



Winning Ways

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Winning Ways

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Winning Ways NewsBits

Joan Fletcher will be speaking at the Tower Club monthly on sales as part of the "Coffee Talk" series. If you want to find out more, contact Joan at jfletcher@winningwaysinc.com

Joan and Betsy will be offering short seminars on Winning Ways to Increase Your Sales - stay tuned for more information!

Mark your calendar for November 16, when Betsy Hudson will be participating in the "Million Dollar Consulting" Workshop at the Fairfax Hilton Garden Inn. Details coming soon at www.winningwaysinc.com.

Check out the great networking events at the Vienna Tysons Chamber at www.vtrcc.org.

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A Matter of Perspective

Are you an optimist or a pessimist? A realist or an idealist? We all have habits of thought that affect the way we view situations and think about possibilities. These habits are deeply engrained, and most of the time it doesn't even occur to us to question the viewpoint that comes to us naturally. We simply take it at face value, whether it helps or hinders us in what we're trying to do.

Choosing and communicating a viewpoint is one of the critical elements in good leadership, whether you're leading a large corporation, a small group, or a one- or two-person enterprise. Every situation has numerous possible interpretations, and numerous possible outcomes. A good leader is able to assess a situation with an open mind, and then choose the perspective which will be most beneficial to the group's effort.

For an example of how much impact a choice of viewpoint can have, suppose you are in a fairly new working environment, still getting to know your teammates. And suppose that, while you're working on a project with one of your new teammates, she starts to seem irritated and impatient. What do you assume about the interaction? Do you assume your teammate is annoyed with you or dislikes you? Do you assume she is stressed about the project? You might guess that she is having a bad day, or distracted by other problems in her life. Or you might guess that she is not used to your way of dealing with this particular kind of problem. Whatever you think about it, your impression is likely to be automatic and unconscious.

Now, how will you approach your teammate the next time you interact? The answer will depend very largely on how you interpreted her irritability. You may be wary, or annoyed with her, or decide already that the two of you "just don't get along." Or you may be extra polite to her, hoping she's in a better mood today; or you may confront her directly, asking if she thought there was something wrong with the way you both handled the situation. Whatever you choose to do will make a big difference in your working relationship with this person—and your actions will be largely determined by the automatic,

unconscious way you originally viewed the situation.

From this, it should be obvious that coming up with new perspectives on a situation is more than just a mental exercise. As a leader, you need to be able to choose the best viewpoint, and then communicate it to the team. Many of the great motivating speeches in history and literature consist of just this—a leader communicating a new viewpoint to a group of people, who are then inspired to take action on the basis of it.

There are two parts to any viewpoint, when looking at a situation in the present or the recent past. The first is, "Why did this happen?" That's your interpretation of the situation. The second is, "What happens next?" That's your prediction of the consequences of the situation. Answers to these questions can run the gamut between realistic and fantastical, optimistic or pessimistic. It's quite possible to interpret the worst situations in a positive light, or the best situations in a negative light. It's all in how you choose to view it.

Suppose, for example, you have made a costly error of judgment. To interpret this, you can say, "I am a failure," or "I am bad at making decisions." You can say, "I acted too quickly," or "I didn't have access to enough sources of information." You can even say, "It wasn't my mistake at all, it failed because of something someone else did." These are all possible interpretations, and they will shape your predictions about what will happen next.

If your interpretation was that you're a failure, then your unconscious prediction is likely to be, "Now we're stuck in this mess and I won't be able to get us out of it." If your interpretation was that it's someone else's fault, then your prediction might be, "I could fix this if everyone would just listen to me and do things my way." The first is an example of defeatism, the second an example of denial and defiance. Neither of these is likely to get you anywhere.

If, on the other hand, your interpretation focused on specific factors that were likely to have caused the problem, then you can move ahead, using the mistake as a learning experience. Your prediction might be something like, "Now that I've seen this area of weakness, I'll be able to make better decisions next time." This is a great viewpoint because it is both positive and realistic. It doesn't ignore the facts, but it looks forward to growth. Generally the most effective viewpoints have this quality: they look honestly at what is behind, whether good or bad, and then they use it to grow. This is an attitude that you, your partners, and your employees can all use to build a terrific future!