

“Why Can’t They Just...?”

Shifting Perceptions and Tackling Drama

Senani Ratnayake, BSc RVT

Drama is often caused by our failure to see another perspective. Our perceived struggles can be very distracting and when each team member has their own stuff going on, it is difficult to achieve unity. Utilizing activities designed to discuss and explore perceptions, we will achieve a better appreciation of the impact and consequences of perceptions and how to navigate them. Addressing personal, team, and business – this workshop is going to help you and your team get engaged and grow.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

This workshop will cover a variety of discussion points and easy-to-execute activities focused on questioning and exploring perceptions. Try it for yourself, and take it to your team – together we will:

- Evaluate our personal situations in order to better visualize capacity and actualize challenges.
- Assess professional roles and whether our biases and expectations, or the biases and expectations of those around us, are setting us up for success or failure.
- Identify ways to put a new “lens” on everyday topics – from customer service to providing value to personal growth, being valued and being a team player.

What if reality was merely an illusion? What if *your* reality is created by *your own* brain based entirely on *your* personal perceptions... making each person’s reality unique to *them*?!

Well, if that’s true, then it’s not that difficult to imagine why sometimes the things that are obvious to us may not be obvious for someone else. Things that appear one way to me might appear a completely different way to you.

It is simple to sit back and observe a situation wondering why somebody else didn’t handle it as you would have, or think about it the way that you did. Yet, based on what we know of how our brains work, it should actually be more surprising to us at times when somebody does see things exactly how we do!

The libraries in our brains begin to build before we are even born. We are exposed to sensations such as touch (heat, cold, pressure, pain), taste, smell and sound, developing preferences that will become forever logged in our brains. Over time, our brains will literally capture and catalogue thousands of experiences a day – from sensations to experiences, each learning building on the next, to become an individualized data-bank of what we know “to be true.”

Our perceptions of the things we encounter are based on everything we have encountered thus far – our brain must decide where to categorize each new thing and look for commonality in order to sort and understand what we are experiencing. This can, at times, create problems as brand-new groupings do not yet have context and our brains may misinterpret what we are encountering.

Our perceptions are the reason for our responses to the things around us, and they can be influenced by many things. This can be both a positive, or a negative, depending on our circumstances.

But let’s take a step back. It starts with our perception of ourselves. Our perception of our own lives, our own successes and our own struggles. It is easy to look at somebody else and believe that they have it better or worse than you based on your perception but we often don’t truly know enough about another person’s

situation to be able to compare. That's perspective. That said, it is not just about what is on your plate, it's also about your capacity and your tolerance. Something that is easy for you to navigate may be complicated for another. Something that doesn't affect you, may greatly affect somebody else. These differences from person to person make it tough to determine how somebody can truly cope with what is before them just by knowing what you know of their (literal) challenges.

As the old saying goes, we should be able to put ourselves in somebody else's shoes when we want to understand how they are feeling, or perceiving their reality. Obviously, this is not possible and, almost insulting to imply that it is. How can one person possibly understand, in totality, what another is thinking or feeling when we cannot first appreciate the scope of their experiences and encounters to-date?

Nobody can fully understand what it is like to be you, but you. We know that drama within the team is often caused by failure to see a different perspective, and so we first start with our own perspective of our own circumstances. It's not because anybody's world is better or worse, it is merely for the sake of acknowledging that everybody is different.

You are likely not qualified to do any more than simply help them see a bigger picture – affect their perspective – so don't attempt to do any more than walk them through the process of capturing what their bigger picture actually is. For some it is easy to become the person who takes on everybody's problems, but this is neither healthy nor helpful, for anyone.

Next, we want to tackle professional goals. We know how we want people to behave in the workplace with respect to culture and values, and with respect to work ethic and job description. We often run into situations where our words are not interpreted equally by all, and everybody has a different version of what success actually looks like. This situation is often caused by people only looking at their role from their own perspective, they haven't (or are unable to without guidance) actually taken a look at the bigger picture to interpret how their role then affects other roles in the hospital, and how their diligence and care, or lack thereof, will affect the overall flow and operation of the hospital. This is where Starting with Why can be very helpful, and tying things back to patient and client care along with your Mission/Brand is a must. If we as a team are committed to something, then we need to assess what our individual roles are in making it so as a team.

It can be interesting to explore this in three steps; first, individually based on your perspective of your role, second as a department (how does your group and its effectiveness affect the other groups in the hospital; what is expected of us by them and what do we expect of them in order for us to be successful) and third as a full team in order to share and learn about whether our expectations of others, and their expectations of us are in fact aligned.

There is really no end from there as to how you can work with your team to put a new perspective on everyday circumstances. You can tackle how we perceive other people based on existing biases, how people perceive our value based on our existing environment, language and processes, how we deliver customer service, etc. One of my favorite activities is putting a new lens on our perspective of ourselves in our roles. Let's each create a business case for ourselves – in the same way we would a new piece of equipment or renovation – can we articulate our unique value? This can be done in a fun way, without creating a feeling of unworthiness, by allowing partners who can build each other up. This should not be used on its own as a tool for performance critique, but could be used for developmental performance planning. While not all initial perceptions may be accurate based on the larger reality, this knowledge is invaluable for coaching and feedback.

Shifting perspectives and increasing awareness around personal perceptions can dramatically affect the level of drama on a team. Where we cannot truly understand somebody else, we must utilize empathy to bridge the gap between our reality and somebody else's. Normalizing our differences, but also bringing commonality to the forefront, will help to keep the "Why can't they just..." at bay, and also unite the team by securing and maintaining a greater, positive perspective.

“Why Can’t They Just...?”

Shifting Perceptions and Tackling Drama Worksheet

Senani Ratnayake, BSc RVT

TOOL KIT

.....

NERD OUT WITH SCIENCE

- Attribution Theory
- Kelley’s Covariation Model
- Fundamental Attribution Error
- Self-Serving Bias versus Self-Effacing Bias
- Just-World Hypothesis
- Unconscious Bias

USE ACTIVITIES TO CREATE ENGAGEMENT

- Christopher Chabris and Dan Simons: theinvisiblegorilla.com (check out the videos and demos section)
- Plates and Buckets
- Perception of People – What do you see?
- Perception of Value – What’s in it for me?
- Use pet related examples to create relevance – The aggressive patient versus the aggressive person – start a conversation on why it is easier to have empathy for one over the other?

KEY POINTS

- Be comfortable with the difference between Perception and Perspective.
- Exploring different perspectives allows for more open, transparent and honest conversations.
- You can never completely relate to another person without having literally lived their life, so empathy is a powerful tool for bridging the gap.
- Consider how having a team with varying perceptions is a strength... how will you use your team’s perceptions as a toolkit for good?
- While each person’s reality is their own, there is still a requirement for aligned perspective – perceptions cannot be an excuse for poor behavior and, if decision making isn’t being made with good intent, that is a separate issue requiring performance correction.

Notes

.....



