

1

INTRODUCTION

PERCEPTION IS REALITY

You don't get to vote on how you are perceived. How others see you is their reality, no matter what you might have intended. That's because we judge ourselves by our intentions and others by their behaviors. How others respond to you as a person and a leader will depend entirely on their perception of you.

Do you think you know how you come across to others? Think again. At Change Masters, we've provided individual leadership communications coaching to over 2,000 very talented people in the United States and internationally. Not one of them completely understood how they were impacting others when we started coaching them.

We've all heard the phrase "Perception is reality," yet you'd be amazed how many people believe this concept doesn't apply to them. Ninety-five percent of the time, our clients are stunned when they see themselves on camera or hear their voices. Even though they look in the mirror every day, the person they're looking at on the screen is a surprise to them. As one of our clients said, "My face is a big scoreboard and I never realized how clearly I was posting the score!" It's why our clients had often been unsuccessful in making behavior course corrections despite getting earlier feedback.

The good news is that you have much more control over how you're perceived than you might expect.

The Impact of Blind Spots

You're under tremendous pressure at work. We hear about it every day. According to research reported in *The Wall Street Journal*, the average corporate executive is some 300 hours behind in their workload at any given time. That kind of constant, unrelenting intensity can destroy the perception of authentic leadership

communication in a hurry if you are not aware of it, because it's tough to communicate effectively when you're drowning in tasks. This is why it's crucial to have a variety of approaches to actively manage those perceptions in our time-starved workplace.

**It is essential
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and responsibility
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perception.**

By seeing yourself as others do, you can understand your blind spots, perhaps for the first time. When we know our weaknesses, we are able to compensate for them. Blind spots are trickier, because we don't realize they exist. If you look at what gets us into trouble, it's not just our weaknesses; it's also our blind spots. Some claim that if you just expand your strengths, it will take care of everything. There's no question that you need to capitalize on your strengths. However, it doesn't mean you can just ignore your weaknesses and blind spots. You can be doing very well in the majority of your interactions but can still be brought down by the behaviors in your blind spots.

Look In The Mirror!

We've seen the big career price paid when people are oblivious to the key facets of their impact. A lack of awareness of your impact leads to a lack of balance. A lack of balance leads to missed opportunities to influence, persuade, motivate, listen or deliver difficult news effectively.

It is essential to take control and responsibility for your own perception. We found it allows you to accelerate perceived communication leadership maturity by five to ten years. If you are waiting (or hoping) that others will just understand your intent, you are not living in reality. Understanding how you are perceived is like attaching a rear-view mirror to your forehead so you are more consistently aware of how others see you. Because of this, it's not surprising the number of times clients have said the same phrase to us again and again, "I wish I had done this ten years ago!"

At Change Masters, we have found that by giving our clients a clear picture of how they're seen by others, they are able to implement new approaches to better align their behaviors with their intentions. Others are then more likely to accurately understand what they mean.

One of our clients, a Chief Information Officer for an international packaged goods company, expressed it this way, "What I saw on the outside is not at all what I feel on the inside. It's not what's in my heart or my head. I had rationalized to myself that due to the difficulty of my role I could just do whatever I needed to do to get things done. Now I see that there are better ways to deal with people when I am under pressure or angry or uncomfortable. I really thought I could throw away nice manners because I was busy. It was a big mistake on my part." Your behavior creates the perception formed by others. Being aware enough to choose more effective behaviors or communication approaches gives you the power to influence how you are perceived. If you don't understand the power you wield, you are bound to unwittingly abuse it.

Seeing Yourself As Others Do Is Critical To Your Success

Some people cringe when thinking about seeing themselves as others do. There's no doubt that it can be painful to understand how you're coming across to others, but this is one area where ignorance is definitely not bliss. Others already see you, for better or worse. You are the last to know about your blind spots. Learning what the