

MIND MATTERS: Perceptual Reality

How we see the world can both help and hinder us. While no one perceives the world universally in the same way, we tend to believe we do. This is a problem, as we come to believe our way of framing the world is the “right” way, and therefore everyone else should see it as we do, or they must be either blind or idiots.

We build a great deal of certainty around our “knowledge”, but what we call “Reality” is really highly subjective. Each of us uses our five bodily senses to experience small portions of the physical world around us. We then filter this data through our experiences, our values and our beliefs to reach a conclusion we call “Reality”.

However, since each of us experiences the world through interpretive judgment, the likelihood of having the exact same understanding of the exact same experience is essentially nil. We can approximate, but then translating the experience from our minds to language to communicate it to another further distorts the “truth”.

Mariah Nemeth, in her work, calls this a "structure of knowing". Others call it a "perceptual filter". It creates the structure with which you can map the world and understand it. However, it also limits you. It is never the whole story, and yet you can easily fall into the trap of assuming that it is. Every structure of knowing we have is false somehow.

Consider how you perceive your parents...loving or unloving, smart or stupid? Whichever, these are YOUR perceptual constructions, and they limit what you “see” and when it comes to your parents. Regardless of how they act, you will only notice what Tony Robbins calls “referents”. That is, you will seek and accept information that supports your biases, and ignore or discount information that doesn’t support them. It’s selective filtering, and you probably aren’t even aware you’re doing it.

This concept is critically important to understand, as it helps us both empathize with and understand others. When we begin to see that there might be other ways of framing reality, we open our minds to vast possibilities, whether they’re concerning our future, our families or the current state of our nation.

How well do your structures of knowing serve you? How helpful are they to you and others? Strive always to be open to examining your own modes of perceiving; how you know what you think you know. This is a gradual process of unfoldment - it takes time and patience - but it will reveal rewards as you apply yourself to it.

* * *

Wendy Jameson, MA, offers business analysis, strategy coaching and personal business planning through her company, Potentiate (www.potentiate.net). She's an author, consultant, ex-therapist and life adventurer. She lives in Gilbert with her husband, two boys and pet menagerie.