A Second Chance to Make the Right Impression

In my workshops when I talk about perceptions – how they are formed and how they affect our creativity – participants used to ask me how to change the opinions others have already formed about them. I used to give some simple tips. In the recent issue of Harvard Business Review (HBR), January – February 2015, I came across an interesting article entitled “Managing yourself a second chance to make the right impression” written by Heidi Grant Halvorson, the associate director of Columbia Business School’s Motivation Science Centre. This article is based on the original article of HBR.

“Become more creative” series will continue from the next issue.

* ‘On my first assignment I missed a deadline and since then my boss has started calling me “unreliable.” All these years I have been very particular about targets and he has conveniently forgotten all of them, but this one is always in his mind.’
* ‘One day my wife told me to pick up some groceries from the market on the way back from office, and with preoccupied mind, I have forgotten to do. Now, according to her, I am ‘useless.’ (Thank God, my office people didn’t know that I am so!)
* ‘A customer wanted some material and while dispatching, one item was sent with a different specification. The customer immediately called and told our people not to assign hereinafter such works to me.’
* ‘I promised my daughter for taking her to a circus show. Due to traffic jam I reached my home late and the show was missed. ‘My dad is always like this,’ is the opinion she is now carrying about me.’

These are some of the common instances we come across with our own self or with others.

What do you see?:

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<tr>
<th>7 + 2</th>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
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In my workshops I show the above arithmetic and ask the participants to tell what they see. Most will say that the second one is wrong. No doubt, that is true. But if we see again we also see that three are correct. However all our attention is going towards the wrong one. The same people, who see the mistake here, are the ones who make complaints about others.

Many people would die rather than think. In fact they do – Bertrand Russel
When I do it is OK, but when others do it is hurting me.

**Create good impressions:** Halvorson explains that people come to know about us in two phases. In the first phase, the person makes an initial assessment of us quickly without conscious thought, relying on a variety of assumptions – using cues like physical appearance, our role and body language. In phase two, the person pays closer attention, gathering contrasting data, and making sense of it to draw conclusions about us. In both the phases, the people are trying to answer particular questions about us. It is as if they are looking at us through a set of lenses. The most powerful of these are the trust, power and ego lenses.

**Trust lens:** The trust lens is employed when people want to figure out if we are friends or foes. They assess our warmth (our expression of friendliness, respect, and empathy), which suggests that we have good intentions, and our competence (evidence that we are intelligent, skilled, and effective), which shows that we can act on our intentions.

**Power lens:** The power lens comes in to play when there is a disparity of power, especially when they have more than we do. They gaze us through: “Prove yourself useful to me, or get out of my way.”

**Ego lens:** The ego lens gives them a sense of who’s on top. Subconsciously people want confirmation that they are superior to us.

**Use the knowledge:** Now let us see how we can use this knowledge to our advantage. The first and most obvious strategy is to present the right kinds of evidence to help others draw the correct impression, keeping the lenses of perception in mind. Let us project warmth and competence – make eye contact, smile when appropriate, nod in agreement, listen carefully without interrupting, sitting up straight, and stand tall. Be a person of our word – perceived as principled and reliable are seen as strong allies.

For power lens, let us demonstrate at every opportunity, making it clear that we want to help them more effective in reaching our mutual goals.

For ego lens, let us be modest and inclusive. Let us go out of our way to affirm the strength of others, and try to create a sense “us,” so that they can celebrate our achievements rather than feel threatened by them.

**Overcoming bad impressions:** Halvorson recommends that if we have started on the wrong foot and need to overcome a bad impression, the evidence will have to be plentiful and attention-getting in order to activate phase two thinking. We should keep on piling until others no longer think likewise. We have to ensure that the information we are presenting is clearly inconsistent with the existing opinion they carry about us.

Take the case of our missing the deadline on the first assignment. Meeting the deadline next time only is not sufficient to correct the impression. If we beat the next five deadlines by few days, they would certainly register. People pay closer attention to see whether the change lasts, and how long. We have to continually prove it - next time and every time.

Be proactive with your wife, child, boss and customers.

All my best wishes!

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*I have been impressed with the urgency of doing. Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Being willing is not enough; we must do.*

–**Leonardo da Vinci**
Discussions - Competition 92 (CS 92)

The newly privatised Sunnylands Hospital Trust has found a wicked way of making extra funds, all of which will be invested in (its own) people – in line with the Trust’s mission statement, of course. The latest one is to buy a ‘job-lot’ of organs from students when they reach the age of 50 – a point at which the organs are still useful for the trust but of an age sufficiently remote to not bother the ‘live fast – die young’ potential donors that the Trust is largely targeting in its advertising. ‘Have a party now, nothing to hand over until 2050!’ trumpet the posters, offering advance payment on kidneys, livers, corneas, and various other bodily bits. And the sums look attractive, on a strictly utilitarian calculation – an amount sufficient to set up a sensible person for life – or support a pretty glamorous lifestyle for rather less time. But still a couple of years or so. Furthermore, if you should unfortunately die before the age of 50, Sunnylands will graciously write off its losses. It looks like a very good offer. But is it ethical?

This is a variation on human organ donations. Already, human kidneys are brought and sold in certain countries, typically for export to the West (where medical companies are restricted in their organ purchases.) Donation of male and female eggs to enable others to have children, including surrogate use of wombs is common. Quite where the line should be drawn is not clear, and it is continually moved by the ever-changing technical possibilities.

Congrats to the few who responded!

LETTERS

N Subramani, Neyveli: CS contains excellent information, very useful for me. Thank you for your efforts.

Anju Deshpande, Mumbai: You mentioned that we have to own the feelings and we should not reject them. How can I own the anger when someone is causing that? Anju, get back the remote control of your life and hold it in your hands. When you say someone is causing your anger, you are at the disposal of the other person. Whenever he wants, he can make you angry. Don’t become a doll in others hands.

Getting angry is perfectly OK. In fact it indicates you are mentally healthy! So develop the courage to own, not only anger and even other feelings like happiness, sadness, fear etc. whenever you get them. Remember, ‘no one can make you angry without your consent.’ Say I choose to be angry or happy. Owning anger doesn’t mean you want them. Something of your past is the cause, and anger or other feelings is the effect. Take responsibility. In spiritualism they call it as the first step for self-mastery.

This is another perception (mindset) we are carrying – all my feelings are caused by others. Don’t give credit to others.

All the feelings are OK. God has created each of them for a purpose. Own them.

P Saraswathi, Chennai: It seems creativity has no separate identity; everything can be attributed to creativity, even ‘empathy’ as the last issue of CS shows.

D Prakasarao, Shreeram Nagar: Empathy is well explained in CS 92.

G Shankar, Hosur: CS-92 is simply superb and very informative. Thanks for consistent feeding of quality inputs to readers.

Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time - Thomas A. Edison
Think-up games - 11 /93

1. There are two options in front of you – In the first option your income (only your income) will be doubled, and in the second option every expenses of yours (only yours) would be halved. All other things will remain same as of now. Which one will you opt for and why?

2. Suppose you can read one person’s mind (only one person), whose mind will you like to read and why?

SEND YOUR RESPONSES TO ME

LETTERS

Kavitha Senthil, Thiruvarur: During November 2009, I attended Faculty Development Programme on Entrepreneurship, at VIT-TBI, Vellore, where you delivered a talk on the role of creativity in getting new ideas for business startups. And since then I am receiving your Creativity Sphere. Now I am handling ‘Communication Skills’ for final year engineering students. The competitions, think-up games and discussions of CS are very useful for me to take the class in a lively manner.

P K Sharma, Dehradun: Do you believe in spiritualism? I don’t understand them. Yes, spiritualism makes sense – gives a meaning and purpose to human life.

I am thankful to my good friend Stalin (fortunately, or is it unfortunately not M K Stalin), who regularly posts me with the messages of Brahmakumaris.

Pravin do the following spiritual audit daily at the end of the day to understand the meaning of life:

In the entire day, today; not only in my words and actions, but also in my thoughts:

* Did I see everyone’s specialties and keep good wishes for each one, in spite of obvious weaknesses being visible?
* Did I remain free from all forms of anger, like irritation, frustration, grudge, revenge, etc.?
* Did I ensure that I neither give nor take sorrow, hurt, pain from anyone?
* Did I remain free from waste and negative?
* Did I remain ego less?
* Did I remain untouched by name, fame, praise, insult?
* Did I remain stable?
* Did I remain free from judgments, criticism, jealousy, comparison, hatred, etc.?
* Did I keep a conscious of serving each one whom I met?
* Did I bring the 8 main powers into practice and experience being powerful?
* Did I remain in self-respect and give respect to everyone?
* Did I practice being soul-conscious in actions and interactions?
* Did I take a one minute break every hour to reflect, meditate and control the traffic of thoughts in the mind?

If you look at what you have in life, you’ll always have more. If you look at what you don’t have in life, you’ll never have enough – Oprah Winfrey
Think Up Games - 10 /92 (CS 92)
1   List out 10 ways to make your young child to eat.
2   Suppose you get the power to change one thing in others, what will you change and in whom?
SEND YOUR RESPONSES TO ME
Thanks to all those who responded. Unfortunately I have lost those mails during the process of updating the OS to Windows 8.1. So I am requesting all those who sent in, to send them again. Others can also respond. (The mistake will not recur till Bill Gates comes with next version of Windows.)

LETTERS

J A Arockiasamy, Tamilnadu: I found CS very creative and interesting true to its title.
Swapan Bhandari, Renukut: I am always waiting for your mail to recharge myself.
H K Bhadhra, Durgapur: Your article on ‘Empathy’ (CS 92) shows a new direction in the concept of creativity – empathy is the spark for new ideas. I know, inconveniences are the sources for new ideas. From your article I understand how to realize the inconveniences of others.
Kalaiyarasan, Salem: During your workshops, as an exercise we did think-up games. Including them in the issues of CS help us keep up the practice.
Sachin Kalekar, Pune: I know it is dependence, but still I look forward to CS as energy booster.

Competition 93
Draw 30 blank circles of the same size, say 20mm diameter, in a sheet of paper. Set your alarm clock for three minutes. Convert the blanks circles in to possible recognizable objects in three minutes. (E.g. clock, ball etc.)
Be honest with time of three minutes. You have to physically draw the pictures. Simply making a list is not the exercise. Once completed tell me how many you could do and send the list of objects, not the sheet.

Positive feelings come from being honest about yourself and accepting your personality, and physical characteristics, warts and all; and, from belonging to a family that accepts you without question - Willard Scott

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