



How Are You Being Perceived in the Workplace?

What do you think co-workers think about you as a worker and professional? How would they rate your attitude, work ethic, and abilities within the organization? Why is this even important to know? It's really important because people form their judgments of us based on what they see and observe about us in the workplace.

Examples of Negative Perceptions:

Some common negative examples would be:

- Perception - a manager favors certain workers.
- Perception - an employee is taking advantage of his sick days at the busiest times.
- Perception - a co-worker is lazy and will get by with as little as possible.
- Perception - a certain employee's mood brings the whole office down.

I don't know of many people who want to be seen in a negative light, yet without even realizing it, our behavior (good or bad) is telling a story about us every day.

How Are Perceptions Developed

This is a critical question because, as professionals, how we are perceived is of utmost importance to our roles and relationships at work. The image we set before co-workers is cast early on and it's important to know that the way we are perceived may not be congruent with who we really are.



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Since most perceptions are developed based on how others observe us, honestly answer the questions below:

1. Measurable behaviors

How often do you:

- Make personal phone calls
- Text friends at work or in meetings
- Check in with Facebook while on the clock
- Talk about your personal life
- Isolate and refuse to engage socially (like lunch or coffee)
- Do as little as you can do to get by

On the other hand, how often do you:

- Offer to help others with a project
- Spend time at your desk doing what's most important
- Go above and beyond your duties
- Help a co-worker who is falling behind



2. Assessing attitudes

How often do you:

- Vent in a negative way about the organization
- Convey how you are thinking or feeling through your body language

- Let your emotions control how you interact with others
- Bring problems at home to work with you
- Misuse your role as a leader
- Have a tendency to be moody

On the other hand, do others see you as one who is:

- A team player
- Loyal to the organization
- Managing your frustrations about work in a professional way
- Negotiating conflict with others constructively
- Willing to engage in conversations to better the organization

I think you get the point. Good or bad, perceptions are formed of us every day based on what we consistently do or don't do. Unfortunately, if bad perceptions of you and your work develop, a domino effect can occur.

Five Facts on Warped Perceptions

1. Warped perceptions can negatively impact your projects, performance, and employer.
2. Once you are viewed in a negative light, everything you do from that point on will be blown out of proportion or questioned.
3. People who don't like you will make matters look far worse than they really are.
4. It takes time to reverse a perception once it's cracked, but it can be done.
5. Your frustrations will increase because there can seem like there is no way back to the right perceptions.

Speaking of the way back, there are some ways to correct the perceptions of others and be seen in a more favorable light.

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Earning a Better Perception from Others

So let's say that there are those within your organization who have drawn warped perceptions of who you are, and you seriously want to reverse that trend and prove them wrong. Where do you begin?

1. Admit to yourself that there is definitely a problem with how you are perceived by others: They might be wrong, in your opinion, and perhaps their conclusions about you have not been very fair or based on truth. However, the issue here is to find even the smallest kernel of truth in what they are thinking about you and admit it. Perhaps you can even acknowledge it to staff and/or your supervisor for the purpose of taking a first step in reversing the misperception.
2. Make the necessary behavioral adjustments: If the perception has been that you are not focused in staff meetings and glued to your cell phone, then leave your phone in your desk (unless you are on call for an emergency). If the perception is that you, as the manager, favor certain workers, then go out of your way to spend time with those doing the complaining. If the perception is that you are too sensitive, defensive, and unapproachable when you need to improve on a task, then welcome feedback and slow down your reactions when someone is pointing something out.
3. Give it time: Those who have held their negative views of you for some time will need some convincing. Don't expect them to instantly applaud you for doing what they think you should have been doing

all along. Most people are gracious and love to see comebacks if they are genuine. Just be consistent and patient.

Avoiding Two Extremes:

There are two extremes to avoid when we talk about what others think of us.

Extreme #1 - You don't care what people think about you!!!! This attitude suggests that you are above any critique, suggestion, or differing opinion. This can be an arrogant stance and will attract more negative perceptions than you had to begin with.

Extreme #2 - You care too much what people think about you!!!! One of my mentors years ago told me that he wanted to see the day when I no longer allowed other people to dictate how I felt. There will be times when people have the wrong perception of you just because you're you. For whatever the reason, we can rub people the wrong way without even trying. Get comfortable in your own skin and realize that you can't please everybody all the time.

Final Thought:

As professionals we want to better ourselves in every way. So ask yourself a few questions. How am I perceived by others at work? Am I willing to do whatever is appropriate to change those perceptions? Am I proactive and doing the best job I can? What separates the boys from the men and the girls from the women in the workplace is the ability to step up and make the necessary changes to improve. It can happen, and the rewards are worth it!



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Bill formed TeamWorks in 2001 to help organizations achieve their goals for establishing high morale and client satisfaction. TeamWorks currently specializes in offering one-on-one surveys and evaluations for management and staff to assess the current culture's needs and recommended trainings going forward.

In addition to conducting a variety of workshops and in-services on workplace issues, Bill mediates conflict among partnerships and staff relationships, speaks at conventions, facilitates management retreats, and offers personal consultation and counseling for staff.

Bill's strengths are in public speaking, mediation, and understanding the complexities of relational dynamics in the workplace. He lives in Medford, Oregon, with his wife Jenny, and enjoys spending time with their five children and five granddaughters.