Perceptions

The active process of assembling sensations and reconstructing events into meaningful patterns to form a usable mental representation of the world.

Three elements of the perception process:

- <u>Raw data</u>: the information we experience - an image, sound, or smell, tasting food, touching an object or person, or being in a situation.

- <u>Mental process</u>: unseen; affected by motives and driven by personal bias. It catalogs information derived from culture, socialization, and experience and begins when we encounter raw data.

- <u>End product</u>: our **perception;** sensing or interpretation of experience.

Your perception (the end product) may be inaccurate, or skewed by your own personal biases, fears, strong hopes or prejudices.

Factors that affect perceptions:

- <u>Biological factors</u>**:** sight, touch, taste, hearing, and smell

- <u>Sociological culture factors</u>**:** social norms, customary behaviors, language, and symbols, ethnocentrism (believing one group is better than another or superior), proximity (close, or distance from a person), color consciousness, values, beliefs, and attitudes.

Perceptual Shortcuts

The mind's ability to take in new information, combine it with old information, and formulate new ideas through quick deduction.

1. <u>First Impression</u>. Making a major decision or judgment call based on a first encounter with an individual, group, or event.

2. <u>Self-Fulfilling Prophecy</u>. Occurs when an individual or group has a high expectation that someone will succeed or fail based on perceptions.

3. <u>Projection</u>. A belief that people will not, or cannot, change their behavior.

4. <u>Blaming the Victim</u>. Seeing individuals or groups as the origin or cause of a particular action / problem rather than the circumstances or other relevant factors.

5. <u>Halo Effect</u>. If we know something good about a person, we are likely to perceive him/her as having other good characteristics; If we know something unfavorable, we are likely to see other unfavorable things.

"Believe only half of what you see and nothing that you hear."
Edgar Allan Poe

Correcting Perceptions

1. Acceptance of differences in people - Disagreement is okay; don't say "you're wrong" or "that's your perception," instead use, "I differ." Don't deny other's experiences. Look at people objectively.

2. Be aware of stereotyping - The key is understanding the dynamics and processes that support stereotypes.

3. Active listening - Listen for understanding, not agreement

4. Interact with groups different from your own!

5. Seek distinguishing information- When you meet people from various backgrounds, focus on the person and not the label that may be attached to them.

6. Receive feedback- Don't defend or rationalize your behavior; accept what others have to say. Agreement is not necessary!

7. Identify the appropriate application of facts, opinions and assumptions- avoid distorting them to meet your needs.

Perceptions explain reality from an individual point of view; they reinforce or enhance one's socialization and defines one's interactions with others who are different or similar to themselves.

Stereotypes

A widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.

Individuals learn stereotypes from parents, schools, peers, and the media. Once individuals encounter others, they make first impressions, and may develop stereotypes.

Stereotypes**:**
- Distorted generalizations about others who are different

- Reinforces underlying prejudices about others who are perceived as different

- Frequently associated with negative pre-judgments

- Once learned are extremely difficult to unlearn

Assumptions:
- An extension of stereotyping

- Similar to stereotypes, but with a very different effect on people

- When based on a stereotype can create expectations, which are perceived as either negative or positive

- Create a self-fulfilling prophecy by filtering perceptions about others so that a person is not affected by what another person is really saying

Characteristics of Stereotypes

1. <u>Fixed, rigid ideas</u>; means that people's perceptions of groups are difficult to change once they form that perception.

2. Either <u>overgeneralizations or oversimplifications</u>; are often exaggerations of real group differences.

3. <u>Not supported by reasonable evidence</u>; based on illogical or irrational foundations.

4. Can be <u>favorable or unfavorable</u>; regardless they have an impact on our behavior.

5. <u>Driven by motives</u> such as fear; rationalization, and prejudice; thrive in the absence of firsthand experience and can become rigid stereotypes based on fear, ignorance, habit, or lack of exposure.

Racial, sexual, and gender remarks or jokes reinforce the most common stereotypes.

Stereotype Management

No matter how hard leaders try to avoid them, prejudices and stereotypes learned during enculturation or socialization will sometimes affect their behavior.

Leaders must:

1. Accept ownership and responsibility for their own behaviors.

    •   Pretending problems don't exist, or denying them when challenged, only makes the problem worse.

2. Recognize how prejudice and stereotypes affect their communication and decision-making processes.

    •   Be cognizant of feelings when communicating and making decisions.

3. Recognize how their behavior affects others, especially subordinates.

    •   Assess the impact of behaviors on others by determining if the interaction achieved the desired results.

Stereotyping that creates inaccurate determinations, unfair choices, or discrimination can impact organizational goals and objectives, create conflict, and undermine mission accomplishment and readiness, and degrade morale.