

Perceptual Intelligence

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Perceptual Intelligence is the knowledge and understanding that everything we experience (especially thoughts and feelings) are defined by our perception. It's important to realize that this is an active, not passive, process and therefore we have the ability to control it or change it.

First, let's look at how perception works.

Perception is the end result of a thought that begins its journey with the senses. We see, hear, physically feel, smell or taste an event. After the event is experienced it must then go through various filters before our brains decipher what exactly has happened and how we feel about it. Even though this process can seem instantaneous, it still always happens.

The filters that make up perception are as follows:

1. What we know about the subject or event. *I saw an orange and knew it was edible.*
2. What our previous experience (and/or knowledge) with the subject or event was. *Last time I ate an orange I peeled it first (knowledge to peel an orange before eating it) and it was sweet. Our previous experience forms our expectations.*
3. Our current emotional state. How we are feeling at the time of the event does affect how we will feel after the event. *I was in a bad mood when I ate the orange and it angered me that it was sour and not sweet (my expectation)*

In the end my intellectual and emotional perception regarding the eating of an orange was an unpleasant experience. Depending on how strong that experience was, determines how I will feel next time I eat an orange. For example, if I got violently sick after eating an orange, the next time I see an orange, I probably won't want to eat it. If I had a pleasant experience eating an orange, the next time I see an orange, I'll likely want to eat it.

Even though emotions seemly occur as a result of an experience, they are actually the result of a complicated process. This process involves interpreting action and thought and then assigning meaning to it. The mind attaches meaning with prejudice as the information goes through the perceptual filters we mentioned above.

Our perceptual filters also determine truth, logic along with meaning - though they don't always do this accurately. Only when we become aware that a bad

feeling could be an indication of a misunderstanding (error in perception) we can begin to make adjustments to our filters and change the emotional outcome.

When left alone and untrained, the mind chooses emotions and reactions based on a “survival” program which does not take into account that we are civilized beings – it's only concerned with survival.

A good portion of this program is faulty because the filters have created distortions, deletions and generalizations which alter perception. For example, jumping to a conclusion about “all” or “none” of something based on one experience. The unconscious tends to think in absolutes and supports “one time” learnings from experience (this is the survival aspect of learning).

Example:

Incident: A person gets bit by a large dog and the unconscious creates a fear of large dogs in efforts to keep you from getting bit again.

Analysis: While it may be good to be wary of all big dogs in certain circumstances, to fear all big dogs is erroneous thinking and leads to subsequent unresourceful behavior.

Let's look at the errors in thinking that leads to this general fear state. The “deletion” is the details of what may have caused the initial dog attack. This is important and useful information. A big dog with its owner at a park, bounding up to you, wagging its tail, is likely to present no danger to you. On the other hand, a dog (big or little) eating a bone in your back alley may be a danger to you if you were to approach it.

The “generalization” is the category you put all dogs or all big dogs into. Generalizing can lead to faulty conclusions because there are always exceptions that need to be taken into consideration. Generalizing leads to narrow mindedness.

The “distortion” is the thought that any large dog will harm you regardless of circumstance. This simply isn't true and limits you in your experience with dogs.

The awakened mind takes the experience into consideration and seeks options through knowledge and understanding on the subject to avoid future consequences. For example, looking back on the incident for details you may have missed you recall that *the dog was injured*. This little detail changes the meaning, the intent of the bite. It also serves as a learning experience. For example, in this case, you have learned that if you ever come upon an injured dog in the future, take precautions to avoid getting bit.

Removing the distortion and generalization allows you to think rationally about dogs, even injured dogs. An injured dog may (or may not) bite you if you touch it,

therefore it's wise to use precautions when approaching an injured dog. Otherwise, dogs are generally okay.

Example:

You are driving your car, on your way to work, when another car cuts in front of you and speeds off. The fear of a potential accident causes adrenaline to pump through your body and a normal response emotional response is to get angry at the other driver for putting you in danger.

You begin to tell yourself what an inconsiderate and stupid person that other driver is and continue to think about how careless their driving is. Those thoughts lead to thoughts of yourself being in a car wreck and in the hospital...who'll take care of your children “ As you continue thinking about this, you feel yourself becoming more and more angry. You're fuming. You see that car ahead of you at a red light...you feel like ramming into his car just to teach him a lesson.... Road Rage... WAIT, STOP ... REWIND

...another car cuts in front of you and then speeds off. You feel the adrenaline rush though your body at the near miss. You tell yourself, “Whew, that was close! Good thing I'm such a good driver.” You continue on, feeling proud of your quick reflexes and vigilance of what is going on, on the road. You continue on thinking about how many things can cause accidents if a person isn't paying attention to the road and feel thankful that you were paying attention. You continue on and feel good about yourself.

The first example allows the primitive brain to react and the outcome is that you feel upset and become a danger to yourself and the other person (anger, unchecked usually results in reckless behavior). Nothing good comes from this incident.

In the second example, you decide to focus on another perspective of the incident – your driving skills and ability to avert danger. With this line of thinking, you reinforce your good driving skills (vigilance and reaction) and you remain in a good mood.

In the first example, when you focused on the other driver, you began to invent reasons for his behavior. “He's trying to cause an accident.” “He thinks he owns the road” etc. The truth is, you don't know what he was or was not thinking at the time, nor do you know what his intention was beyond wanting to change lanes. For all you know, you were in a blind spot and he simply didn't see you. Perhaps he had just received some horrible news, a family member was at the hospital near death, and wasn't as road cautious as normal. In addition, you probably can think of times when you were distracted or in a hurry and not paying as close attention to your driving as you should. All of this reflects perspective. Looking at a situation from different points of view and choosing the best one.

Perceptual Intelligence is a learned skill. It begins with awareness and requires practice before it becomes habitual. So, you may find yourself initially reacting to a situation but – now having this knowledge – you catch yourself and ask yourself – is this the best perspective choice?

Perception and Memory

“The problem is never the person, never the experience, never what we have been through. The problem is always the frame, always the mental movie, always the higher frames running the movie.” (The Users Manual for The Brain by L. Michael Hall and Bob Bodenhamer, 2003)

Since all incidents go through our perceptual filters, we essentially are the writers, directors and editors of our own movies called memories. Thus, memories are not recorded in the same way that a video camera records an incident.

This is actually a good thing because it gives us the power to take any memory and edit it, adding new meanings and resources to that memory so that it serves us a useful purpose.

A few of my clients have objected to this procedure because they believed that in changing a memory, you change the truth. My response to these objections is – your memory is not “true” anyway. Every time you bring up a past memory and play the movie, it gets changed. The incident initially passed through your perceptual filters before being recorded as a memory and passes through your perceptual filters again every time you recall the incident. Those perceptual filters give meaning and change meaning according to your present state.

Given that our memories are vague representations of an incident anyway, what purpose does an unresourceful or painful memory serve? Why bother keeping that perception of the event when you are able to make something good to come from it? This is where Perceptual Intelligence comes in. Perceptual Intelligence is knowing that your mind is more plastic than stone and can be molded and reworked as needed.

Many have survived horrible incidents and made decisions which subsequently shaped their lives in a positive or negative direction. It was not the incident that determined the outcome; it was the perception of the incident and the decision on life direction that followed. The heroic survivors we see on TV or read about in books merely applied principles of Perceptual Intelligence, where the “victims” remained immobilized indefinitely.

Sidebar: The difference between a victim and a survivor is perception. A victim perceives him or herself as helpless and powerless - unlucky to have experienced this circumstance. A victim isolates themselves from others and thinks mainly about themselves and how bad things are. A survivor perceives him or herself as lucky to have survived this incident and chooses to make something positive result from it. A survivor reaches out to others for support, to give support and focuses on helping others. The only difference between the two people is their perception of themselves and the event.

For a survivor, what often follows tragedy is an euphony of how precious each moment of our lives really is. The euphony is the decision to live life in the moment and realize how easy it is to enjoy each moment.

Redefining a Memory

Imagine yourself as a director of a movie (your memory of the event). In your hands is the movie reel of the incident. As director, you have creative license to delete, modify or add to the scenes.

Ask yourself the following questions about a memory of a troubling incident:

1. What do you want the movie to mean? What is the message you want to give the viewer? (example: Be careful around injured strange dogs)
2. What changes would you make to the movie to have a more resourceful outcome? What decision about the incident would the main character have to change in order to make the outcome more desirable? (example: the main character (yourself) reflects upon the incident and feels relieved that s/he came through it alive and pretty much intact. The main character, even though she was injured, liked the feeling of helping an injured animal and as a result looks into volunteering at a animal shelter).
3. Imagine you are sitting in a theatre and in your hand you have a remote control. There is a switch on the remote for "black and white" or "color". You want to choose the "black and white" setting. (This will help you dissociate your self from the memory so that you can view the memory without feeling emotional pain).
4. Press the play button and imagine the movie/memory beginning to play. When you get to a spot that had troubled you, press "pause". What changes do you want to make to the movie so that the main character (you) is feeling more resourceful? Perhaps you want to add a character as support to you? Perhaps you want to change the main character's perception (some understanding about the issue, looking at it from a

humorous point of view, looking at it from an adult's perspective instead of a child's ... etc.).

5. Once you have made the changes, rewind the movie and then play it back (in color) with the new changes in place. Now, does it feel better? Continue on with the editing until you are satisfied with the feeling you get when you recall that memory.

You see, when you resource a troubling memory - even if all you do is give the main character knowledge that they will come through the incident okay – you freeing your mind from the past and allowing yourself to have more power in the present.

Conclusion:

Perceptual Intelligence is a learned skill. It begins with awareness and requires practice before it becomes a habit. So, you may find yourself initially reacting unfavorably to a situation but – now having this knowledge – you catch yourself and ask yourself – is this the best choice of perspective? If not, you now know you can change it.

Our mind is like a work of art, you can throw the paint on the canvas and take your chances that the outcome will be pleasant, or you can apply the paint with skill and create a work you can admire.

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