

Your Map of me IS only your Map of me

Your brain is like a huge machine without an off switch. If you don't give it something to do, it will come up with something all by itself. If you put someone in a deprivation tank where there is no outside experience, his/her brain will start generating internal experience. And it doesn't care what it generates. You do, but it doesn't. From day to day our brain takes in millions of bits of information and it has a way of categorizing it, sorting it, storing it and retrieving it. And the only way it can do that is through the experience that is already there. Our perceptual filters are made up of our memories, moods, attitudes, meta programs, time, space, matter, language, upbringing.... Many variables make up our perceptual filters and they are unique to each individual. This is what accounts for the varying opinions people have on any one given topic or person. Often times, I've had favorite individuals whom I considered friends and thought, "I'd love to get these people together. I'm sure they would enjoy each other the way I enjoy them." And yet, given the opportunity for them to get to know each other, the connection doesn't happen. It doesn't happen because what we see in them is unique to our filters. Because the other friend doesn't have the same filters, she/he doesn't see the other friend in the same way. You know, what's one man's treasure is another's junk. This same principle can account for why there are Republicans and Democrats, Libertarians, socialists, people who like big houses, small houses and condos, the beach or the mountains, Albertson's or Whole Foods, blue cheese or balsamic vinaigrette. We all have our own unique way of seeing and experiencing the world. It fits us, but it may not fit anyone else exactly the same way—like an article of clothing.

The same principle applies to understanding communication. S.I. Hayakawa in *Language in Thought and Action* says, "The meaning of words also changes from speaker to speaker, from hearer to hearer, and from decade to decade." We know what we mean and our intention behind it, but how is the other person perceiving it and will they understand the intention? The trap that many people fall into is that they think what they perceive being said is what was actually said. Wittgenstein says, "The connection between language and reality is made by definition." And it is each individual who is doing the defining based on perceptual filters.

Over the years, I have said things, as we all have, that were misinterpreted. In the NLP model, the meaning of our communication is the response that we elicit. We are responsible for our communication and it is our job to change what we are doing until we get the outcome that we want. We are not responsible for how someone interprets it. They have their own filters, maps and agenda. Often motivated by unconscious patterns and filters, the conscious mind interprets the communication in a way that will justify its pattern of thinking and, thus, its reality.

Here are things to remember when engaged in conversation especially when there is conflict. 1. Your map is not the territory. It is only your interpretation, deleted, distorted and generalized by your perceptual filters.

2. All experience or data is ambiguous. Initially we experience it without judgment. It is only the act of thinking about experience or perceiving it that we categorize it, make meaning of it and move in a certain direction with it.

3. Language is understood on many levels and is based on discrimination. The brain selects and stores information on a continuum from conscious to unconscious. There are underlying and supporting structures for each sentence that make the sentence possible. This is what the Meta Model is all about. 4. We only retain certain kinds of information in order to remember the experience instead of retaining all of the facts of the experience. The information we do retain is categorized or put into classes and then meaning is made. And it is the meaning we remember, not the facts. In other words, we make generalizations about every experience we have.

Therefore, language (or a word) only represents an abstraction of certain aspects of an experience. They are actually code words for underlying information that is unique to us. 5. Aligning Perceptual Positions is an outstanding way to understand how your perceptual filters are working in a particular situation. Being able to move from Self to Observer to Other and back to Self, not only helps you delineate personal boundaries and helps you understand the intentions of the other person, it helps you gain clarity and understanding, and develop respect for yourself and the other person.

6. Be mindful that when you become upset or offended by what someone says or does that you are interpreting their communication through your filters and therefore, to be completely fair to both parties, it behooves you to check it out, either through the above alignment or actually talking with the person to determine actual meaning intended. It will certainly make you feel better, if nothing else. Remember, what they said also came from their perceptual filters. In other words, it's just a map, not reality. I'll leave you with this little story about the blind men and the elephant.

The three men compared notes after examining the elephant:

The first man said that the elephant is like a stone, cool, smooth, shaped like a curved cylinder. The second man said no, the elephant is like a hairy rope. Then the third man also said no, the elephant is massive, solid, full of little hills and valleys.

Each person was correct. The elephant has the characteristics each mentioned, but no one ever has the whole picture. Each had a different conception of the elephant and each idea was consistent with the other ideas when the ideas were put together. But each person was incorrect in thinking the elephant was nothing but what he had experienced. Another way of saying that would be each person was incorrect in thinking the elephant is only what he had experienced. So an interesting question arises: can we ever assert with complete and utter certainty and confidence that we are completely right and the other person is completely wrong? (Information, in part, is from Christina Hall and Richard Bandler) Have a safe and enjoyable summer.