

The Three Aspects of Perception

Each person, over the course of his or her life, comes into minor and sometimes major conflicts with others. Many people are also trapped in conflict-ridden emotional relationships or feel constantly uneasy as a result of problematic relationships at work. A fundamental reason that an interpersonal conflict often seems so involved and entangled to us is that we lack a clear view of what parts of the problem we ourselves are responsible for, and to what extent the fault lies with the other person. The following exercise is an effective way to resolve such problems.

Think about someone with whom you have constant relationship problems.

First. Stand in the room and think of this person. Imagine her or him standing in front of your inner eye a few meters away. Sense within yourself what conflict this person is causing and what it is doing to you inwardly. Explore your feelings and, very important, ask yourself: How am I interpreting this person's behavior? What might be the reason he or she behaves this way? Often your interpretations result from the feeling that you are not taking yourself seriously, that you are not getting recognition or respect. As a result, old beliefs are being triggered such as 'I am not important,' 'I am not noticed,' 'I am powerless,' 'I am not adequate.' Notice whether the behavior of your conflict partner triggers such emotions and attitudes in you.

Second. After you have examined your situation carefully, shake off all such feelings and ideas and try to return to a neutral state of mind. This can also be achieved by totally distracting yourself for a short time. Then move spatially to the location of your conflict partner. You now take on his or her role, by trading places. This new location is that of empathy. Try to put yourself in the shoes of your antagonist as much as possible. Sense this person's feelings, especially about you, see yourself with his or her eyes. How could your counterpart be interpreting your own behavior?

Three. When you have sufficiently examined the feelings and interpretations of your counterpart, remove yourself from this perspective completely and return to a neutral attitude. Now you move into the third position of perception, which is the perspective of observation. From here you see yourself from the outside and, at an equal distance, you see this other person. Slide a glass wall in front of your inner eye, between your imagined self and your antagonist. Such an image is helpful for removing yourself from this entangled involvement. Now imagine that you are an impartial judge and must evaluate this case. How much of this difficult situation with the other person is your fault? What do you need to take responsibility for? Then look at the other person and ask yourself: How much of this is his or her doing? Then consciously give back responsibility and ownership to that person. You can now take on the share for which you are responsible. Imagine that you are your own coach. What would you advise? How can you behave in the future or how could you have behaved better in this situation? Remember that you can never change the other person: you have control only over your own behavior and your own attitudes.