

Ongoing Discussion “Thought Piece”

From Judgment to Discernment

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As we move throughout our day, we typically encounter situations where we jump to conclusions or attribute errors, biases or other faults to ourselves and or other people. In interpersonal situations we interrupt, talk over or cut people off to push our viewpoint and try to avoid being seen as wrong or not knowing. In other situations we may just shut up and judge ourselves. Frequently we don't even realize when we are doing it. Even when we do, we lack the will to stop it. Typically negative judgments carry with it some kind of rejection and castigation. It may simply be the act of pulling ourselves back from the other person, creating separation. Or it can involve the spewing of a lot of negative attitude and lack of cooperation. It can also just be self-directed. No matter how much we improve organizational structure and process our planning and decision making cannot thrive without altering these defensive patterns. We will continue to experience limited results if we do not move from judgment to discernment.

Judgment Story

A couple moves into a new neighborhood. The next morning while they are eating breakfast, the woman sees her neighbor hanging the wash outside. "That laundry is not clean; she doesn't know how to wash correctly." Her husband looks on, remaining silent. Every time her neighbor hangs her wash to dry, the woman makes the same judgment. A month later, the woman is surprised to see a nice clean wash on the line and says to her husband: "Look, she's finally learned how to wash correctly. I wonder who taught her how?" The husband replies, "I got up early this morning and cleaned our windows." And so it is with life... What we see depends on the clarity of the window through which we look. In this case the inner "Judge" or "Critic" was the window.

The "Judge"

One of the major impediments to clear thinking and discernment is our inner "Judge" or "Critic" sub-personality- the voice at the edge of our consciousness that quickly judges ideas, differences, ourselves and others. It is part of the overall negative or balancing feedback loop that acts to protect our currently held windows- assumptions, beliefs and world views. As such, it often tries to keep us as a somewhat closed system. The "Judge" is typically at the core of most disruptive emotional reactions and unproductive conflict. It is one of the biggest creators of "pebbles"-ongoing resentments that keep people from interacting productively.

	Self -judgment	Judgment of others	Judgment of ideas
Some of its familiar refrains are: Self - judgment			
"They must think I'm so stupid!"	"Be perfect!" "Be practical!"	"You will never get it!"	"This sucks!" "This is so bad!"
"That's not my area!"	"I'll fail!"	"They are so stupid!"	"Nope"
"Follow the rules dummy!"	"That's dumb!"	"You gotta be kidding me!"	"That won't work."
"You are so stupid!"		"Were you not there when..?"	

What is “its” mindset / purpose / aim? The “Judge” is critical and serious. It is a closed system with its own logic. It believes it knows right from wrong. It is many-faceted and somewhat unique to each individual. Generally its aim is to protect, correct, control, punish and perfect.



Where did it come from? The self-organization of the “Judge” involved the introjections of heavy handed messages from peers, parents, teachers and coaches in the context of learning right from wrong, good from bad and black and white. This dualistic thinking is often coupled with learning grammar, math and other subjects that teach us to think logically. So when we encounter an idea that is outside of our current world view, beliefs, values or logic bubbles, it can be experienced as a form of cognitive dissonance or subjective threat to who we are, our sense of identity, often evoking a stress response.

Systems Thinker, Margaret Wheatley puts it this way “in all human systems everything self-organizes around an attractor that someone identifies with, there is a ‘self’ that gets organized. Michael Polanyi states: “We incorporate into our bodies what we come to learn about the world, so we experience that knowledge as part of us.” Lacking awareness and understanding of the response, the “Judge” acting as a defense mechanism often comes into play. It is also the biggest obstacle to creative thinking as it can suppress the creative insight before it reaches consciousness.

What to do about it?

Learn how to become a “fair witness” by peripherally observing your mind chatter as you move throughout your day. Discovering a deeper sense of “I” in this way enables you to notice when and how often your “Judge” is in play. For example, when you experience some tightness in your body and hear “How could you be so stupid?” or “Oh, yuck, it's raining” or you are, somewhat bluntly, telling someone “That won't work” your “Judge” is probably in play. At the end of each day do an evening review and make notes about what you observed as a “fair witness.” After a week or so, during your evening review, imagine what your “Judge” might look like. Give it a face or image and then open a conversation with it. Ask it what it wants. It typically wants to feel correct, in

control, superior and perfect. Then ask it what it really needs. What it typically really needs is to feel secure and safe. Reassure it that you will keep everything safe.

The next step is to move to your "fair witness" position or deeper "I" in real time. Then cut off "its" thoughts, sensations and feelings as quickly as possible. Discern what's valid. Ask yourself questions like: *Do I need to aggressively challenge this idea. What am I assuming, and why? Are my assumptions valid? What mental model am I operating from? Why do I think that is "dumb", "stupid" or "bad"? Is this really based on all the facts? What data am I selecting out to use? How do I feel about ..? Why might I be feeling / thinking this....?* Then give it what it really needs. Reassurance, that this way of protecting yourself is not necessary. Everything is OK. When physical or emotional reactions are too powerful, exit the situation and go to a place where you can express or release the physical or emotional tension. Then move to your "fair witness" or deeper "I". Extract what's valid. Give it what it needs-reassurance that everything will be OK.

Establish a habit of discerning. Practice seeing with greater neutrality by simply observing what is happening and seeking to build a shared understanding of what is. When someone doesn't agree with you, calmly communicate your concerns and preferences with clarity and kindness. Keep in mind that they just see things differently-through a different window. Being curious about your own and others' windows facilitates discernment and shared understanding.

The "Judge" when properly recognized, understood and expressed, can be utilized as an extraordinary ally in creativity. It sits in the cluster of critical thinking faculties that can help discern boundaries to be broken, assess viability, and make incredible distinctions that lead to new creative ways of perceiving things. Remember, creativity is looking at the same patterns everyone else is but seeing something different.

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BIOGRAPHY

Peter Stonefield, BSEE, MA, Ph.D. is President of Stonefield Learning Group, consultant, psychologist and author of *Managing Innovation* and numerous articles. He was an electronic engineer and marketing director for the Bunker-Ramo Corporation. He has successfully completed over 250 consulting engagements, created more than 20 different training and development programs and coached over 250 executives. He has facilitated the development of 20 knowledge leveraging "Communities of Practice" in engineering and marketing organizations. His client list includes Apple Computer, Baxter Laboratories, Dow Chemical, Hewlett Packard, IBM, Intel, Motorola, US Government, PPG, Sun Microsystems and several startups like Plaxo and Liquidity. He was the principal consultant to the winner of the US President's Quality Award for *Managing Change* in government. He taught graduate-level courses on the Cognitive and Creative Process, Leadership, Collaboration, Counseling Skills including Guided Imagery and the Purposeful Imagination. He was a director of the Learning In New Dimensions, a company that imported and evolved 'super-learning' techniques for use in business and education.

His current focus is on Agile Leadership a breakthrough leadership development program. Peter's mission is to catalyze and accelerate the evolution of organizations and people.

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