn't be watching TV while you are trying to study" can be said "Get your studying done first and then reward yourself with a TV program", or "I cannot get as much studying done as quickly with the TV on and I find that I can enjoy TV a lot more once the studying is out of the way. Why don't you try that for a couple of days and see if it works that way for you". Teaching children to focus in ways that we may take for granted or which may seem like common sense, often has to be learned by younger children who often are over stimulated by so much visual and auditory noise. The critical "demand" not to mix the two (study and TV) of ten leads to that rebellious response automatically, whereas teaching can circumvent that authoritarian trap.. In the above example, changing the language of criticism from a "you should" to an I message "I find" or "I cannot do both as well at the same time", shifts the conversation from a critical one to an educational one. The incidental learning that goes along with this educational approach is far greater than the critical method. In the critical method the focus becomes the rebellion or adaptation to the parental "should" instead of the importance of focus, attention and concentration in accomplishing whatever it is that you are doing. In the critical method the lesson was never learned and in the supportive educational method the message at least had a chance to be learned whether or not it was. We

have at least set the stage for learning instead of creating a natural struggle between the parent's beliefs and the child's desire to do it his way.

It is very difficult to mold specific behaviors . As parents we often try to stop the child from developing negative behavior. For example, if we want to stop the child from being dishonest we emphasize the need to never lie, often punishing the child severely for lying. In this sense we make such a big thing about dishonesty that: 1. we create it as a battleground for rebellion and 2. we never get the point across about how important honesty is. Ironically, we create what we do not want by such a negative approach. If we want a positive outcome it is important to spend as much or more time and effort supporting and stroking honesty as we do being critical of dishonesty. It really is so difficult to be a parent because it requires thought and not just automatic thinking. To teach a child when he may lie i.e., when there are perceived belief differences , is much harder than simply to tell the child not to lie. We have to believe before we can teach. We have to realize that the issue of differing beliefs between the parent and the child is a set up for lying. To be able to warn the child that he is vulnerable to lying then, is a learned caution that may later pay off in his understanding about lying.

This example fits many forms of behavior. Generally, the more positive we are in our interactions, the more we mold those specific behaviors and avoid the critical negative behaviors that we do not want to reinforce. This leads us to the next step in reducing criticism. It is a very purposeful attempt to change the structure of a language in which we have all been raised. To modify what we now tend to do without thinking, in an "automatic" way is the most difficult struggle in reducing criticism. If children were taught in the earliest grades that critical language does not make them feel good about themselves or those around them, there might be a break in the automatic use of the language of criticism. In our society criticizing truly begins with a language which allows criticism and a language which is never challenged as to the effects that its use has on people around us. Instead of "What's the magic word", we need a clever phrase like "That's going to hurt somebody's feelings" when the child uses the language of criticism. While I doubt that we can change the structure of our language, there is absolutely no reason why we cannot teach children in our educational system the effects of the use of the current language in their interpersonal relationships. In my own upbringing, I never remember the effects of the use of our language being taught to me. No one ever taught me that my use of the critical phrases "you should, you ought, you must, you better not" could effect how the recipient felt about himself or me. No one taught me how their self-concept might be negatively affected. Yet I, as did most of us, learned never to "hurt" others feelings. Of course no one told us how to avoid that or that the language of criticism was intimately connected to the "hurting" of others feelings. Now while these examples seem trite and unimportant, an effort to reduce criticism or the automatic nature of criticism in our society is fundamentally based on a significant shift in the teaching of our language at a very early age. A shift from simply teaching verb tenses to humanistically teaching the effects of verb tenses. To teach basic truths where none have been taught before can make for the foundation of a better society. These truths are simply:

1. Criticism causes hurt feelings
2. Criticism is a function of our language.
3. Criticism causes a negative self-image and self-concept in the receiver.

If we make corrections in a positive educational manner we create positive learning and foster more of a positive self-concept. This nurturing and supportive position achieves the desired change much more often than does a negative critical approach. We simply have to teach ourselves and our children how to do this. Unfortunately, we have made little or no concerted effort to

do this in our educational system.

On a personal level moving from a “you” message (usually with the implied or actual pointed finger) to the “I” message, forces us to change the structure of our critical language. For example: “You should not swear” produces a very different critical message when it is stated as “ I am offended when you swear in front of me and I would appreciate it if you would check your language when I am around.” This change in language sets the stage for the “offender” to change his behavior out of courtesy or respect or desire to have a better relationship with me.

Since criticism often comes from someone whose beliefs have been violated, another way to reduce criticism is to select our battlegrounds better. Which of our beliefs are so important that we want those around us to know how important that they are and what they are? When raising children or in our work or in our daily relationships, it is very helpful for us to know which of our beliefs in each of these situations, has a high priority. For example, in the work situation, some supervisors believe in drawing a battleground around being to work on time. Enforcing this belief sets the stage for the employee to know that work is work and we expect a full days work from you. Known consequences for late arrival make it very clear that this belief is to be enforced and with the consequent penalties if it is not.

In other work environments subtle or covert criticism might be passed on for late arrivals. The belief of importance in being on time is not as clear and employees might play games around late arrival. Passive aggressive rebellious attitudes may prevail because of the critical “attitude” of the supervisor and the motives for being on time get confused. Are they on time because they want to please or kiss up, or because it is expected or are they continuously fighting the system and the supervisor. In the first example, the “on time” issue does not become an issue because it is not made a battleground. In the second example “being on time” gets much more negative attention than work gets positive attention and the critical approach has promised to make this a battleground for management and employees. In this example the battleground becomes a distraction from the major purpose of the company.

In couple relationships often the battleground areas detract from the couples ability to develop a close or intimate relationship. How the couple deals with money, sex or substance abuse are good examples of detractor issues which become battlegrounds, often because of different beliefs that each person has about these issues. If these differences become an “I’m right and your wrong” issue, the one up one down structure has been established. Then criticism from the one who is “right ” to the one who is “wrong” begins a marital pattern. These polarizing issues destroy the chances of equality and of intimacy in the relationship.

Incompatibility in relationships and in the work environment almost always focuses around our beliefs and their beliefs, my beliefs and yours. I have said many times that it may take only one belief difference to end a relationship. For example, slavery or not, abortion or not, spanking or not, saving money or not, married individuals going to lunch with the opposite sex or not, smoking or not, drinking or not, being a Republican or not, are all examples of relationship breakers. It is absolutely essential for these beliefs and the “corporate culture” beliefs to become known to the prospective partner or employee before there is any commitment to work or to build a relationship.

Too often the rose colored glasses of “love” obscure the belief differences . If they do become known their relative importance is obscured by the first exciting stage of the relationship. Rest assured that as stage two of the relationship approaches and stage one fades these belief differences begin to jump out of the closet. Many times we are not proud of these beliefs and they are safely and securely hidden for years beyond the first stage. Whenever they manifest themselves there will

be a serious challenge to the relationship, the partnership or the employee - employer relationship. There are many other instances where these belief differences are known and one or the other spouse firmly believes that he or she can change the other one. Not only do they believe that they can change the other one, but it is their right and duty to change the others misconceptions. Now we have very real problems because of the belief that I can change my partner, whether the partner is ever consulted with this need to be changed.

In an attempt to determine the strength and vulnerability of a relationship and the consequent potential for criticism and belief system differences, I devised a very simple scale to assess a relationship. This scale is on a continuum with change on one end and unconditional acceptance on the other. It is a double scale with one for each partner. Each person has to rate himself on the scale as to where he stands on the line. That is, do they want to change their partner or can they accept their partner like they are.

Acceptance \_\_\_\_\_ Change

If both parties are heavily on the change end, there are many predictable problems. If one is wanting the partner to change and the other does not, these two will have many predictable problems. If both are toward the acceptance end of the scale this predicts a type of relationship that will have less difficulty. As you might expect, the more one or both parties bases the success of the relationship on changing the other person, the more criticism there will be in the relationship. This also predicts greater anger and a greater number of potential battlegrounds for disagreement.

This scale and the position that couples place them self on the scale is also a function of age and maturity of the individual. In general the younger and /or more immature the more we expect to be able to change the other person. With age and maturity we move more toward choosing relationships where there is greater similarity of beliefs and greater acceptance of our friends and partners like they are.

Also, newer relationships tend toward the change end whereas longer term relationships have generally moved toward adapting to each other and accepting each other as they are. You can see that this simple scale becomes quite complex when you superimpose age, maturity and length of the relationship on it. The value of this scale however, is simply to educate the couple as to where they are and their partner is so that once identified, the couple can better understand the type of interactions that will come out of their placement on the scale. In terms of criticism, the closer you are toward unconditional acceptance, the less critical of each other you will be. The opposite is also true - the greater the need, desire or attempt to bring about change, the more criticism there will be in the relationship.

Thus, a major way to reduce criticism in relationships is to choose someone whom you are in sync with in their beliefs and to challenge any residual belief that you may have about your "responsibility" to change that person, that boss, that government etc. Change never becomes permanent from criticism after the age of 21 (and maybe at no age). Change only occurs as the result of internal desire, education, knowledge, growth, heavy motivation and consequent effort.

As an ongoing exercise, each of us has to be aware of our beliefs which includes our biases and prejudices and mis-learnings (from childhood) to educate ourself about them and to modify them as we grow. The adage of recognizing those things we can change and accepting those things that we cannot becomes central in our relationships and in reducing our criticism of others for not being like we want them to be. If we are unable to sort out this issue of what we can change and what we cannot, either in ourself or in others, then the idea of eliminating or reducing criticism will never be successfully tackled.

The most important bridge to reducing criticism is to learn how to be a good teacher. I have said earlier that anything

we say in a critical manner can be said from a teaching posture without all the negative effects of the criticism.

In our daily interpersonal interactions it is much healthier to say “Let me give you some information”, than it is to say “You should know better .” It is much healthier to say “I have found that this works better for me”. than “You shouldn’t do it that way”. It is much healthier to say “Lets see how many options we can come up with” rather than “The way you’re doing it will never work.” It is much healthier to say “Let me teach you what works for me” rather than “You better not do it that way.” It is healthier to say “Can you find two or three different ways to get the same result?” instead of “That’s a stupid way to do it.” Instead of criticizing - teach - teach - teach - . If you add support and nurturance to your teaching you have established a very powerful positive approach to whomever you are relating.

This type of mindset i.e. walking around saying to yourself “Teach with support and nurturance” eventually makes it second nature for you and criticism takes a back seat. Breaking the automatic nature of criticism requires a very purposeful mindset change that can be exercised over and over - if for nothing else than to add a positive approach to balance the automatically negative critical approach.

Another pet way of automatically being critical is to tell the other person (child, spouse, employee) all the things that can go wrong if they make a specific “ridiculous” choice. Trying to protect that person from bad consequences of his decision is a normal parental thing, however, it often involves being critical. Trying to get the child (usually after 9 or 10 or older) to run continuations if they make specific choices helps the child develop options and begin to think in terms of long term consequences - an art and process which we have gradually lost over the past 100 years. Processing cause and effect is something we have gotten away from in our world of ”instants” -instant food, instant stories, instant credit, etc.

In order to reduce criticism, we have to:

1. Get away from the automatic language which we have all learned so well;
2. Learn how to at least balance the criticism with positive , supportive, nurturing statements;
3. Practice teaching and creating a mindset to substitute criticism with “I” statements;
4. Find options;
5. Help others to look at long term consequences;
6. Teach cause and effect i.e. - if you do this - these are the effects and consequences;
7. Practice running continuations, i.e. what are all the outcomes that you can imagine if things work out and if they don’t;
8. Recognize what we can change and what we have to accept as unchangeable;
9. Let others be themselves and live with them and love them as they are;
10. Look at others and their beliefs and realize that they have developed ways of coping that work for them. These coping mechanisms may not work for you, but they do work for the other person. There simply are more ways than one to live and to be happy. It becomes very difficult to accept this fact - that the other people in this world do not think and believe or act and react the same way that you do and that they manage to survive and thrive, sometimes a lot better than we do.