

Thinking Errors Defined

By Tracy E. Barnhart

Published: 01/18/2010

<http://www.corrections.com/news/article/23237-thinking-errors-defined>

I got a lot of response to my initial article on criminal thinking errors requesting more information of the errors as defined. Well here are the criminal thinking errors defined and I hope they will assist you in understanding the personalities of the inmates you work with.

ANGER

This thinking error keeps others away and helps us avoid other unpleasant feelings like shame, sadness, or fear. Rather than focusing on our real feelings or actual actions, this thinking error causes us to focus on the anger and not the real issue at hand. When we throw tantrums, act aggressively, respond sarcastically, or fly into a rage, we get others to focus on the thinking error, the anger.

Sometimes, we use this thinking error to try to intimidate or threaten others, so that we can remain in control. Sometimes this thinking error may go underground. For example; "I don't get mad, I get even."

ASSUMING

This thinking error is also sometimes called "mind reading." We use this thinking error when we believe that we know how others think or feel. Rather than checking the facts by asking how someone feels, we assume that we know by doing what we want based on our assumptions. For example, we assume that invading someone's personal boundaries will be okay because we have invaded those people's personal boundaries before.

We also use this thinking error when we do not inform our employer that we are unable to attend work, by assuming that will be okay because it was, "for a good reason." The antisocial spends a great deal of time assuming what others think, what others feel, what others are doing. He or she uses this assumption in service of whatever criminal activity or behavior they decide to engage in.

The antisocial assumes that other people do not like him. This gives him an excuse to blow up, be angry or rob, molest, not pay taxes, or any other thing that he has in mind. Assuming takes place every day and the antisocial makes assumptions about whatever he wishes in order to support his antisocial behavior.

AVOIDING THE HOT IRON

Without looking at the past, we cannot learn from our errors and change the future of our behavior. Our goal setting or defined purpose is based on our understanding of the past and our vision of the future. For example, "Why do you keep bringing up my future plans and goals?" Answer, "My previous error or failing in some areas are why I have a plan or goal." Without facing our weaknesses or bad habits, we will probably do it again.

Using this thinking error, we do not understand why others keep bringing up our past and/or mentioning our previous profiles or history. Without looking to the past, we cannot see the future with any sort of clarity or vision.

BLAMING

We use this thinking error of "pointing the finger," by finding an excuse not to solve the problem. When we blame others, we are no longer responsible. Our blaming others or fingering can also be used to build up resentment toward someone else for "causing" whatever has happened. Through the fingering technique, we can be angry at or have our family angry with someone else, "rather than us." For example, "The pre-sentence investigator hates men." "My sister's friend has caused us a lot of problems." She is the one who said; "The trouble with you is that you're always looking at me in a critical way."

Blaming is an excuse to not solve a problem and is used by the antisocial to excuse his behavior and build up resentment toward someone else for “causing” whatever has happened. Example; “I couldn’t do it because he got in my way,” “The trouble with you is you’re always looking at me in a critical way,” “He should have told someone sooner,” “He wanted me to.....” Blaming is often seen in what seems like ordinary conversation, that is, the antisocial may be observing some else’s behavior which has nothing to do with his, and still making blaming comments about other people. This often generates excitement for the antisocial and is used to put others down, while he builds himself up.

CONFUSION

When using bafflement or confusion, we present ourselves as puzzled about a situation. We claim not to understand the question, but we reject any clarification of the question. When we can remain perplexed or confused about assignments, rules, requirements, expectations, or the facts, we do not have to work at meeting our obligations.

If we are truly confused, we need to ask for clarification at that time. It is a thinking error to wait until later and claim ignorance. Sometimes we will use confusion by pretending to be unsure of what we did. For example; “Yes, wait a minute, no; I’m not sure what I said to the officer.”

EXCUSES

This thinking error allows us to have justification or reasons for anything and everything. Whenever we are held accountable for our actions, excuses will automatically be given. We have an excuse for everything and we will carefully concentrate on the justification or reasons of the excuse something has happened. For us, this is better than accepting responsibility for what has occurred.

For example, “I had a bad attorney.” “My family was rich.” “My family was poor.” “They don’t like my skin color.” “I’ve never been able to read very well.” “I’ve never liked math anyway.” “The judge does not like teenagers.” Excuses are made by the antisocial for anything and everything. Whenever held accountable for actions, excuses are often given. Excuses are a means of finding a reason to justify their behavior.

FACT STACKING

We use this thinking error when we tell the truth in such a way that the facts help us not to take responsibility for our actions or behavior. Instead it makes us feel powerful, uncomfortable, and unlike others. When using logical arguments or fact stacking, we rearrange the facts for our benefit, For example, “he was teasing me all along.” “He did that before I punched him.” “What I did not explain is that I had been bullying him for at least two months, in and out of school.”

FRONTING

We present ourselves as helpful or agreeable, when we are really trying to manipulate others so that we will not be confronted. We always think of ourselves first by being selfish. When we are being phony or fronting by being a “nice guy,” we will always feel something is owed back to us. For example, I agree to accept what the others are saying, when I am really thinking; “If I am nice and agree with them, they will leave me alone.” The message with this thinking error is, “since I am nice to you, you must be nice to me.” You often hear inmates say “Stop Fronting.” This is also the same as playing a roll that you are not really. If you are attempting to be something you don’t really believe or the real you you’re fronting.

GRANDIOSITY OR MAXIMIZING

We know this thinking error as the opposite of minimizing. We maximize when you’re trying to make little things seem like very important things. This is what some people may call “Making a mountain out of a mole hill.” Using this thinking error often causes others to focus on little insignificant things rather than the issue at hand. Sometimes by “setting little fires,” we can focus attention on trivial matters by creating chaos. This way, we do not have to focus on the facts of our behavior and feelings.

MINIMIZING

This is a common thinking error. We use this thinking error when we try to make things seem smaller than they really are. Often, we will use words like, “just” and “only” to make what we did seem smaller. We depreciate our actions, they become unimportant, and “not that bad.” For example, “I only teased her a little bit, not all the way.” “I only screamed at her once.” “No biggie, I don’t care anyway.”

The antisocial often minimizes his behavior and actions by talking about it in such a way that it seems insignificant. This is not accounting for the significance of his behavior. Minimizing is particularly seen when the anti social is confronted on his behavior.

HELPLESSNESS

This thinking error occurs when we present ourselves as being helpless, unable to meet expectations and we are in need of others. This thinking error is very similar to victim stance. When using helplessness, we will enjoy talking about how, “I cannot write, cannot solve problems, or cannot overcome my disabilities.” I heard this lot dealing with inmates requesting favors.

This is how we manage to make our control over others. When confronted for using this thinking error, we may try to make others seem or look uncaring. Using this thinking error, we may enjoy talking about our problems, but we still need to be responsible for our actions and or work at improving our weaknesses in any area of our life.

HOPOVERS

This thinking error is also known as “sidetracking” or “changing the subject.” We use this thinking error when we try to change the subject, when we are confronted with facts about our behavior. We bypass to another subject very quickly to distract others from the real issues. Example, “Why did you join a gang?” Answer, “Gangs have been around for centuries and originated in China.” Remember, part of learning is disciplining yourself to stay focused and deal with the issues or problems at hand.

HOT SHOT OR COCKINESS

Using this thinking error, we believe that we are triumphant over everything. We make ourselves believe this. When we believe this, we do not believe we need any further goal setting, development, or improvement. We have no doubt that we can be around high risk situations, with no risk of making the same mistakes again. Using this thinking error, we overestimate the amount of change we have gone through. Cockiness thinking error makes us believe, “I know all the answers.”

For example, “I’m an honor roll student now. I don’t have to worry about studying anymore.” “I’ll never fail that class again.” “I’ll never flunk a test again.” Remember, there is always a need for change, which is necessary for growth and maturity. Adults and authority figures are aware of this and will remind us that we do not know everything. Just ask them.

I CAN’T ATTITUDE

Sometimes we use this thinking error so that others won’t expect us to do what is required or expected. This attitude will ultimately lead to disappointment, failure, a loss of control, or a loss of freedom. For example, “I am powerless to learn all these rules” “I can’t complete that assignment”, “I am unable to do that math”, “Society has too many rules. I am a rebel at heart,” and “I am unqualified. I can’t, means I won’t.”

IT’S MINE, OR ENTITLEMENT

Using this thinking error, we think that it is proper to take what we want. We tell others and ourselves: “If you don’t give me that pencil, I’ll take it.” Using “It’s mine” or ownership, we expect others to do what we want. We treat the property of others as ours, to do with as we please. To steal, to borrow without permission, or to vandalize, means

nothing to us.

For example; we borrow someone's valuable pen. We believe we are entitled to keep it as long as we want, because we helped the lender with their mathematics. For example, we talk only about our rights, never considering the rights of others or our responsibility in the matter.

JUSTIFYING

This is very much like blaming others or excuse making. Our justifying allows us to explain the reason for things. When we justify or explain we always find reasons for why things are the way they are. We do not want to recognize that things are the way they are because of us, so we find a way to explain or justify them.

For example, "She didn't have a chance to be a good person anyway, so it didn't matter as much with her.", "He wasn't my natural brother, only my step-brother.", "My girlfriend wouldn't do what I asked. What was I supposed to do?" Justifying – Justifying is the anti-social's way of explaining things. Examples: "If you can, I can", "I was so lonely I had to,,", " He/She yelled at me, that's why I hit", "No one listens to me, so that's why I can't do anything." The person with anti-social thinking finds justification for all issues that he does not wish to own with responsibility.

KEEPING SCORE

Sometimes, this thinking error takes the form of playing "reprisal." Often we will be angry or hostile and will be quietly keeping record of others mistakes, rather than focusing on the issue at hand. This allows us to feel better about ourselves because we haven't had as many mistakes as others. In other words, we are "one up" on others. When criticized or confronted, we respond by bringing up the errors of others, so that we will not be the focus of attention.

By keeping score, we avoid taking responsibility for our own behavior, and avoid working at improving. For example, someone says to you; "You were lying when you said that I was in your room." I say to the group; "Don't even start with me. Two months ago I hated Jim, so I set him up."

LACK OF EMPATHY

Using lack of empathy, we do not think of how our actions influence others, except in the most obvious physical sense. We have no concept of emotionally hurting others or causing great mental pain.

To stop using this thinking error, we need to put ourselves or a loved one in another person's shoes. How would we feel if we or a loved one was emotionally, mentally, or physically hurt? For example, I will tease a classmate about failing the test. Seeing this is bothering him, our feedback or response is: "It wouldn't bother us if we stopped thinking about it", or for example; We get into a fight with one of our peers in PE during flag football and all we have to say is, "It could have been worse. We could have really hurt him."

LET'S FIGHT, OR SPLITTING

Sometimes we like to start frays so we can stand back and watch. We will manipulate and control others so that they become aggressive or hostile toward each other, while we can be a shining example of maturity. Sometimes, we will then enter into the conflict as a mediator and try to resolve it so that we can look good.

Another example of "let's fight or splitting" is when we try to divide others by turning them against each other so that we can get our way. This is done when we ask one person one question and the answer is "no," so we then ask a different person the same question and get a "yes." Then when the first person says "no" again, we can say, "But Mr. Smith lets me do that." This is a common tactic among inmate to play staff and administration against each other. You will hear they say things like, "First shift lets us do that"

LYING

This is one of the most common thinking errors used by us. We use it in many ways. We use it to distort, confuse, or make fools of other people. There are three kinds of this thinking error. One: Omission, we make up simple things that are not true. This kind of thinking error is simple and clear. We simply say things that are not true and that have never happened. Two: Commission, this is when we tell a half truth. We state things that are true, but leave out the important details. We are not being truthful by leaving things out, but what we say is true.

Three: Action, we behave or act in a way that is not accurate or that suggests something that is not true. We may show support for someone else, when in fact we are being critical of the person. By showing support for the person, we may encourage the person to make a mistake, which makes us look better. It is not so much that we are saying things that are not true, but we behave in ways that can be misinterpreted by others.

MAKING FOOLS OF

This thinking error allows us to ridicule other people. We feel powerful and controlling, when other people are dependent on us. We will be in a powerful position by keeping other people waiting, hoping, and wondering. For example, we stole a key to an important room. As the owner of the key is asking everyone and searching everywhere, we try to make a fool of the owner by saying, "I have the key, and you can have it if you can find it." Later, after being taken at my word I say, "I was only joking, I wouldn't admit it if I had it."

Another example is when someone compliments me on my work. We can make a fool of the complimentary by failing the next work assignment. This is a very tempting game for me, instead of doing the work at hand. This is the effect of lying on others, and "taking others with them." Antisocialist make fools of others by agreeing to do things, and not following through, by saying things that they do not mean, by setting others up to fight, but inviting frustrations and letting people down, as well as numerous other ways. Making fools of is a major ploy for antisocial and a major behavior common to all. Antisocial delight in making fools of professional people, such as therapists, lawyers, judges, correctional officers, and anyone they can take in, telling stories to get over on you.

MR. GOODGUY

This is a type of "fronting." Using this thinking error, we try to present ourselves as a nice person who does not make mistakes in our life. When we use this thinking error, we try to outweigh our mistakes with good deeds. We may present ourselves as caring about others, doing well in school by following directions.

However, it is present in how we think of ourselves, than what we actually do. This caring attitude is quickly gotten rid of when an opportunity for personal gain or pleasure presents itself. We need to be true to others and ourselves. We need to face who we really are. Caring about others and ourselves is a full time job, not something done to look good.

MY WAY, OR NO WAY

This thinking error is also known as "all or nothing." For example, "my way or the highway." We use this thinking error by trying to exert our power over others through insisting that things be done our way or not at all.

Using this thinking error, we see things in only black and white, success, or failure. Using this thinking error, we do not see the alternatives and we lose our power to choose between alternatives. We believe we have to be number one and anything else is a failure. For example, "If I cannot be the best, then I don't want to do it." "If we can't play basketball, then I don't want to play anything." Remember, there are usually alternatives or choices about learning and getting better comes in stages of maturity.

PET ME

We are often very selfish and think only of our needs. We often set up other people so that our needs are constantly being met. We want to do things so that we get the compliment. We want to be noticed, cuddled, recognized, get the attention, and certainly we want to avoid feeling bad.

For example, we purposely act and behave in certain ways so that others will notice or applaud. If we are to hand in a written assignment, we will want to personally hand the assignment to the instructor. Another example of this thinking error is when we complete the assignment for the purpose of gaining approval, rather than for the purpose of learning or changing.

POWERPLAY

Also known as, “authority conflict,” this thinking error is when we want all the power and wish to be right no matter what. We enjoy arguing, fighting for the sake of arguing, and fighting with others. We get a high from dominating other people. We do not care that we have used other people to get this feeling; we believe that this is our right. We disallow others to learn due to the disruption this thinking error causes.

We do not allow others to meet their obligations because they are dealing with this unruly behavior. We are placing our individual needs over the needs of others or the teams.

REDEFINING

This is our process of determining the boundaries, by shifting the focus of an issue. We then avoid solving the problem and we use this thinking error as a power play to get the focus or attention away from ourselves.

This thinking error allows me to avoid looking at the real issue. Question, “why didn’t you do your chores for this week?” Response, “I have done my assignment for the last three weeks.” Question, “Do you have your money saved for your driver’s license examination?” Response, “I am very concerned about how hard the test will be.” Redefining is shifting the focus of an issue to avoid solving the problem.

REFUSAL TO ACCEPT OBLIGATIONS

Using this thinking error we say, “I forgot” as an excuse for not completing assignments, meeting institutional expectations. For example, raising our hands in class, bringing materials required for the course, cooperating with the teacher, using appropriate language in class, respecting life and others property.

When we use this thinking error, we do what we want and ignore our responsibilities or promises. Forgetting is not a valid excuse; we are accountable for all of our actions and for all the things that we forget.

REFUSAL TO ACKNOWLEDGE FEAR

Using this thinking error, we often tell ourselves, “Nothing scares me.” We cut off the fear that most people experience and which stops most people from doing what they know is wrong. Using this thinking error, we cut off any anxiety that prevents ourselves from doing what we know to be wrongful acts.

For example, “I don’t care if I flunk this test,” “suspension or expulsion or incarceration does not scare me.” “Go ahead give me detention or suspension I’m not scared of you.” For others not using this thinking error, fear is an incentive for self-improvement. Fear is something that takes great courage to face and understand.

SECRETIVENESS

Often, we want to keep mysteries about ourselves. We may keep secrets and claim that it is part of my confidentiality. Using this excuse, we never open up to others and take a chance to trust. By doing this, no one can help us or even know us well enough, so that we may truly accept them. By keeping secrets when others want us to give up the mysteries, we maintain power and control over others, but the mysteries maintain the power and control over ourselves.

Often, we keep mysteries because we are often afraid of rejection. Many times, we keep mysteries from ourselves as well as others. For example, “I can’t tell anyone.” Face your fears and decide why you are afraid of telling your secrets. Then decide what you need to do to get past the fear. If you tell your secrets, then they will no longer have

power over you.

SEEKING SYMPATHY

We do not like to feel as though we are wrong. We will feel better if we can get others to feel sorry for us. "Seeking sympathy" is when we say things or do things in order to get others to feel sorry for us. For example, "My girlfriend probably will break up with me soon, so why should I care?" "Why should I ask questions? My questions are always stupid." "My family will be better off without me around." "I never get to do anything around here."

SILENT POWER

We like the attention that this thinking error brings to us and enjoy watching the frustration grow within others. We also like the feeling we have over others. When we focus on our silence, it stops us from dealing with the real issues at hand. Remember, our silence will not help us with our goals. Our real strength will come from working with others and participating. Our strength will come from sharing our experiences, feelings, and thoughts with others as we learn to trust. For example, I am upset with one of my friends because of what he said and I am showing my anger by yelling. When approached by an authority figure to find out what is going on, I refuse to discuss the matter by clamming up.

Using this thinking error, we become quiet, often refusing to participate or even explain our feelings. Often, we wait for others to rescue us by encouraging us to talk.

SLACKING

We are slacking when we try to do the bare minimum required and nothing more than what is absolutely necessary. We want to meet the goals and objectives or to complete the assignment so we can relax and kick back or rest. We are concerned to complete our projects only as something to be done to get someone off my back. We put forth minimum or mediocre effort and we are not concerned with changing, modifying, or improving ourselves.

We do not want to wait for gratification we are impatient or restless. We want what we desire right now, not later. We fail to realize that goal setting and having a defined purpose are about commitment to change. That change requires hard work, patience, responsibility, and effort. Our improving is not about semesters or time completion; it is about commitment, genuineness, self-motivation, change, and growth.

UNIQUENESS

This thinking error allows us to believe that we are so special that the rules are only for others, certainly not me. This thinking error allows us to believe that we are one of a kind and unlike all others in my program. We use this thinking error to tell ourselves, "I am so horrible and terrible that nothing or no one can help me." Therefore, I am not like anyone else. Alternatively, I might tell myself, "I didn't do anything as bad as these others, I am not like them, and these rules are for the others, not me."

This is a very common thinking error that can be seen when we tell ourselves that we do not have to listen to others and only have to participate when others are focused on us and someone is speaking directly at us. While others are talking, our using our uniqueness will often appear as being bored or daydreaming. For example, you will start playing with your shoes because you believe that improvement is for someone else, but definitely not you.

VAGUENESS

We use this thinking error when we try to avoid giving specific information. We do not want to be pinned down. When we are not precise and clear, our actions can never be examined. For example, Question, "Did you break the motion detector?" Response, "I didn't do that." Question, "What did you do to your little brother?" Response, "I did something kind of bad." Question, "What did you do?" Response, "I took something away."

Obviously, these answers are unclear, not precisely answered, and we have allowed ourselves to avoid the reality of what we really did.

VICTIM STANCE

Often, we want others to feel sorry for us. To do this, we present ourselves as the true victim in various situations. Sometimes we use this thinking error by explaining, "I would not have hurt him if I had not have been hurt myself." We use this thinking error to try to make others see us as powerless and therefore not responsible for our own behavior. By doing this, we try to avoid any accountability or responsibility.

For example, "Poor me, no one really loves me." "I couldn't help it, no one understands me." "I am locked up in this prison away from my family." We are not powerless, we need to accept the freedom and responsibility of the powers of choice that we have.

YOU'RE OKAY, I'M OKAY

We often try to be extremely positive in order to avoid looking at the reality of the pain that we have caused. We will often work at being helpful, cooperative, and supportive of others. We may even start to worry about others problems, rather than think about our own actions and any hurt we may have caused. Sometimes we call this co-dependent.

Using this thinking error, we may be the one who feels we must constantly compliment others or be humorous. Most often, we want to focus on our own weaknesses. Using this error, we avoid reality by focusing on how things ought to be rather than they are or how we are. We manage to avoid responsibility for what we have done.