

## Are You Self-Aware or Self-Critical?

*Self-criticism or self-judgment is self-hatred. It will always hurt you. There is no exception to that.*

– Dick Olney

Imagine carrying an MP3 player around with you containing one single track. Any time you do something, you push “play” and hear the words, “You’re not good enough. You didn’t do that right. Why can’t you be better?”

Sound appealing? Of course not. Yet so many of us do exactly that – only we don’t need the MP3 player. We have a well-ingrained internal voice that offers a nonstop barrage of criticism. Nothing is safe from the judgment of the inner critic.

Frequently, that critic uses the guise of “constructive criticism.” We convince ourselves that we’re acting in our best interest by continually examining our flaws so we can grow and improve. But when we look a little deeper, we often discover a toxic habit that only serves to limit our potential, rather than expand it. Why? Because that focus on where we fall short is frequently destructive self-criticism masquerading as growth-inducing self-awareness.

How can you tell the difference? Simple. Self-awareness is about examining reality and looking for ways to positively grow. Self-criticism is about looking at yourself, finding the flaws, and reinforcing the message, “You’re not good enough.” No amount of self-criticism will add up to a positive result. Even if you do “improve,” the self-criticism will still be there, waiting to pounce on the new results.

Next time you catch yourself picking apart what you did wrong, what you could have done better, what you need to do differently next time, etc., ask yourself, “Where is this coming from?”

Does it come from a place of love, or a place of loathing? Do you see the positive potential of what you could become, or the frustration of what you are? How does it make you feel when you do it – on the road to growth or not good enough?

Start noticing the inner critic when it comes up. Notice what it has to say. Ask yourself, “What is the positive piece that this voice is ignoring? What was good about what I just did?” Ask yourself if the inner critic is being realistic, and if you would have the same opinion about somebody else.

Self-awareness can open the door to growth, improvement, and understanding. Self-criticism on the other hand can weigh you down with an endless loop of negative thoughts. Don’t get so focused on improving that you end up afraid to take the steps required to improve.

## **Putting It to Work**

- *Look at your past reaction to “imperfection.”* Look back over the last week or month. Make a list of times when you have seen something you have done as less than preferable. How did you respond? Where were you coming from? Were you self-critical, or self-aware?
- *Notice your reaction to your “imperfections”* Every day, try to notice your reaction to what you perceive as less-than-perfect performance, less-than-perfect characteristics, and less-than-perfect behavior. Ask yourself if that reaction will help you build or beat you down. If it doesn’t help you build, look at what alternative perspectives could be.
- *Review your reactions.* For the next week, do an end-of-day review on your self-aware/self-critical reactions that day.