

PEOPLE ARE FUNNY



Whether you lead an organization, team, group, person, or set of outcomes, you may agree that leadership is “all about the people.” Our biggest challenges and successes require us to manage, work with or influence the people who are “co-creators” of our key results. We can be very smart with the best ideas about the work, yet fall short, or get marginal results due to poor implementation, missed opportunities, or simply unnecessary stress and strain on the system. We may even accomplish the intended result, but lose the respect and confidence of our team or fail to build individual and team capability along the way. These failures can be due to many things, yet often they occur because we do not understand the differences in people and incorporate that knowledge into our interactions.

This writing is about how we view and find pathways to success with the people that matter to our results. It’s not necessarily about leadership, but then again, this is a capability great leaders possess.

This material will:

- Challenge you to stop and think about your judgments and how they affect your actions and outcomes.
- Present a way to think which moves beyond a human resistance to people who are different from us.
- Offer a tool to organize your observations and stimulate your curiosity.

JUDGMENT CAN BLOCK NEW THINKING

Human beings are “wired” to make complex judgments. We absorb and retain a tremendous amount of data that we filter through our experience, standards, and desires. And as we move forward in life, we observe people and situations and—SNAP!—we make a judgment about their capability, style, motivation, etc. Along with the thoughts or words we use comes a feeling—positive, negative, and occasionally neutral. When the feeling is negative, we are “in judgment” of that person.

This wiring is automatic and natural. It’s the same wiring that protects us from stepping out into traffic and prompts us to extend our hand in greeting. We take in a myriad of data and make a decision based on what we know and the standards we have adopted.



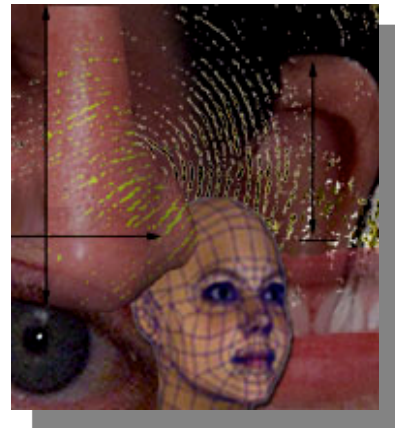
Our negative judgment is particularly problematic because the emotions that accompany that judgment often:

- Stop us from action
- Push us into wrong action
- Blind us to possibilities
- Seduce us to complain rather than seek solutions

Imagine if upon observing and gathering information, we shifted our view to see that person as “funny.” While it may sound silly, simple, or naive—the best path to success is to reframe your judgment and give yourself options.

EACH PERSON IS UNIQUE

We all know we are products of our personal biology, history, and environment. The person we know the best is our own self. We can recall our earliest memory. We usually know who our biological parents are and we may know about our family genetics, maybe even our IQ. We can remember schools we went to, books we read, teachers we liked and those we didn't. We have stories about how we had fun, what we excelled at, and what we are proud of. We can rattle off why we chose the schools we went to; we can recite our resume and point to managers and companies we most appreciate. We also have private thoughts about our greatest pleasures and fears.



When we succeed, we do so in large part because of our history. And, when we make mistakes or fail, the cause may be rooted in our history, too. While we judge our own deficits or failures, we often partially forgive ourselves because we did not intend to fail—our personal history informed our capability, aptitude, or experience in the matter.

Yet, we don't understand or forgive other people quite as easily. After all, it is not possible to know the other person as well as we know ourself.



PEOPLE LIKE ME ARE EASY

The heart of the problem is that we tend to categorize people as Easy or Challenging. We are more eager to work with, talk to, debate an issue, etc. with people who are “easy.” We are more likely to avoid, procrastinate, complain about, or dismiss people who are “challenging.” Why?

A Person Who Is Easy	A Person Who Is Challenging
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is someone we understand well • Is like us in fundamental ways—our thinking or behavior • Allows us to be ourselves—without extra effort 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is someone we don't know or understand • Is not like us in fundamental ways—our thinking or behavior • Tries to change us or works to be “right”—we have to work harder

You may be saying “of course, some people are easy for me; and, some people are challenging.” But do you really know that person who is challenging? Do you realize that your judgments are *your* judgments? Do you incorporate that recognition into how you operate? All of us can get better at how we interact with the key people in our sphere of influence.

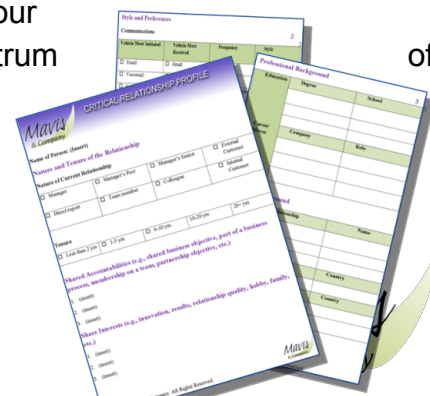
CURIOSITY YIELDS MORE UNDERSTANDING

What can you do to guard against this human tendency to judge? How can you become more effective with people who are different from you?

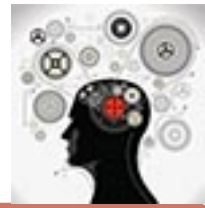
Start with identifying what you do know about the person. Then notice what you *don't* know about the person. Check your data for what you assume and what you actually know. You will never have all the information about someone—not even a small fraction. In fact, you don' even have all the information about yourself at your disposal.

Using the Critical Relationship Profile tool to organize your information, you will be prompted to record a wide spectrum of data:

- The nature and tenure of your current relationship
- Shared accountabilities



of



- Shared interest (work and personal)
- Personal and professional background
- Style and preferences (e.g., communications, decisions, and meeting facilitation, etc.)
- Issues of importance (e.g. relationships, results, reputation, process-orientation, etc.)

Be curious about the person. Start to really observe this person who you think is “funny” (i.e., different). Operate as if you don’t know the person at all. Ask questions in a neutral way that will give you more understanding of how the person is thinking. Guard against any instinct to make your approach or way of operating better or best—don’t infer that this *funny* person is inferior.

This type of real curiosity can be very valuable for any key relationship. It is often the people we think we know the best for whom we are most judging (i.e., long-term colleagues, children, spouse, lifelong friends, etc.).

Our judgments can even be positive *and* limiting. When we’ve decided that we appreciate a characteristic of a colleague, we may assume we know more than we do. We are quick to judge with a positive, affirming thought or a negative thought.

OUR LENS SHAPES OUR VIEW

Consider your eyes and ears as an imperfect camera lens. Our lens is imperfect because, unlike a camera, we:

1. Rarely capture all of the situation. We see and hear some percentage of what goes on in an interaction. There may be too much occurring. Or, we simply can’t absorb all of it.
2. Filter that information through our brain. And, our brain is fast. It sorts and matches what we see and hear attempting to make sense of it.

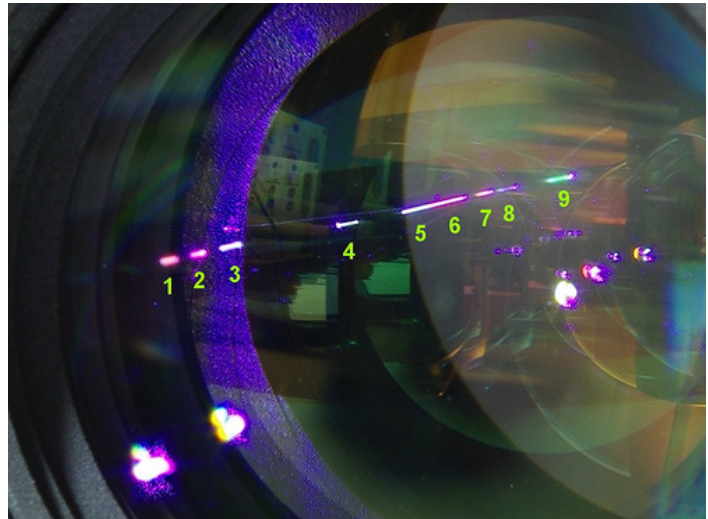
With limited data being sorted against our personal history and standards, we generate opinions about what is happening and why.

Recognize each judgment is based on your standards. In that SNAP of a judgment, we compare what we see in someone and what we believe is “right”—what we do



ourselves or have been taught to think is right. Take any judgment, positive or negative, and think about how five different people from different cultures might view the same situation.

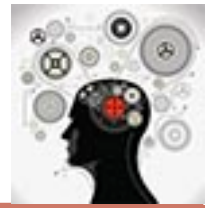
Understand yourself and your funniness. In order to understand how our “lens” is shaping our view, we can take a deeper, more reflective look at our own “self.” A humbling, but valuable exercise is to complete a personal profile and imagine how someone might see you as “funny.” Compare some of your styles and issues to those of the “funny” person. Any insights into why you might have difficulty understanding or interacting with this person?



A PERSONAL STORY

In my early thirties, I worked for a boss who “drove me crazy.” Let’s call him Tim. I was new to the company, and he was a bit of a loner. He lived two states away from our office and was present sporadically. Those were the days when we typed on electric typewriters. Most people used their secretary; Tim often typed his own memorandums with the first sentence “apologies for the typos within.” He was very smart and (I think) a visionary.

Two things about him drove me nuts. *One*, he would give me assignments for some analysis and wave his hands, talking fast—and I thought I knew what he wanted—only to find out in successive reviews that I didn’t. *Two*, he would stand in the doorway of my office periodically and as I turned to address him, he would say, “Mary, everyone is very pleased with your work. You are the first person to do this job well. BUT....” and he would launch into something he was not happy with. I had a lot of agreement about Tim’s foibles from virtually everyone I talked with. Tim was “just that way.” Quickly, I began to work on getting my reporting relationship changed and was successful within the first months.



It was not until I actually had my performance review and closing meeting with Tim that I had a valuable insight. In this meeting, I planned to give him some feedback and started by saying “I want to share what I appreciate about you and what has not worked well.” When I got through three sentences of how much I appreciated his knowledge and experience, he reached for the phone and asked our secretary to “bring in that marketing analysis I wrote.” The conversation that ensued gave me an understanding for how unappreciated this man felt. I guess he was not getting enough recognition from our firm of smart, big egos. Since that day, I have kept in mind that using and acknowledging a smart, important person’s expertise can go a long way toward building an effective relationship. I discerned that what I considered an attack was not an attack—in fact, Tim’s behavior was not about me at all.

My biggest regret is that I don’t know much about Tim and didn’t learn as much as I could have if I had been less resistant to him as a manager-colleague. If I could have seen the funniness in him rather than view him as a maddening man, I could have created some lightness and openness around his behavior and, as a consequence, made an even bigger impact in my role.

Try This!

Practice a conversation with one of your *funny* people.

1. Identify a person who frustrates you and with whom you have a conversation planned.
2. Take 10 minutes (no more) and write on a piece of paper “everything you know” about him or her—work-related and personal.
3. Look at your list and complete the phrase “_____ is the kind of person who...”

IT’S A NEW MINDSET – USE IT TO CREATE RESULTS

Here’s a mantra you can use to create an empowering mindset when you get frustrated with someone:

If I were born in the same town to the same parents on the same date...

Had the same DNA, IQ, body structure...



Grew up with the same siblings, went to the same schools, read the same books...

Went to the same college, same professors, jobs, (you get the picture)

Then, I would be doing and saying exactly what s/he is doing right now.

Yes, of course, each of us has freedom of choice. This is not about people being trapped in their past or without personal power. It is about consideration and appreciation of how each of us has come to the current bundle of funniness that we are.

We'll be talking about influencing strategies later. All of your focus on understanding the funniness of people will be the groundwork for your effectiveness as a person of influence. For now, shifting your mindset to "people are *funny*" will give you so much more freedom to think and take actions that produce better results.