



## This issue...

**Independent Thinking.** Are you a sheep?

## Want to share your story?

Do you have a story that you would like to share? A life experience you want to talk about? I want to hear! I'm looking for life stories – sad, funny or just food for thought. So many people are isolated from others and don't realize that their stories are the stories of many others. I believe that both telling and hearing stories can be very healing.

## Want to receive these by email?

Simply send an email to Cindy Trevitt at [cindy@mycounsellor.ca](mailto:cindy@mycounsellor.ca) and write "subscribe" in the subject line.

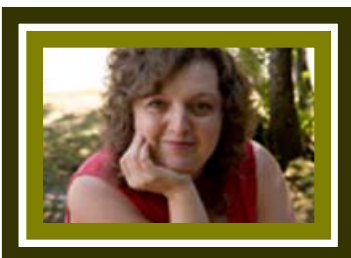
## Want to hear about a certain topic?

Email your suggestions or questions – I'd love to hear from you.



## New hours

**Now open Tuesdays through Saturdays!**



**Cindy Trevitt, Registered Professional Counsellor**

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Web page [www.mycounsellor.ca](http://www.mycounsellor.ca)

Member in good standing of the Canadian Professional Counsellor's Association: [www.cpcarpc.ca](http://www.cpcarpc.ca)

## Furthermore:

I recommend educating yourself in the art of living consciously and in keeping with your authentic self. Find self-help books that truly speak to your unique sensibilities. Here's this edition's recommendation:

Emotional Intelligence, Why it can matter more than IQ, by Daniel Goleman  
&  
Raising your Emotional Intelligence, A Practical Guide, by Jeanne Segal, Ph.D.

**Our job is not to make up anybody's mind, but to open minds and to make the agony of the decision-making so intense you can escape only by thinking.** ~Author Unknown

I'm standing at the corner of an intersection waiting for the light to change. Other people stand beside me – they look left, they look right, the light is still red but there are no cars. They start walking. I stay standing at the corner now feeling conspicuous. The phrase "monkey see, monkey do" comes to mind. Besides the 'laws', do you think I'm right or wrong in my action? Do I walk too so that I don't feel the discomfort of 'sticking out'? Do I stand there a stickler for the law? Do I tell the others what I think they should do? I *choose* to stand there. Why? Because I'm a free and independent thinker. Okay, big deal, it's just a crosswalk. But it's not just about when to cross a crosswalk. It's about how I choose to live my life. Do I choose to be a sheep who is easily led astray or a free-thinking, independent, conscious choice-making individual?

I know, this sounds a little harsh. It's not that cut and dried. I agree. But I'm trying to illustrate a point. The individual who passively glides through life acquiescing to the pressures – real or perceived – of others has no ownership of their own actions and is highly susceptible to making very poor choices. 'She made me do it. I was pressured. I had to. It's fun. It was out of my hands. It doesn't matter what I think.'

In the news, we have Don Imus's very politically incorrect statement heightening controversy over the responsibility of hip hop music and big corporations and the public. We have road rage – a problem that grows with the population and changes within our city. We have people abusing drugs and alcohol as a pastime or escape. I encounter people who, when discussing a neighbourhood problem, cheerfully pipe up about how they've known it all along and have done little if anything. At the end, I am left with this question: *Who* is responsible? And the one person I can personally hold accountable is: me.



Whenever we begin to lay blame for the actions of one (ourselves included) on another, we have immediately resigned from all responsibility in our lives. On the Imus issue, one point made was that the community is *taught* to use slander and negative language towards women and people of colour. As if it's not their fault because they were *taught* that. I can offer you a glass of poison and you don't have to drink it. You can decline. You can turn away. Or you can go ahead and swallow the whole damn thing. Who is to blame: me for offering poison or you for drinking it?

"Those who know how to think need no teachers."

- Mahatma Gandhi

In essence – it's not whether you agree with something or not, it's whether you stopped to look at the concept. Think about it. Pontificate for a while *before* you swallow it, hook, line and sinker. It's old and well-used but the old saying goes, are you the passenger or the driver in your life?

**Road rage?** Who got mad? You did. I did. What did we do with that anger? Did we take all the previous zillions of perceived infractions, pile them up into a monstrous catapult and spew our hot molten rage all over the road in a glorious temper tantrum that a million four-year-olds would envy? Not a frequent freeway traveler myself, the few times I do venture out that way I am positively *stunned* by the driving: weaving in and out vicariously and all arriving at the same time (if at all). What do *you* choose to do?

**Abusing our bodies with substances.** Alcohol and drugs. As if it *fell* into our hands. We don't know why and we don't want to know. If we have to stop, we might feel something. We might think something. It could be difficult. What kind of life are you choosing?

Belief is when someone else does the thinking.

~Buckminster Fuller

The average man never really thinks from end to end of his life. The mental activity of such people is only a mouthing of clichés.

~ H.L. Mencken

**Peer pressure:** In my youth, I have done things for others because I couldn't say no. I didn't think or believe (there's a nasty word about not thinking) I had the right. It felt debilitating and powerless. Everyone but me had power. It has taken me years to grow and calcify the plenty sturdy spine I presently enjoy. I grant that it isn't easy and it isn't quick, I did make a choice however. To have a better life. To treat myself with respect and to understand that sometimes saying no to others is a sign of respect as well. The thing is that we each have the ability to make conscious choices. All the time. Every day. What are you choosing to do? Do your actions represent the person you *want* to be?

I guess this leads me to another point: who are you? If you want to see someone exhale abruptly, laugh nervously, fidget, get defensive, and delay responding or just plain get rid of someone, ask them this question. Many of us are led to believe that who we are is of no consequence and should really be kept to ourselves, thank you very much. Who are you and who are you choosing to be? How far away is that from where your subconscious is driving you?

"People mistakenly assume that their thinking is done by their head; it is actually done by the heart which first dictates the conclusion, then commands the head to provide the reasoning that will defend it." – Anthony de Mello

Some emotions and impulses such as greed or lust are kept in check by our moral sense but this leaves little room for rational choice. Instead, the mind is like the "whack-a-mole" game, where emotions keep popping up to our conscious attention. Consciousness is like a spotlight, which allows us to focus on our feelings, weigh them against each other, and act on them. We only have one body, and many desires, which is why our consciousness must prioritize our actions.

If we feel, then act, without thinking, what's to stop us from stealing the very next object of desire we see? Emotions and feelings like awe, gratitude, sympathy, compassion, empathy, guilt, shame and embarrassment, all contribute to the



moral sense, which can override the more negative emotions. These feelings stop us from stealing. The philosophical debate over choice versus morality is fascinating. But at the end of the day, are you going to be proud of the legacy you made in your life? If you feel the world has always taken from you, do you choose to become a thief or rise above it all?

Some of us act out of interest in pleasing others – authority figures, partners, family and so forth. But, what is the end result of insincerity? Who is benefited?

**The 'Bystander Affect':** It is more common for a single individual to intervene if another person is in need of help rather than if a group of people is present. In some situations, a large group of bystanders may fail to aid a person who obviously needs help. In 1964 a woman named Kitty Genovese was stabbed to death by a serial rapist

and murderer. The murder took place over a period of about thirty minutes, after which it was reported that dozens of alleged "witnesses" failed to help her. Hence, the term 'Genovese syndrome' was used to describe the phenomenon. Sadly, there are many such cases. A common explanation is that, with others present, observers all assume that someone else is going to intervene. This is an example of how diffusion of responsibility, and I think lack of independent thinking, leads to social loafing. Some assume that others are more qualified to help. Others fear "losing face", being superseded by a "superior" helper, or offering unwanted assistance. Another explanation is that people look at the reactions of others in an emergency situation to see if they think it is necessary to intervene. Since everyone is doing exactly the same, they conclude that other people don't think help is needed. Still another view is that emotional cues to action can be as powerful as rational ones. When people see a group of inactive people they feel that no action is required. Again, independent thinking is needed.

"To achieve, you need thought. You have to know what you are doing and that's real power." - Ayn Rand

I see the ability to think and behave for your self coming from two principle points:

- 🕒 Know who you are. Have a strong sense of self.
- 🕒 Know what you want.

If you have these two things down pat, then the rest will come much easier.

**"I do this real moron thing, it's called thinking, and I'm not a very good American because I like to form my own opinions."**

**– George Carlin**

Free thought holds that individuals should neither accept nor reject ideas proposed as truth without access to knowledge and reason. Freethinkers strive to build their beliefs on the basis of facts, scientific inquiry, and logical principles, independent of authority, bias, conventional wisdom, popular culture, prejudice, sectarianism, tradition, urban legend, and all other dogmatic or untrue principles.

Things you can do to strengthen your independent thinking:

- 🕒 Become more critical about what you see and hear
- 🕒 Question your irrational assumptions
- 🕒 Strengthen your rational beliefs
- 🕒 Avoid belief traps that limit your options
- 🕒 Don't let others define the situation for you
- 🕒 Ask yourself, is the person or authority asking me to go against my own values or conscience?
- 🕒 What are my own motives for responding favorably to this authority or person (if I am)?
- 🕒 Am I letting him or her define the situation because I'm too lazy or too fearful or too anxious to think for myself?
- 🕒 Am I ignoring hypocrisy or troubling behavior because I like the person or agree with them on other issues?
- 🕒 Am I going along in a situation that I'm uncertain about or have doubts about just because everyone else is? Do they really know more than I do or are they just as uncertain?



- 🕒 Am I passing the buck and giving responsibility for the outcome to someone else? Am I thinking about the consequences of my actions? What will happen to others? To me?
- 🕒 Am I letting myself be pressured into a commitment or action before I'm really ready?
- 🕒 Am I just going along with authority because I've never thought to question it before?
- 🕒 Don't react just out of habit. Be willing to question the way things have always been done.
- 🕒 Encourage critical thinking in others
- 🕒 Ask Questions: Be willing to wonder
- 🕒 Consider other explanations
- 🕒 Tolerate uncertainty

Dependant thinkers accept whatever they are taught and rarely question information or ask themselves if it really makes sense. Independent thinkers feel the need to make sense of the world based on personal observations and experiences rather than just going along with the thoughts of others.

Big or little, choices affect our lives. If you're making a decision for someone else's benefit, think about this – they're not the ones that will be around to live your life. You are. You are the only one accepting the consequences of your choices. Not them.

Ask yourself what kind of friend, partner, parent, sibling, daughter/son, employee, manager you would like to be. Now, ask yourself what kind you're being right now. Adjust accordingly.

Understand that even no choice is a choice.

**The next action you take represents who you are. Do you like what it says about you?**