



teamworks

Making the Workplace Work for You

It's a Matter of Perspective... in the Workplace

*“When you change the way you look at things,
the things you look at change.”*

—Wayne Dyer

Perhaps you've heard about the college student's letter that changed her parent's perspective?

Dear mom and dad,

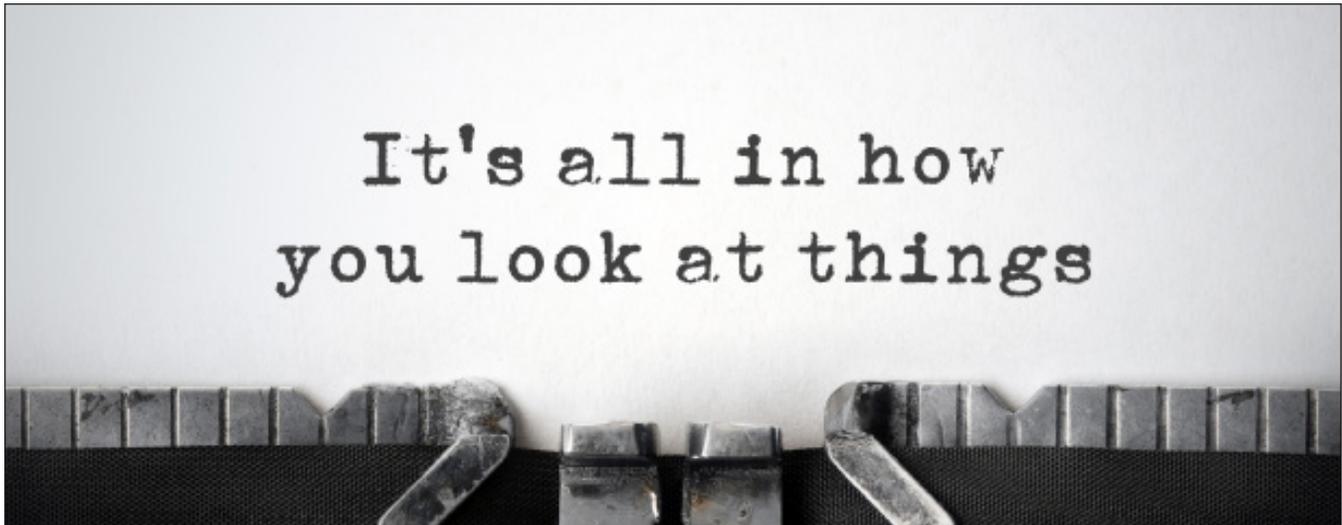
Just thought I'd drop you a note to update you on my plans:

I have fallen in love with a man who calls himself Bruno. He quit high school in the 11th grade to get married. About a year ago they got divorced because he said “she didn't take good care of him.” We've been going steady for two months and planned to get married in the fall. Until then, I've decided to move into his studio. I might be pregnant. No worries mom and dad. Bruno is really smart and he doesn't believe in car payments so he has a Harley for both of us to ride on. We haven't figured where to put the baby's car seat yet. We also are excited about the piercing studio that he is trying to start. We'll be able to work there all day while the baby sleeps.

Anyway, I dropped out of school last week although I'd like to finish college in the future.

Dad I want you to know that everything I just told you is false. But it is true that I got a C- in French, and it is true that I flunked out in math and it is true that I'm going to need more money for tuition payments.

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Obviously things can get a lot worse than more tuition payments. That's perspective!

You see, perspective is the way we view people, situations and how we are treated in the workplace. The actual definition of perspective is "to look through and see clearly." It's the ability to properly interpret exactly what is being said or done in any given set of circumstances.

Some common examples would be...

- ▶ You are sure that your supervisor has it out for you or doesn't appreciate you. You recently found out that it is not true and he/she values you as an employee.
- ▶ There is a major change in the organization and you are feeling that it is either about you or there is a plan to replace you. Yet at a recent staff meeting it was explained that the move was predicated completely on a financial change recommended by accounting.
- ▶ You are regretting speaking up in the staff meeting and feel nobody really cares about your opinions or ideas. However the boss called you into his office the next day and not only thanked for your excellent input, but is researching the possibility of implementing your suggestion.

I once worked with an office that had two employees who were at odds with each other for two years and the problem had become obvious to everyone on staff. When I inquired as to when or why the problem first began, one of them said it started on the first day she was hired.

She said on that first day her co-worker told her she had hoped her relative that had also applied for that position would have been hired so she could work with her. From that moment the new hire knew she wasn't wanted there.

She was defensive and always looking over her shoulder and the other employee couldn't figure out why she was so resistant and irritated with her.

When this all came out in mediation, the older employee said "I didn't mean that I didn't want you here. I was just stating that my relative applied for the same position." After a bit more discussion it changed everything for both of them.

One thing I've noticed about forming our perspective is that we can quickly misjudge a person or situation unless we have all the clear facts.

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Another thing of interest is when we are trying to help someone move out of a reoccurring unhealthy situation. Sometimes all it takes is getting them to see their situation from a different perspective.

Here are some other ideas that could be helpful with having the right perspective:

A Few Facts on Perspective

- ▶ Having the right perspective can change our behavior for the better.
- ▶ Different perspectives may not mean that another's perspective is wrong. Instead, they are just seeing the situation from a different point of view. It is said, "I've learned that two people can look at the same thing and see something totally different". If you don't believe that, try marriage!
- ▶ Changing one's perspective involves being willing to seeing another's viewpoint from a different angle.
- ▶ It doesn't take that much effort to shift our thinking when necessary.

Have you ever been taking a picture or looking through binoculars and the lens is not in focus? It doesn't take much effort to get the focus crisp; just a few turns and you're there.

When we have our own narrow view and interpretation about what is going on at work, the best way to refocus is to step back a few steps so you can see the forest from the trees and get a clearer picture of what is really happening or not.

If we jump too quickly and insist that we know what people's motives are or how they are feeling or thinking about a given situation, more times than not we are probably out of focus.



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So what would be some practical steps in the workplace to refocus our perspective?

Things to Do

Be realistic:

Sometimes our perspective is formed out of our own insecurity. We actually imagine what isn't even true or accurate. Be sure that your interpretation of what has happened is based on truth.

Try putting a positive spin on a given outcome:

If there is a major adjustment or change in the office, rather than saying what we will lose, focus on the possibility of what we will gain from this new situation.

Don't react until you have all the facts:

I like the phrase 'Observation not Accusation.' In other words, gather the necessary data and your perspective should be clearer and more accurate. Another quote— "Everything we hear is an opinion not a fact. Everything we see is a perspective, not the truth." (Marcus Aurelius)

Be open to the possibility that your perspective is off:

Instead of stubbornly insisting what you are thinking is right and the other person or group is wrong, maybe a more objective solution-oriented discussion is warranted in order to clear the air.

Make a decision to think differently:

Why not step back and look at the situation from a different angle or point of view; especially if the situation or relationship is not working or worsening? "If you don't like something change it; if you can't change it, change the way you think about." (Mary Englebriet)



Final Thought

Like the opening story about the daughter in college needing more money for tuition whose parents didn't get the full picture until they read to end of the letter, so we also in the workplace frequently can have a clearer perspective and see a more accurate picture if we don't form opinions too quickly.

So whatever your current viewpoint is about a person, conversation or situation at work, step back, adjust your focus and maybe your new perspective will be the right one! It truly is "All a Matter of Perspective in the Workplace."



Bill Gallagher has been counseling and working with professionals since 1980. His emphasis in the workplace is to help develop both relational skills and professional standards among administration and staff. He has worked in multiple organizational settings and of recent has spent most of his time addressing workplace issues in healthcare and city government.

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.