2.1: Our Communication “Frames” Our Arguments

Your Saturday night poker game is in full swing. You are holding five cards. You are trying to decide whether these five cards are better than any of the other hands around the table. If you feel they are, you will bet; if not, you will fold and wait for the next hand. You wish you had an idea of what the other players had. You look over to your opponent to your right to see what he is going to do. Is he going to raise or fold? What should you do? The tension mounts.

One by one you observe the players around you. In their own subtle way, each of them is communicating some information to you. You go around the table gathering information about each player before you decide what to do. One player is looking nervously around and constantly rechecking his cards. He probably doesn’t have too good a hand. Another player keeps asking whose bet is it. He seems anxious to play. It could be a bluff, but you think maybe he really does want to bet and that his hand may be better than yours. A third player is quietly fingering his chips, as if ready to bet as soon as someone else does. You don’t like the looks of this at all. He appears far too confident.

In the end, you decide to sit out this hand. It’s a good thing too, because the quiet person was, in fact, ready to bet and had a hand that would have beaten yours. This time you made the right decision.

This is what this book is about. No, not playing poker, but using your critical thinking capabilities in a communication situation to improve your argumentation and decision-making skills.

First, we need to understand four important concepts:

- Critical thinking is a skill which can be improved.
- All decisions are made in a communication environment.
- A better understanding of how we think and how we communicate improves our argumentation skills leading to making higher quality decisions.
- Understanding language and how it effects our thinking improves our argumentation skills.
Critical thinking and argumentation takes place not in a vacuum, but within the communication process. It is important to realize that the more we understand how communication affects critical thinking and argumentation, the more we can improve our skills and increase our effectiveness. First, miscommunication may lead to conflict, or aggravate conflict that already exists. This is one of the reasons we have arguments. The second reason we have arguments is when there is an actual disagreement between people.

By improving your critical thinking and argumentation skills, you can be more in charge of your life. Instead of letting those around you exert undue influence and guidance that could lead to decisions which would not be in your best interests, you can be in charge of yourself. When you are finished with this chapter you will be on your way improving the manner in which you make decisions. The best way to begin is to first examine the process of communication.