



Reality is Perception

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Have you ever tried a diet and failed to lose the weight you wanted to lose? Maybe more than once? Was it the diet's fault? Or have you ever read a book on marriage enrichment to enhance your marriage and yet your marriage stayed the same? Was it the book's fault? Or have you ever attended a training program at work to learn something new and yet a few weeks later found yourself still employing old habits and outdated information? Was it the training program's fault?

If you don't yet recognize the problem, there is a picture of it in your house. It is usually located just above the sink in your bathroom. If you're not convinced, go home and look at it. It is silver, shiny and commonly referred to as a mirror.

As the famous cartoonist Walt Kelly said through Pogo, his cartoon character, we have met the enemy and he is us. To be more accurate, the enemy is what we think. What we do or don't do is the result of what we think. While there is no denying the reality of a challenging economy or the uncertainty that comes with newly elected officials, these are merely circumstances, not the true source of our problems or our solutions. These and everything around us are external influences that we choose to impact, let impact us or do nothing with.

In "You Can Be Happy No Matter What" written by Richard Carlson, he explains that thinking is ability, not reality. I know this seems obvious, but we frequently confuse our thinking with our reality. For example, two people can witness the same event, but have completely different explanations of it. As my wife and I raise our teenage boys and try to make sense of the actions that result from the teenage mind, it happens almost daily! The reason is that people interpret reality differently. Our unique knowledge, experiences, skills and values cause us to interpret situations differently. Even indisputable facts can take on completely different meanings for different people. Our thoughts don't represent our reality, but only our interpretation of our reality.

The normal sequence of events is this: We take in information from our surroundings. It is processed and filtered through our biases. It then becomes our declaration of fact or a question if we decide to take in additional information. It creates a feeling which drives our attitude and mood. Collectively, they all drive the actions we decide to take. In summary, the decisions we make, the actions we take, the actions we don't take and all that we do come from our thinking. And to be clear, our thinking comes from within, not from anything external to us. We choose to be in a bad mood. We choose to ignore our diet. We choose to discount what we read in a book or learn in a training program.

If you want to enhance your performance at work, improve your relationships at home, develop yourself in any way or simply achieve more in your life, take responsibility for your thinking. Here are seven actions you can choose to take that will help you:

- 1) **Recognize** - Recognize that your thinking is a function of your consciousness and sub consciousness, not something external to you. Recognize that your thinking is an interpretation of your reality, not reality itself.
- 2) **Accept** - Accept that you are in control and that you choose to react the way you do to your circumstances and situations.
- 3) **Understand** - Understand that you have built in biases and blind spots based on your personality, experiences, values and knowledge. Conduct personality assessments such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to understand them and help bring them into your consciousness.
- 4) **Ask** - Ask others for feedback to get a more accurate picture of yourself. Conduct a 360 assessment such as the Alpine Link SCOPE of Leadership™ 360 degree survey to capture the perceptions of others. Others are like a mirror, except their feedback is more insightful. Just be aware that their feedback reflects their biases too.
- 5) **Learn** - Learn to intercept and question your judgment as you uncover your own biases and natural preferences.
- 6) **Visualize** - Visualize that which you want to become, overcome, attain or achieve. Dwell on thoughts that support that which you want to become, overcome, attain or achieve.
- 7) **Engage** - Engage in that which takes you in the direction of what you desire to achieve.

There are times when you just need to take a closer look in your mirror, particularly at what you are thinking. As Zig Ziglar says, avoid stinking thinking. Take control of your thoughts and you'll find that you can transcend your circumstances, remain upbeat and accomplish anything you desire.

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