5.3: Challenging Our Assumptions

Before you begin to analyze a Claim take time to list and challenge any assumptions you may have on that claim. This useful approach to analyzing a Claim is known as a "Key Assumption Check" and is a very important starting point at the beginning of any decision you might want to make. And just before you make a final decision, recheck those assumptions.

Way, way back in the 60's when applying for a job, having long hair for a man was a handicap. Many employers had the assumption that a person with long hair was some sort of "hippie" and they therefore inferred that this person was a bit lazy and not that serious about a job. The result was they were rejected. Now this may seem like ancient history, but even now if a woman shows up for a job interview with her head covered with a hijab a series of assumptions about her will be made by the employer. From these he or she may infer a variety of behaviors of that job applicant. The key is we need to recognize and challenge these assumptions to help us make the best decisions possible. How many great potential employees have not gotten a job due to inaccurate assumptions being made?

When my son was in grade school he wasn’t doing his math homework and instead would watch cartoons on television. I made the assumption that he was being lazy and was about to punish him. Instead, I challenged that assumption by asking him questions. In the end, I found out he was avoiding doing his math homework because he had been absent when his teacher explained how to do them and he was afraid to ask his teacher for help. By challenging my assumptions, I was able to make a much more informed decision on what to do.

Some of your assumptions are easily recognizable, while others may be more hidden from you. We may have a variety of subconscious biases that influence our decisions without even being aware of them. Their hidden nature makes them difficult to discover.

Imagine you hear a report of a mass murder that involved explosives. What is your first reaction? Do you assume a terrorist action and infer specific types of ethnic characteristics? Imagine you hear a news story that involves a member
of the National Rifle Association? Or a member of the Democratic or Republican Party? What assumptions do you make? Do you recognize those assumptions or are they hidden?

In any case, at the beginning of any analysis you need to take the time to challenge your assumptions by asking questions or as we call them, *Issues*.

5.3.1: “Challenge Assumptions” (CC BY 4.0; J. Marteney)