
A Mental Health Perspective Towards Understanding Criminal Thinking

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“Inside the Criminal Mind” Antisocial Personality Disorder

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MATCH- the Famous Criminal Quotes with the Criminal who said it

1. "I'm a decent man who exports flowers!"
2. "Don't mistake my kindness for weakness, I am kind to everyone, but when someone is unkind to me, weak is NOT what you are going to remember about me!" "I have spent the best years of my life giving people the lighter pleasures, helping them have a good time. And all I get back is abuse, the existence of a hunted man!"
3. "Everybody is a gangster, until a gangster walks in the room!" "I never lie, because I don't fear anyone! You only lie when you're afraid!"
4. "To sum it up, I must say I regret nothing!"
5. "You can imagine my embarrassment when I killed the wrong man!"
6. "The nature of any human being, certainly anyone on Wall Street, is the better the deal you give the customer, the worse deal it is for you!"
7. "I am not a crook!"
8. "I did not kill my best friend, I dismembered him!" "I did not knowingly, purposefully lie; I did not knowingly, purposely, intentionally lie. I did make mistakes!" "What the hell did I do? Kill them all, of course"
9. "You feel the last bit of breath, leaving their body. You're looking into their eyes. A person in that situation is God!" "Murder is not about lust and it's not about violence. It's about possession!"
10. My children, Michael and Alex, are with our heavenly father now and I know they will never hurt again. As a parent, that means more to me than words can ever say!" "I am not a monster!"
11. "When I walk into a house, everything there belongs to me!" "I've been called the 'super-human, the human fly!"
12. "Thanks a lot Society, for railroading my ass!" "They say it's the number of people I killed; I say it's the principle!"
13. "All of my life I wanted to be a bank robber, carry a gun and wear a mask. Now that it's happened, I guess I'm just about the best bank robber there ever was and I sure am happy!"

John Gotti #:__ Al Capone #:__ John Dillinger #:__ Adolf Eichmann#:_ Susan Smith #:__ Bernard 'Bernie' Madoff #:_

Joseph Valachi #:__ Ted Bundy #:__ Robert Durst #:_ Pablo Escobar #:_ Richard Nixon #:_ Aileen Wuornos#:_

Bill Mason #:_

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A Word or Two About Thoughts and Feelings



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The 'Continuum of Responsibility / Irresponsibility

- a. RESPONSIBLE THINKING-takes responsibility; Shows consideration to others; chooses to do what is best for others and self
- b. IRRESONSIBILITY THINKING-makes excuses and won't take responsibility; lies, manipulates and puts little or no effort; is unreliable, late and won't fulfil obligations
- c. ARRESTABLE THINKING-strongly resist taking any responsibility; is a loner, secretive and considers self as better than others; breaks rules, commits crime, when possible, without getting caught
- d. EXTREME ARRESTABLE THINKING-accepts no responsibility, must beat the system at all cost, concerned with self, self- does anything to get own way, criticizes, blames or harms others, breaks the law as a way of life.

Whether or not we act out our thoughts is a matter of choice. Choice is the fulcrum point where our thinking is or is not translated into behavior. The ability to choose is what makes us responsible for our actions. Behavior is a product of thinking.

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What is the Criminal Thinking? THINKING Pattern; Error/ Barrier?

The Term 'Criminal' evokes stereotypes and strong emotional responses that confuse or mislead more than they inform. For this purpose, we do not use Criminal in a legal sense. Our emphasis is on Thinking Processes that the irresponsible, arrestable (from petty thief to the professional criminal) all manifest with different degrees and consequences. "Crime does not come to the criminal-to-be; he goes to it!"

Harmful Criminal Thinking patterns take shape in infinite ways but generally fall within at least 2 or more of the 9 categories we call 'Thinking Patterns or Errors, Barriers'

1. CLOSED THINKING- Lies by omission; Not Self-critical; Unreceptive to responsible alternatives
2. VICTIM ROLE-Full of self-pity; blames others; family, childhood, genetics social conditions, the past, etc.; Sees self as the victim, not the victimizer
3. SUPERIOR SELF-IMAGE- focuses on personal good deeds; Refuses to acknowledge harm to others, Denies destructive behaviors
4. RECKLESS ATTITUDE-"I can't" means "I won't!", No obligation to others, Refuses disagreeable tasks, Complies only for benefits, Considers responsibility dull
5. INSTANT GRATIFICATION- "I want it now!", Expects instant response, Makes decisions based on feelings, Does not learn from the past
6. FEAR OF "LOSING FACE"-Has profound fear of personal insults, "put downs", Experiences a 'Zero-state' (feels worthless), Refuses to admit fears (super optimistic)
7. POWER and CONTROL- a compulsive desire to control every situation, Manipulates and deceives to gain power and control, Refuses to cooperate (unless taking advantage of others)
8. POSSESSIVE ATTITUDE-"It's Mine", Thinks others opinions are worthless, No respect for the rights and property of others, Views people, places and things as their possessions, Uses sex and sexual comments for power and control, not intimacy
9. UNIQUENESS- Demands more of others than from self, Ignores Higher Power, Views self as unique and better than others, Quits at the first sign of failure

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What are 'Time Bomb Tactics? - Staying on Track'

Time Bomb Tactics are behaviors that are used by anti-social individuals, masters of their craft that thrive on antics to get their own way. They are like an arsenal of commando skills used to shift blame, lie or deceive while ignoring obligations. They are like being 'inebriated, drunk with applications' and beyond common sense. Tactics are primarily used to avoid taking responsibility.

Examples:

Shifts Blame or Focus by pointing out others faults, accuses others of misunderstanding, uses anger as a weapon to control others, introduces irrelevant material (race, gender issues), puts others on the defense by degrading or embarrassing/ builds self up by putting others down, Makes a big scene over minor issues, attempts to confuse

Lies and Deceives by being deliberately vague, omits facts, distorts the truth avoids duties and obligations, agrees without commitment (says 'Yes' without meaning it), tells others what they want to hear, not the whole truth.

Ignores Obligations by Refusing to communicate or participate - Silence, Minimizes behaviors ("I just got into a little trouble!"), does not pay attention, chooses only what is self-gratifying

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The Thinking 'Error' of the 'Victim-Role'-detailed explanation



A common stance whereby the criminal thinking pattern consist of being full of self-pity, blames others: family, childhood, genetics, social situations, the past, etc.; sees self as a victim not the victimizer.

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Dr. Samenow- some 'Concepts of the Month'



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The Criminal's Tactic of Silence

Parents, teachers, family members and others who think they know the criminal will encounter a tactic that he deploys frequently -- a lapsing into silence, momentary or prolonged. Silence is a tactic by which he hides from others, by which he refuses to be accountable. In a more general sense, he utilizes it so that others have difficulty knowing him. Given that he perpetually seeks to gain an advantage over others often in nefarious ways, it is understandable that he wishes to conceal his intentions. If he is in the process of being questioned by someone who has apprehended him and discovered what he is up to, silence is a means for avoiding self-incrimination.

On a frequent basis, parents, spouses, friends, teachers, and counselors encounter this individual sitting before them, arms folded, eyes lowered or staring blankly ahead lapsing into stony silence. But there is a very busy mind scheming and calculation. When a criminal remains silent, others are largely rendered impotent in their efforts to acquire information. Silence is an act of defiance but not in an obviously aggressive manner.

-Stanton E. Samenow

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Self Esteem - What is it?

We have all heard the term "self-esteem" probably since grade school. This psychological term has become part of common parlance. There has even been a self-esteem "movement" especially among educators and some mental health professionals -- born of a sincere desire to help people feel good about themselves.

Self-esteem has little to do with feelings at all. It is the result of a process. A person has "high self-esteem" if he has achieved something that he has worked for. This does not necessarily mean money or high grades in school, although these may be part of it. The achievement can be overcoming adversity. It can be using one's talent in any area of endeavor, disciplining that talent, and doing something worthwhile with it.

If a person has been thoughtless, if he has been lazy, if he has cheated others, there is little to feel good about. Some people believe that a core problem that criminals and juvenile delinquents have is "low self-esteem". Actually, that is a misconception. They vacillate between seeing themselves as number one or a nothing. This is black and white thinking, little of it realistic. If a person has lied, injured others, and done little with whatever abilities he or she has, that individual would have no reason to have "high self-esteem". To artificially try to help that person feel better about himself would actually boost his criminality!

So keep in mind, that self-esteem is an outcome -- a result of a process that entails plenty of self-discipline, hard work, and the constructive use of one's talents. Self-esteem exercises to artificially inflate how a person feels are futile. Helping that person change his thinking so that he works at something responsible and worthwhile will eventually place him in a position where he actually has something to "feel good" about.

-Stanton E. Samenow, Ph.D.

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The Criminal and "Low Self-Esteem"

Observers will say about an offender that the core problem is his low self-esteem. After all, the person may have had numerous failures in life - in school, at work, and in his family. Even in crime, failure occurs when the individual has been caught. Some mental health professionals erroneously believe that crime is caused in part by the individual's sense of inadequacy. That is, the offender pursues power and control to compensate and feel better about himself. This is an inversion of cause and effect. In most instances, the criminal has rejected his family, teachers, and the world of work long before they reject him. By refusing to exert effort in responsible endeavors, he has accomplished little that is substantive. If a person throws away opportunities and resorts to exploiting others is it not realistic for him to have, by standards of the responsible world, low self-esteem. A nineteen-year-old who dropped out in tenth grade, who has no job skills, and who has alienated his family would have little basis to think well of himself. It is by his series of choices that he tries to "feel good" (translates into seeking excitement and having a sense of uniqueness) by engaging in criminal behavior - tearing others down while building himself up.

-Stanton E. Samenow, Ph.D.

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“Depression” and the Criminal

Offenders are frequently considered to be suffering from depression by concerned families and, under certain circumstances, by clinical evaluators, i.e., trained mental health professionals.

Consider the circumstances in which offenders are evaluated by professionals. These are situations that are unpalatable to offenders. That is, they are being held accountable after being apprehended for a crime. Thus they are facing charges and may be in jail or awaiting trial while still in the community. Under conditions that they abhor, offenders may indeed seem despondent.

The question is whether they are depressed about themselves or only about the situation in which they find themselves.

People become depressed for many reasons. On the surface, it is often difficult to determine what lies behind the depressed countenance and mood. Is the person despairing about himself because he believes he is lacking or insufficient in some manner? Or is he depressed only because he does not like the circumstances in which he finds himself? It is essential to make this distinction when assessing criminals and reporting on their mental state.

-Stanton E. Samenow

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An Attention Deficit Disorder is not predisposing to Criminality

I have interviewed numerous youngsters whose misconduct has been explained partially based on their having an attention disorder. Parents assert that their son or daughter repeatedly get into trouble because they grow easily bored, don't listen, fail to follow directions and behave impulsively. In short, because they are unable to pay attention, they do not do what they are supposed to do.

In many instances, this view was supported by teachers who daily find that these youngsters don't complete tasks, have trouble sitting still, agitate others and, otherwise, cause trouble. Sometimes, it was the teachers who counseled parents to have their child evaluated professionally to see if they suffer from having an attention disorder.

No specific test exists for establishing the presence of an attention disorder. Behavioral observation and obtaining a history provide the bases for such a diagnosis. Well-meaning physicians prescribe medication to these youngsters on the basis of the description that is offered of their behavior.

Among children who do poorly academically and are involved in antisocial behavior (fights, thefts, truancy, etc.), medication has no effect. There is no pill that transforms a chronically misbehaving child into an attentive, self-disciplined, achievement motivated human being. What I find significant is that a child who fails to pay attention in school may sit for hours in front of a computer concentrating upon games or focusing on other activities that he enjoys. He chooses not to attend to endeavors that he finds boring or not to his liking.

I am not suggesting that attention disorders do not exist. I have interviewed boys and girls who desire to excel at school but have difficulty focusing despite their efforts to do so. Some of these youngsters are helped by taking medication. The point is that they are motivated to do well to begin with. School achievement matters.

In evaluating the existence of an attention disorder, one must develop an in-depth understanding of the personality of the child. Many adult offenders whom I have evaluated took medicine, when they were younger, for an alleged attention deficit disorder. Nonetheless, they continued to manifest the same thinking patterns that result in lack of achievement, personal instability, and injury to others. Obviously, the diagnosis of attention disorder was wrong to begin with.

-Stanton E. Samenow

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"Bipolar" Disease or the Ups and Downs of the Antisocial Person's Unrealistic Expectations?

Over the years, I have witnessed an increase in the diagnosis of "Bipolar Disorder" (formerly called "manic-depressive" illness) in people who primarily have an antisocial personality disorder. What I believe has happened is that well-intentioned professionals who do not regularly interview or treat antisocial individuals are deceived. The antisocial person thinks in extremes. He is number one or he is a zero. There is no middle ground. He has very unrealistic expectations of himself and others. So long as he can prop up a very shaky image of himself as a powerful and unique person, he seems on top of the world. When that image is threatened and things are not working out as he ordained, he slides into a depression. For the antisocial person, the "best" antidote to feeling like a nothing is to show you are somebody -- thus another assertion of his power and control, often with others being injured in the process. The antisocial person's peaks and swamps of emotion are very different from a person who suffers from a mood disorder and who may genuinely merit the diagnosis of "bipolar."

-Stanton E. Samenow

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The Criminal's Anger Results from Fear

The criminal is chronically angry at a world that does not fall in line with his unrealistic expectations and pretensions. The anger may not be visible, but it is present. The offender's anger arises from the fear of not being in control, control being paramount to his self-esteem. In fact, his anger boils up when he wants to prove he is someone, a person to be reckoned with. It is in the service of reasserting control.

When an offender is angry, a proper focus by the agent of change is to explore what he is afraid of. Ventilation of anger is to be discouraged, as injury will invariably result. A far more constructive objective is reduction of, if not elimination, of anger. If the offender thinks realistically, he will not expect to control other people. Consequently, he will not become angry when they behave in ways that he deems undesirable.

-Stanton E. Samenow

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Sporadic Remorse Elevates the Criminal's View of Himself as a Good Person/ the Myths of the 'Out-of-Character' Crime

A hallmark of criminal behavior is the failure to be remorseful, or so it is said. Actually, experiencing remorse for victimizing another human being is not alien to the offender's experience. A man broke into a home and cleaned it out of valuable antiques and heirlooms. Upon learning that the owner was suffering from a terminal illness, the offender was so remorseful that he arranged to have the stolen items returned. Remorse clearly was a positive force in restoring property to the victim (although it did nothing for the terrible emotional aftermath that the victim suffered). The fact that he made this restitution did not in any sense deter this same offender from in the future breaking into other homes and stealing.

Criminals do experience remorse. However, it is not a reliable deterrent to committing other crimes. Many an offender, juvenile and adult, has expressed remorse about hurting a parent -- a parent who had stuck by him, bailed him out of a jam, supported him financially and emotionally and offered him numerous second chances. However, when that parent tried to question the offender about where he was going, whom he was with, and what he was doing, this parent again became a target for anger, ridicule, and derision.

The fact that he experiences remorse, rather than deterring future misconduct, actually enhances the criminal's view that he is a good person. It does not lead to enduring changes in his thought processes or lasting reform in his conduct.

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Being Soft- mental health pitfalls

Among mental health professionals, good intentions abound, but many are ill equipped to assess and treat anti-social individuals. There are several reasons for this.

Pitfall-to focus on causes, if you understand the origin of the behavior, they can better treat it, developing 'insight' (should be termed 'incite') BUT remaining criminal. The criminal loves this because it places blame on people and forces out of himself.

Pitfall-Mental Health professionals often help offenders suffering from depression and low self-esteem, determining these are key factors for their behaviors. Keep in mind, that offender is an outcast from his family, failed at academics, never supported himself, etc.

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Similarity of Thinking Patterns between the Criminal and the Addict

Criminal Thinking Patterns • victim stance • “good person” stance • “unique person” stance • fear of exposure • lack-of-time perspective • selective effort • use of power to control • seek excitement first • ownership stance

Addictive Thinking Patterns • self-pity stance • “good person” stance • “unique person” stance • fear of exposure • lack-of-time perspective • selective effort • use of deceit to control • seek pleasure first

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The offender who makes claims that they want ‘help’

‘Irresponsible’ individuals typically attend to ‘getting help’ the same way they attend to life in general: they seek to control situations and excel in twisting facts to suit themselves. And, while getting by with little effort toward routine responsibilities, they store most of their energy to be spent on the rush they get from fooling others and committing forbidden acts. Masters of their craft, anti-social individuals thrive on antics we call ‘Time Bomb Tactics’ to get their way. It is a means of Power and Control Thinking Error, seeking to control the potential Mental Health professional and the parameters of the clinical atmosphere by introducing their demands and influences. The idea of asking for help is another way of placing restrictions and redefining help to meet their expectations. And, if it doesn’t go their way, they’re ‘out’.

Note: Offenders who are used to using illegal substances to deal with life will ask for medications up front, and reject alternative treatments to handle the ‘problem’, like ‘talk therapy’.

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The Changeability of the Criminal

My colleague and mentor from so many years ago, Dr. Samuel Yochelson, would say to the criminals whom he was seeing, "Who are you today?" This had nothing to do with psychosis or a dissociative reaction (e.g., multiple personality). Rather, he constantly observed firsthand the changeability of these men. One day a man would be contrite and intense about change. He would be receptive to constructive criticism and eager to improve. The next day, that very individual would be imperious, angry, and ready to abandon any efforts to change. I recall a mugger and thief who was so determined to change that he began attending church daily, started reading the Bible regularly, and touched a cross he wore around his neck whenever he slipped and uttered a curse word. This man wanted to be purer than pure. He wearied of this in time and again became a very dangerous individual. No more church, Bible reading, or touching the cross.

To even a trained observer, these shifts may be suggestive of a mood disorder, possibly a bipolar disorder, or some other psychological disorder. The changeability may be rapid occurring within a day or over a period of days.

What is actually occurring is that the criminal has competing desires. He may desire to change but he also wants the excitement of his way of life --- a little bit like St. Augustine -- "I want to be pure, God, but not yet." The changeability of the criminal is NOT a result of a mental illness. He makes choices, at times going from one extreme to another. Extremism in thinking is one characteristic of his cognitive functioning. The offender may be sincere about wanting to change, but he also wants what he wants when he wants it. Helping an offender to remain fed up with his criminal lifestyle and remain on track to change to his way of life that he has envied but never lived for long is at the heart of the challenge of "habilitation."

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FEELINGS

Many mental health professionals emphasize having their clients/patients "get in touch with their feelings" and "express their feelings." With certain types of problems, this may work well. However, in working with offenders, it is counterproductive. Try to avoid the phrase: "How does that make you feel?"

Like anyone, offenders have strong emotions -- rage, despair, excitement. However, they are inclined to cite feelings as an excuse for nearly anything. "I was up tight, so I smoked pot." "I was down and out, so I didn't go to work." "I was really ticked off, so I threw the chair." They treat their feelings as external to themselves, as though they are victims of their feelings. Worse yet, they'll try to enlist a counselor/therapist to embark on an archaeological expedition to discover the cause or source of their feelings. More excuses result.

If I ask, "How do you feel about this column?" I am really asking "what do you think?" If you are very much in agreement or very much opposed to what I am saying, you may generate some emotion along with your thinking. Thinking gives rise to feelings.

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- PARENTS DON'T Turn Children into Criminals
- On a superficial observation, criminals seem like overgrown toddlers. Like very young children, criminals think the world revolves around them. In an infantile manner, they quickly become enraged when frustrated. And, they lack a healthy conscience, all be it, faulty. Prison psychiatrist J.L. Baker, M.D. wrote, "Like a child, the criminal doesn't understand the necessity of self-denial now for future benefit." The fallacy in this explanation is that, unlike infants, who are beginning life's journey, the criminal has repeatedly been exposed to socializing influences BUT rejected them! The child is NOT like a formless lump of clay that is molded by his parents. Instead, parents and offspring influence each other's behaviors; the process is reciprocal.
- As a child, the criminal is a dynamo of energy, has an iron will, insist on taking charge, and expects others to indulge his every whim. His appetite for adventure is voracious. He (she) takes risks, becomes embroiled in difficulties, and then demands to be bailed out and forgiven. No matter how his parents try to understand and guide him, they are thwarted at every turn. While other children seek recognition through school achievements, athletic completion, or participation in social activities, this child establishes himself by doing what is forbidden.
- CORPORAL PUNISHMENT
- CORPORAL PUNISHMENT has long been controversial as a means of coping with disobedience. There is no evidence that spanking modifies behavior. The criminal, as a child absorbs the physical punishment and shows he can take it.
- THERAPIST GONE FISHING

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Interrupting Time Bomb Tactics

Trying to facilitate a learning process while tactics are in operation is like trying to talk sense to a drunk. The inebriated party must first be sobered before real effective interaction can begin. An escalating occurrence of 'Time Bomb Tactic' proves counter-productive and blocks effective interaction and learning. Until the Tactics are efficiently interrupted progress will not begin.

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Dr. Samenow's Considerations for Interviewing Hostile/ •—————Resistant—————•

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Sentimentality- Resistance to change

The fact that an offender experiences sentimentality is by no means an indicator that he is changing in the direction of becoming a responsible person. That he experiences intense sentimentality under certain circumstances actually enhances his perception of himself as a good human being, perhaps making him even more resistant to change.

- PARENTS DON'T Turn Children into Criminals
- On a superficial observation, criminals seem like overgrown toddlers. Like very young children, criminals think the world revolves around them. In an infantile manner, they quickly become enraged when frustrated. And, they lack a healthy conscience, all be it, faulty. Prison psychiatrist J.L. Baker, M.D. wrote, "Like a child, the criminal doesn't understand the necessity of self-denial now for future benefit." The fallacy in this explanation is that, unlike infants, who are beginning life's journey, the criminal has repeatedly been exposed to socializing influences BUT rejected them! The child is NOT like a formless lump of clay that is molded by his parents. Instead, parents and offspring influence each other's behaviors; the process is reciprocal.

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The Problem with "Anger Management"

Offenders, especially those who commit domestic violence, are often ordered by judges to attend "Anger Management" classes. The inevitable outcome is failure! This is because the entire concept of "anger management" is flawed. It implies that one is going to be angry, but that the anger just needs to be handled appropriately. The Criminal is always angry.

The criminal is angry because of unrealistic expectations that he has of himself and other people. His anger arises out of fear of being putdown. It is his thinking processes that must change. If they do, there will be far less anger to deal with. The objective should be elimination of anger, not managing it! No medicine has yet been produced that alters the thought process of the criminal.

For example, if he learns to accept criticism (like facing his fears-accountability) and not take it personally (even benefit from it), he will not feel put down or diminished. If he is realistic about what he expects from other people, he will seldom experience frustration and disappointment.

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**TruThought "Mantra": "I will do
whatever it takes to get out of
prison, AS SOON AS POSSIBLE!"**

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RECOMMENED READINGS

- Straight Talk About Criminals- Stanton E. Samenow; Rowman and Littlefield Publishers
- Why Good Parents Have Bad Kids- E.K. Hayes; Doubleday, N.Y.
- Before it's Too Late- Stanton E. Samenow- Jason Aronson Pub, N.Y.
- Inside The Criminal Mind-Samenow/ Yochelson; N.Y. Times Book, N.Y.
- Why Are you Not a Criminal?- J.W. Rogers; Engelwood Cliff, N.J. Prentice Hall

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Thinking Patterns of the Criminal

- Lying- a way of life
- Power and Control
- Uniqueness
- Shut off Fear
- Super Optimism (external and internal-conscience issues)
- Fear of Being Put Down (example: Road rage) leading to 'Good Person Myth' and selective good deeds
- Low self-esteem Agent of change
- Out of Character Crimes – 'sick'; insane philosophy

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