

Tuning Your Sea Anchor

A sea anchor stabilises a boat in heavy weather by increasing drag and providing a breaking mechanism. It also supports the boat from turning broadside into the waves, reducing the risk of being swamped or capsized.

We have our own form of internal sea anchor that reduces our speed and keeps us moving in consistent direction. Two components of our sea anchor are our conscience and our inner critic. While our habits, patterns of behaviour and beliefs also tend to keep us following a consistent line, they function more as a corral that limits our movement rather than slowing us or bringing us back in line.

Our conscience is the voice we hear within us that informs us of the right and wrong of what we are doing. This is quite distinct from guilt, which is a condemning voice that comes after an act, refers to the past, and reminds us, from a basis of what we have been taught, of what we should have done. The conscience is a voice we hear in the present moment about what we are doing. It may be overlooked and dismissed, or encouraged and developed. By tuning into and adhering

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Abstract

Our conscience and our inner critic both attempt to realign the course we are taking when we are off track from what they consider suitable. While our conscience differentiates between good and bad, our critic is always negative. Both need attention and adjustment to serve us best.

Keywords

Aware, congruence, conscience, conscious living, inner critic, leadership coaching

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A working sea anchor may have made a difference to this outcome.

to our conscience we remain more consistently true to ourselves. We are congruent. This is a beneficial sea anchor. Our conscience is often overshadowed by other contributors to our decision-making process such as pressure from others, learned behaviours, habits, or actions arising from being emotional hijacked. One way of tuning our conscience is meditation. As you sit and observe your inner world without judgement you can delve below the din of day-to-day life, observe yourself in your current situation, and gain insights into what really matters to you.

Our Inner Critic also acts as a sea anchor. It tells us we are wrong, whether that is measured as inadequate, evil, stupid, inappropriate, clumsy or a vast array of other possible negative judgements. The familiarity with our Critic stems from its development in our formative years, its voice gleaned from the messages of our parents or other significant people. A lucky few have little to no critic. Unfortunately, most of us have a somewhat noisy, incessant and repetitive voice that goes off any time we move against what others taught us to expect of ourselves. The Critic is not a voice based in any truth. We may believe it is true because we are so familiar with its messages, having heard it all our lives. We can be sailing through life, enjoying the sun, the sea air, skimming the waves in a carefree manner, and suddenly ... come to an abrupt halt as our mind is filled with negativity. The Critic is a sea anchor in all the wrong ways. We may have found a zone of productivity, where we really are humming with excitement and ease, creating the results we have wanted, and suddenly we lose all momentum, founder, and have to deal with the impact the negative messaging has on us. The Critic brakes us when we are ready to race, and brings us back to the direction the negative messaging would have us go.

The Critic is a mental habit. Neuroscience highlights that rather than “changing old habits”, it is easier to implement new habits. The underlying principle is that habits, particularly long-term ones, have cut neural pathways in the brain that are deep and fixed, somewhat similar to the channel cut by the river in the Grand Canyon. Attempting to fill in that river would be futile. By implementing a new habit, our focus and attention shifts. The brain doesn’t need to change the old pathway. The more strongly the new habit can be installed, the better. Changing habits requires adjustments to mind-set, motivation and intent. The old habit loses traction as its relevance is diminished by disuse.

To adjust the habitual Critic, it is important to implement another way of thinking and being. One way of doing that is by creating an emotionally-charged, positively-phrased affirmation that you anchor with repetition, and connect with whenever you recognise the Critic is ‘speaking’. Or, reassign the Critic a new role. Imagine the Critic is a member of your internal orchestra. The Critic is currently playing a trumpet at full volume and out of time and tune with the rest of the orchestra. Reassign your critic to the triangle, and coach him to only play when called on by the conductor. It is a matter of asserting yourself against that inner bully. Other approaches can also be used that bring greater inner peace and freedom to be yourself. By adjusting the behaviour of your Critic, you have greater freedom to chart the course in your life that matters to you, and will spend less time foundering or on the rocks.

Are you doing what is meaningful in life? Are you congruent across your thoughts, feelings and actions, and with your values and beliefs? If you want support to be more fully who you are, coaching can be a valuable avenue.

For more information related to themes in this article, refer to chapter 11 (Purposeful Forward Movement) of: Harrison, S. G. (2012). [Appreciate the Fog: Embrace Change with Power and Purpose](#). Auckland, New Zealand: Xlibris Corporation.

Coaching can support you create the best outcome when working with areas covered by this article.

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