



Criminal Thought Errors:

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A look at the works of Dr. Stanton Samenow, Ph.D.

Introduction

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Many years ago I had the luck to run across a book “Inside the Criminal Mind by Dr. Stanton Samenow, Ph.D. I had just finished the book as I began an assignment to help a company in pre-sale due diligence. Truly, but for this book, I would have been a piece of proverbial and professional toast.

The CEO of the company was an engaging, funny madman. I enjoyed my time with him; he was lively thought provoking and dead sure of where he and the company were going. We had a bite to eat, and I began listening to his ideas, dreams, problems, pride, sentimentality to his wife and children. After a few more drinks he discussed “between us guys” about the extramarital affairs he was enjoying and how he had scammed a house in which to live. He had pretended to buy the house, asked for the keys and moved in over a weekend. In California, he figured it would take them nine months to a year to evict him because of the law. He said to me “9 months in a huge house in the Hills – its free Mc Mansion.” In actuality – it took the rightful owner almost two years to evict him. It was a monolog tour-de-force, and I could not get in a word. As he continued a little voice in my head kept going, tick, tick, tick, tick. The voice in my head was ticking off all of the criminal personality thought errors as this man spoke.

I began my work on look at his company as a buyer would look at the company and began to dig deeper into this man’s background. Mind you this was back in the early 1990’s when the internet of things had yet to appear. What I found was one disaster followed by another follow by frauds SEC violations – it just kept going on and one. However, out of all of the schemes he had pulled – it was his bank reference that was fantastic. All of the business in which he engaged he provided a lawyer, accounting, and banking reference. Lawyer and accountants can be bought – but it is harder to do with banks. I looked at this man’s standard application, looked at his references and found the name of the bank “Uplands Commercial Bank, Uplands California.” It had a name and a phone number.

Being suspicious – as I have a license to be suspicious – I went to the yellow pages phone directory and found the advertisement for the bank. It had a nice line drawing and the bank and the banks address.

It was not far away, so I drove over to meet the reference. Try as I might – I could not find the bank at the address given in the telephone directory. Where I was standing was at an address in-between a fast food restaurant and a plant nursery. I check the book – I looked at the street – I even asked the people in the plant nursery if they knew where the bank was located. The questions prompted a response – “You another legal guy looking for the phantom bank?” A small dim light came on in my head.

I went back to the CEO’s office and from the lobby phone I called the number. Sure enough, the number rang as the last line in the office roll over and only rang in his office. The CEO answered the phone, and I told him I was waiting for him in the lobby.

He emerged from his office – at first, shaken and then in a fully enraged tantrum – threatening to beat me up and drop me in the desert, etc...

I suggest he pay me the last he owed me and I would depart. At first, he refused – but eventually saw the futility of the situation and paid me. In shared with his three attorneys what he was doing. One left immediately the second two stayed on with him. Both that stayed were disbarred.

Inside the Criminal Mind is such an important book – it is required reading for all of the IDDO instructors. All have commented something to the effect – I wish I knew all of this when I was a lot younger. Please do buy the book – but to whet your appetite here is a condensed version of the criminal thought errors.

THINKING ERRORS CHARACTERISTIC OF THE CRIMINAL (Yochelson and Samenow's "The Criminal Personality")

Initially, it is critical to watch the subject's mannerisms and actions. A lot of information can be gained about intentions before an interview begins. Certain behaviors are typical for a subject under stress that suggest deception will be an ingredient in the forthcoming interview. Keep in mind that never is a single behavior representative of lying or guilt. Instead, behaviors will cluster together as excellent "tells" about the subject being questioned. Below are some of the body language indicators:

- 1. Energy** - The criminal is extremely energetic. His or her high level of mental activity is directed to a flow of ideas as to what would make life more interesting and exciting.
- 2. Fear** - Fears in the criminal are widespread, persistent, and intense; especially fears of being caught for something, fear of injury or death, and fear of a put-down.
- 3. Zero State** - This is the periodic experience of oneself as being nothing, "a zero"; a feeling of absolute worthlessness, hopelessness, and futility.
- 4. Anger** - Anger is a basic part of the criminal's way of life. He or she responds angrily to anything interpreted as opposing what he or she wants. Anger is, for the criminal, a major way of controlling people and situations.
- 5. Pride** - Criminal pride is an extremely high evaluation of oneself. It is the idea that one is better than others, even when this is clearly not the case. Criminal pride preserves his or her rigid self-image as a powerful, totally self-determining person.
- 6. The Power Thrust** - Criminals need control and power over others. The greatest power excitement is doing the forbidden and getting away with it. The need for power, control, and dominance shows in all areas of their lives. The occasions when criminals appear to show an interest in a responsible activity are generally opportunities for criminals to exercise power and control.

- 7. Sentimentality** - Criminals are often excessively sentimental about their mothers, old people, invalids, animals, babies, their love attachments, and plans for the future
- 8. Religion** - Criminals use religion to support their way of thinking and their criminality. Their religious ideas are usually very literal and concrete. Religion (like sentimentality) does not consistently deter criminal thinking or actions but does support the criminal's self-image as a good and decent person.
- 9. Concrete Thinking** - Criminals tend to think in terms of particular objects and events, rather than general and abstract concepts.
- 10. Fragmentation** - This is a very basic feature of the criminal personality. It refers to radical fluctuations in the criminal's mental state that occur within relatively short periods of time. There is a pattern of starting something, and then changing one's mind. Criminals will make commitments with sincerity and great feeling, and then break these commitments within the hour. They may feel sentimental love for their children, and then take their money to buy drugs. Their personality is a collection of distinct, isolated, and contradictory fragments.
- 11. Uniqueness** - Criminals emphasize their total difference from other people. They feel themselves to be special, "one of a kind."
- 12. Perfectionism** - Criminals have extreme standards of perfection, although he or she applies these standards sporadically and inconsistently.
- 13. Suggestibility** - Criminals are (1) very suggestible with respect to any behavior that leads to what they want; (2) very resistant to suggestion toward responsible thinking and behavior.
- 14. The Loner** - Criminals lead a private, secretive life; one against the world (including fellow criminals). They feel themselves to be apart from others, even if outwardly they are active and gregarious.

15. Sexuality - Criminals have plenty of sexual experience, but little in the way of sensual gratification or competence in performance. Conquest is essential, and a partner is regarded as a possession.

16. Lying - Criminal's lying is a way of life. Lying is incorporated into his or her basic makeup and feeds other criminal patterns. More common than premeditated lying, is habitual lying, which becomes automatic. The criminal defines reality with his or her lies, and so maintains control.

17. The Closed Channel - In treatment, an open channel of communication requires disclosure, receptivity, and self-criticism. Instead, the unchanged criminal is secretive, has a closed mind, and is self-righteous. If therapy for the criminal is to be effective, an open channel between the criminal and his or her therapist must be established.

18. "I can't" - Criminals say, "I can't" to express a refusal to act responsibly. At the same time, they believe that there is nothing they can't do if he or she wants to. Criminals say, "I can't" to escape accountability for what he or she does.

19. The Victim Stance - When criminals are held accountable for their irresponsible actions, they blame others and portray themselves as a victim. The world does not give them what they think is essential, so they view themselves as poorly treated and thus a victim.

20. Lack of Time Perspective - Even more than wanting what they want when they want it, criminals demand immediate possession and success. They must be the best, have the best, right now.

21. Failure to Put Oneself in Another's Position - Criminals demand every consideration and every break for themselves, but rarely stop to think about what other people think, feel, and expect.

22. Failure to Consider Injury to Others – Criminals lives involve extensive injury to those around them. However, they do not view themselves as injuring others. When held accountable, they regard themselves as the injured party.

23. Failure to Assume Obligation – The concept of obligation is foreign to criminal thinking. Obligations interfere with what they want to do. An obligation is viewed as a position of weakness and vulnerability to other's control. Obligations are irritating to the criminal, and if pressed, he or she will respond with resentment and anger.

24. Failure to Assume Responsible Initiatives – The criminal declines to take responsible initiatives because, (1) responsible initiatives fail to provide the excitement and power thrust of forbidden activities, (2) they do not provide a guarantee of success and triumph, and (3) they are often afraid that accepting responsible tasks will expose their lack of knowledge and ineptness.

25. Ownership – When criminals want something that belongs to someone else, it is as good as theirs. "Belonging" is established in their minds, in the sense that they feel perfectly justified in getting their way. Criminals consider themselves decent people with the right to do whatever suits their purpose. They view the world as their oyster and view people as pawns or checkers, waiting to be dealt with as they wish. This thinking is habitual and without malice.

26. Fear of Fear – Criminals are fearful of fear and contemptuous of fear. When they discern fear in others, they point it out scorn it and exploit it. When fear occurs in them, it is a put-down, destroying their self-esteem. This also applies to the many states that denote degrees of fear- doubt, concern, apprehension, and anxiety. They deny these in themselves, but when they occur in others, the criminal is ready to pounce.

27. Lack of Trust – Although criminals do not trust others, they demand that others trust them. There are times when their trust of others is sincere, but this is only one of the many fragments of their personalities. It does not last.

28. Refusal to Be Dependant – Like anyone else, criminals depend on other people for some things in life. However, they do not see themselves this way. They fail to believe that a degree of independence is a necessary part of existence. To themselves, dependence is a weakness; it would render them vulnerable.

29. Lack of Interest in Responsible Performance – Criminals are not interested in responsible tasks that don't offer immediate excitement. They find responsibility boring. When they do become interested in a responsible project their interest is short-lived, unless they feel the excitement of being a conspicuous success.

30. Pretentiousness – Criminals do little to achieve, but carry tremendously inflated ideas about their capacities. They are, or will be the best, never that they will do their best. They are right, and others are wrong, "I usually get mad... if I hear somebody say anything wrong. I usually try to set them straight." When confined they regard themselves as more knowledgeable than prison staff and seize every opportunity to teach others.

31. Failure to Make an Effort to Endure Adversity – "Effort" refers to doing things that are contrary to what one prefers to do. In this sense, criminals expend little effort, though they may expend tremendous energy doing what they want to do. They refuse to endure the adversity of responsible living. The main adversity for criminals is the failure to be a big shot. Adversity is anything that is not going their way. Criminals escape from "adversity" into criminal thought action, which is exciting.

32. Poor Decision Making for Responsible Living – In important personal decisions, there is no sound reasoning, fact-finding, consideration of costs, or options. Criminals are reluctant to ask a question about non-criminal activities because they view it as a put-down to reveal their ignorance. If their pretensions and expectations are controverted by the facts, they do not want to hear them.

33. Corrosion and Cutoff - Criminals may be deterred from criminal activity by a sense of conscience, a sincere wish to change and by sentimental, religious, or humanitarian feeling, as well as, by fear of getting caught. Criminals overcome these deterrents to their criminality by the processes of corrosion and cutoff.

Corrosion - A mental process in which deterrents are slowly eliminated until the desire to commit a criminal act outweighs the deterrent factors. This is criminal scheming. In this process, a criminal's sentiments, ideals, and fears gradually give way to the desire for a criminal activity.

Cutoff - A mental process that eliminates deterrents from consideration completely and instantaneously. The gradual process of corrosion is completed by the final cutoff of fear and other deterrents to crime. Cutoff is a mental process that produces fragmentation (Number 10). Criminals radically move instantaneously from one mental state to another.

34. Building Up the Opinion of Oneself as a Good Person - Criminals believe that they are good and decent people. They reject the thought that oneself is a criminal. Performing sentimental acts towards others enhances the criminal's view of oneself as good. The image of themselves as good people gives them, in turn, a license for more crime, and postpones the recurrence of the zero state.

35. Deferment - Criminals defer or "put things off" in three distinct areas. (1) They carry with them the idea of an ultimate crime, the "big score," but defers enacting it. (2) They have the idea that one day they will quit crime, go straight and settle down, but that day is constantly deferred. (3) They have a habit of deferring the minor routine responsibilities of life - paying a bill, writing a letter, filing a tax return.

36. Super optimism - A criminal's mind works in such a way that a possibility or an assumption is an accomplished fact--an idea is a reality. If someone tells the criminal "maybe" he regards it as a promise. Anything that he or she decides to do is as good as done. The criminal uses cutoff to eliminate fear and doubt. The result is that as he or she approaches a criminal activity; the state of absolute confidence is reached. Superoptimistic, there is not a doubt in his mind.

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Similarity, if he does decide to become a responsible person, he is Superoptimistic of his or her success. Once this decision is made, the criminal will believe that change has already accrued.

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