

Perception

Perceptions are created from information taken in through our five senses and then interpreted in our minds. Perception is developed from life rules, history, experiences, and other people's interpretations and opinions (e.g., work, family, church, school, friends, or people with great intentions but different opinions). Our perceptions can be so strong in fact, that they become our beliefs. Our beliefs drive us and determine how we respond to situations and adversity. Many of our beliefs fall into these categories:

- Control
- Pleasing others
- Achievement.

What is the difference between perception and reality? Reality is fact without judgment or interpretation (e.g., It is snowing). Perception is past and future interpretation (e.g., Every time it snows I have a hard time getting to work on time, I'm sure I will be late and my boss will be upset). We understand our history based on things like our memory of experiences, others' descriptions of our experiences, stories told in photographs, and recollections of our feelings. Often, we change the "facts" of past situations based on our interpretation of them. Since we don't know the facts of our future, we rely on our perceptions and may use our history to predict our future. When our beliefs are based on distorted perceptions, it is helpful to know that we have the power to change them.

Sometimes perception causes conflict. When perception is based on inaccurate or distorted information, our inner dialog will often guide us on a path that is not productive. Self-defeating or distorted perceptions generally fall into these four categories:

1. ***Need to be perfect*** – I need to do everything right the first time.
2. ***Vulnerability to criticism*** – Criticism means I am not okay.
3. ***Having inflexible rules or "shoulds"*** – I should stay late or they'll think I'm slacking off.
4. ***Being non-assertive*** – Not using your voice to say what you really think and feel.

Interpretations or perceptions can come to us in the form of rapid-fire thoughts, known as "chatter" or in a narrative we build to make sense of a situation. Humans love stories, so we tell ourselves them all the time. Examples of assuming we know what people are thinking...

Sample Perceptions:

1. A service representative thinks, "I won't offer my suggestion to the VP on making calls more efficient. He has probably already thought of this and will think I'm wasting his time."
2. A manager thinks, "I must be the bridge between my designer and my copywriter. If I'm not involved they'll have trouble interpreting the clients' needs and won't deliver the project." Meanwhile the designer thinks, "I wish the copywriter and I could have some time alone together. My manager is great, but I want to be able to bounce ideas around to get to a creative solution, without making our manager worried about staying on track."
3. A marketing associate thinks, "If I don't organize the holiday party, it will never get off the ground. I did it last year and everyone is expecting me to do it again."

Perceptions can be very powerful and we often make assumptions about other people's intentions. Our distortions can lead to worry, fear, poor decision making, misunderstandings and lack of confidence. **Action builds confidence, more on that later.**

Tools:

What are the facts of the situation?

Try This...

Try to use these tips as a guide to differentiate between your perception and reality. When you find yourself making an assumption or listening to your made up story, ask yourself:

- What are the actual facts of the situation?
- Is my narrative causing me to have a distorted perception?
- Is this perception helping or hurting me?
- Would I act the same way if I wasn't being influenced by my distorted perception?

Every experience we have in our lives has an impact on how we see ourselves. As children, our experiences at school, with family, friends and teams, help to shape our perception of who we are. Later, our experiences and relationships, both social and professional, continue

to affect and be affected by our self-concept. As our roles and priorities change, our self-concept and self-esteem continue to act as the lens through which we see ourselves and the

world around us.

