

Want Better Outcomes? Check Your Perspectives!

by Inez O. Ng

In my work with clients, the issue of perspectives comes up quite often. Usually, I have to give my clients a quick refresher on what it is, and why it is pertinent to our discussion. Being good at choosing perspectives is so helpful that I thought it worthy of an article.

What is a perspective?

The definition of perspective that fits best for my discussion is “a specific point of view in understanding or judging things or events.” Perspectives are not facts. They can be completely true or completely false. But they have huge influence over our lives.

To illustrate what I mean, one of my colleagues once had to address a problem with his work group where two individuals had completely different perspectives on each other, and were both rigid in their positions. To illustrate the point that there are more than one way to look at something, my colleague had these two individuals sit facing each other, then showed them a rubber ball and asked what color it was. One person answered “red” and the other “black”.

As it turned out, both of them were correct because the ball was half black and half red. From their respective perspectives, they were both right. But from the other’s perspective, they were both wrong.

What I am trying to convey is that there are often many, many different ways to look at a situation, and we can consciously choose what perspective we hold. We can take that ball and choose the perspective that it is red, or it is black, or that it is half red and half black.

Why is that important?

Our perspectives have great influence over us because it impacts how we feel, how we think, and how we act. In other words, perspectives can run our lives.

Here’s another story from ancient times:

A man walked into a quarry and ran across a worker. He asked him, “What are you doing?” The worker replied, “I am cutting stone.” The man walked on a while longer and ran across another worker, and asked him, “What are you doing?” The worker said, “I am building a cathedral!”

How’s that for different perspectives? Both men were doing the same work. Which one do you think was more inspired to go to work everyday?

So, when you are faced with a challenging task, do you want to think of it as cutting stone or building a cathedral? Which perspective will motivate you, or empower you, or get you excited? What kind of effect on the work product do you think these different perspectives will have?

What can I do?

So, here's my advice on using perspectives to your advantage. When you are in a funk, or you feel overwhelmed, or frustrated about something, here's what you do.

1. Notice and tell yourself that you are in one particular perspective. Figure out what it is. Is it the "I am in over my head and can never get this right!" perspective? Decide if this current perspective is helpful or not. If not...
2. Think of a different perspective you can have about the situation. How about the "Big projects are made up of little parts, so I can tackle one part at a time, and before I know it, I'm done" perspective?
3. Think about how you feel about the situation from this new perspective. Does it put you in a good frame of mind?
4. If this one doesn't do it for you, try another one, and another one, and another one until you land on one that works.
5. Once you've found the perspective that you like, choose it and stay with it until you feel the need to change.

From this new powerful perspective, you can go out and build your cathedral. You just have to choose it.

"The circumstances of the event will be essentially the same no matter what perspective you are in, AND your way of looking at the situation has enormous impact."

So, set yourself up for success by being aware of what your perspective is and if it isn't useful to you, choose one that is more helpful. Because the better your perspective, chances are, the better the outcome will be.

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