What is Self-Criticism?

Although self-criticism may sound like somewhat of a vague concept, it is actually a very real problem, which can have a severe impact on your life, self-esteem, goals-setting, and relationships with others.

A teacher mentally scolds himself for being too hard on a student, "Why do I always do this? That poor child looks so sullen and all because of me."

A lawyer loses a case and despite having won many others in the past, she tells herself, "I'm good for nothing. I couldn't win a simple case. I shouldn't have become a lawyer, I am not fit for the job."

The food is saltier than it should, be causing the husband and father to question his culinary skills, "Gah, I have done it again. Why can't I ever get it right? My wife will hate me for this."

Do these examples sound familiar? Do you have a similar commentary running in your head? If so, you may be prone to self-criticism.

Being Self-Critical

Self-criticism refers to the behavior of pointing out one's own perceived flaws. It could be directed towards various aspects of the self, be it physical appearance, behavior, inner thoughts and emotions, personality or intellectual attributes. Failing at something that is important to us, whether it is a relationship, school or work, can be painful. Most of these experiences jolt us, threatening the very core of who we think we are and who we aspire to be.

Protective Strategies

Failure makes us turn to self-protective strategies. These include:

- Rationalizing what happened, in order to place ourselves in a positive light

- Blaming another or discounting the importance of the event itself.

These make us feel better in the short term but overall, they are less likely to help us improve or avoid repeating these mistakes in the future.

Research shows that those with an overly inflated view of their performance showed decrements in subsequent motivation and performance as compared to people who viewed themselves more realistically. These people believe they have reached perfection, and hence stop putting efforts into improving themselves.

Confronting Imperfections

Although easier said than done, taking an honest view of oneself is important, in order to strive for betterment. Confronting one's faults and imperfections can be overwhelming and may lead to feelings of despair and hopelessness.

Self-Criticism Can Be Detrimental

In order to take responsibility for our actions and make an effort to improve, we might get carried away and blame ourselves far more than our share and pull ourselves down. Research reports self-criticism leads to an increase in procrastination and impedes goal-progression. Feeling worthless and incompetent drives away any likelihood of putting a better effort next time.

Self-criticism is both powerful and dangerous. In moderation, it works just right to stimulate improvement, but too much can ruin your self-confidence.

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