

## CRITICAL THINKING & THE VOTING PROCESS

While teaching international physicians about leadership concepts at Stanford University, one of the most difficult growing and mind-expansive efforts was in the realm of critical thinking. Some physicians from different cultures/countries stated an amazing epiphany/insight as they forced themselves toward more personal critical thinking objectivity. In contrast, other physicians had more difficulty moving from their subjective biases in their thought processes. However, the changes that eventually occurred in all their critical thinking ability resulted in positive outcomes regardless of gender or clinical expertise. Diagnostic skills and accuracies due to their new emphasis on critical thinking were reported post their educational experience to be more accurate to improve patient outcomes.

Critical thinking involves objectively, analyzing, and evaluating any issue to form a judgment through an intellectually disciplined process of conceiving, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information from one or all of our senses. This objectivity includes the absence of bias/prejudice and increased fair mindfulness. The process becomes extremely important when voters must make serious choices regarding every aspect of a community's needs and the candidate they desire to have the responsibility to meet those needs. It is a crucial choice that defines the future quality of community life. Why are these objective considerations important in the voting process? Because we are civilized intellectual and participatory human beings with the capacity to analyze and be self-determined as to our future. To be otherwise is to awaken the savage beast within us that has no reason, purpose, or place in a civil and democratic society.

As an American, you have a personal responsibility to analyze each candidate before casting your vote—to determine through your critical thinking (objectivity) the extent of the qualities that you and your family hold dear. Your decisions (as a part of our democratic process) will hopefully be represented for a given future time as the consistent framework of our democratic society.

Recognizing and accepting the demonizing of other candidates is often common practice in the democratic process, as candidates challenge each other for a place of desired superiority. Candidates often accuse each other of being craven, lying, unfit, and unresponsive to community needs—and shall I go on? It can project a feeling of baby-eating monsters—(you know what I mean!) Don't be surprised at over-exaggerations of personal abilities and personal performance promises. And yet, don't believe all the critical points you hear! Each candidate contrives a game plan, and you are often the easiest person to be deceived as a voter. All this is par for the course of "running for office." Topics are framed in the issues of the day. Watch out—these framed anchoring comments either are important to you or intended to confuse you in your efforts to choose the best person to meet your philosophy of "democratic goodness."

Know what you value for yourself and others who are dear to your heart. Consider if the values of the person you vote for will meet whatever criteria and values you have for the progression of the things to come that are important to you and your family. Be gentle with yourself and candidates—knowing that candidates have varying qualities of goodness, kindness, and abilities that meet someone's needs—but your needs are the ones most important! Be attentive while YOU listen to other voters about their observations of pros and cons regarding candidates. Your listening skills will help to understand another person's intellect, understanding of the issues, and degree of reasonableness toward challenging critical

thinking efforts! However, be *independent in your thinking*—not just a crowd-follower or crowd-pleaser!

In determining the community's best candidate, the values and beliefs are variable enough to meet every individual's voting needs. However, your values and voting decisions will help determine an election outcome. It is also your loud and clear announcement related to community values, tolerances, and the expected course of goodness for Custer County.

Our perspectives, values, and beliefs radiate from our past experiences of personal and family needs and life experiences. What is the "right" voting choice for you may be wrong for someone else, and it is out of these personal differences that democracy is maintained.

The message rings loud and clear--think—think—think critically about your desire to continue the path you selected at the last election or move boldly in another direction. We are not robots without responsibility for our own voting decisions and democratic outcomes.

Know this—nothing ever stays the same (the universal concept of Entropy). Entropy says everything negatively changes, declines, or disintegrates unless positive intervention occurs. Only through our critical thinking (intellectual objective evaluation and analysis) to make positive voting choices can we hold democratic voting to be a "steady as she goes" approach without Entropy's naturally imposed universal negative decline.

Spread the word---See your friends at the voting polls!

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