

Introduction

The CMD is a core process in Personal Leadership (PL) that supports us in returning over and over again to our highest and best. The CMD is a vehicle to get somewhere that the PL practitioner wishes to go; the more we do the practice of this internal dialogue, the more obvious the benefits become.

Engaging the CMD

We call this a Critical Moment Dialogue because it is a moment of choice: you're choosing to discern for yourself the essential truth of a particular "Something's Up" situation or experience. Whether or not the moment is critical to anyone else doesn't really matter, it's critical to you: you are choosing to disentangle from your automatic response and to discern your right action.

The "Something's Up" that you are exploring as a critical moment may be a positive (happy, inspiring) or negative (difficult, unpleasant) situation. Although we may think more often of using the CMD on a negative situation, the process is equally valuable to use on a positive one. Indeed, the CMD will help you take an appreciative, learning, and receptive orientation to whatever kind of situation or experience you find yourself in. It will help you step forward with mindfulness, access your creative wisdom, and align with your vision of yourself at your highest and best.

Some Suggestions Along the Way

1. Begin by engaging a receptive orientation. Find a quiet spot and ensure that you have at least thirty minutes of time for your personal reflection and writing. Begin by cultivating stillness. Take deep breaths and relax. Bring your attention into your heart area; breathe in and out from your heart until you feel as calm and receptive as you can be in the moment. When you're ready, begin.

2. Pay attention to the physical sensations in your body. As you pose each question and as answers come forth, notice whether you're feeling diminished, heavy and confused or energized, light and alive. Allow the pathway of your embodied experience to guide you as you sense the difference between merely repeating what you already know and the energizing clarity that comes when you gain insight and new perspective. Discover how the critical moment is serving you.

3. Separate inquiry from decision-making. It is very important that you separate your work on the internal dialogue of the full CMD, using the questions associated with each of the six practices, from the ultimate step of discerning your right action. If you don't do this, the process of the CMD can be short-circuited and potential value lost.



4. Fully engage all perspectives. When you are engaging in your own inner dialogue, be sure to let all your opinions and voices be present. Don't be swept away by the loudest voice, the most quiet, the most logical, the most emotional. And don't worry if what you find yourself writing, especially in response to a challenging or negative "something's up," seems to be rather ugly or mean. The CMD will serve you best when you are fully honest with yourself.

5. Welcome, and trust, surprises. Be willing to fully welcome surprises and insights that you never could have imagined. In truth, it may be that the more unusual and unexpected the insight, the more you can trust that it is not a replay of the habitually-programmed 'automatic pilot' script you have spent years perfecting. Be mindful of each insight as it surfaces, however small and easily dismissed it may at first seem to you.

6. Use your vision as a guide. Remember that the CMD is set within the context of your guiding vision; your vision is the beacon that keeps you focused when the tendency to diverge or to be less-than-honest with yourself is strong. Of course, your vision is dynamic and may well be refined through the CMD process. You'll be able to tell when it is appropriate to align with your existing vision and when it is time to change your vision.

7. Make the CMD work for you. It's important to remember that the CMD questions are offers, not strictures. As the practice of this internal dialogue becomes more familiar, questions sometimes seem to collapse in both time and sequence. You may find that some of the questions in the CMD become your 'favorites' because they seem to consistently open doors to new or surprising information. You may also find that you develop new questions that work particularly well for you for one or more of the PL practices.

Briefly summarize your 'Something's Up' critical moment.

- What are the circumstances; what happened? This is where you describe the objective facts of the situation without interpretation or evaluation.



Attending to Emotion

Emotion paradoxically both blocks and offers an opportunity to learn about the specific situation or encounter. Rather than engage or suppress your emotion, move into the neutral perspective of witness: detach from the emotion and self-observe. Notice how your emotion changes.

- What is the emotion, positive or negative, that I am having in this situation? What are its qualities and characteristics?

- What information is the emotion offering me?

- Why do I care about this “critical moment” situation so much; which of my values are involved?



Cultivating Stillness

Quiet your mind. Disentangle internal experience from external circumstance. Breathe. Meditate through movement or sitting, and receive information from your deep, creative connection. Attend to what resonates as truth from deep within.

- What additional questions, focusing on any of the practices, do I need to ask myself?
- Taking a breath, what insight comes from the silence within?
- What can I learn about myself from this “critical moment” situation?



And then... Discerning Right Action

○ What might I do to bring my current reality into alignment with my vision?

○ What action might best move me towards my highest hopes and enhance the creative potential of this interaction, relationship, or situation?

○ What, if anything, is the right thing to do? To say? To whom? How?



To Summarize

What have you learned — about yourself, potentially about the situation or other people involved, about what it means to be effective in situations of difference, about what it means to align with your highest and best?

To Complete

Check-in with your body, your physical sensations. What is your current energy state: are you feeling inspired and energized? If not, there may be something more for you to receive — return to whichever of the six practices calls to you for another phase of deepening exploration.

When you feel complete, check-in again with your body. If you feel any residual tightness or sense of holding, get up and move your body: stretch and bend and wiggle your hips and move however your body wants you to move so that you release the energy and feel again a light free-flow within yourself. Do so until you are complete!

