

# Perceptual Intelligence

The first step to greater perception, and perhaps the most difficult one is to admit that I do not see the whole truth.

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**A**braham Maslow, one of the first research psychologists to study organizations, was troubled to learn that many leaders' perceptual intelligence was organized around the early childhood need for power and self-esteem. In other words their perception primarily viewed people and their company as tools for attaining self-esteem.

Maslow envisioned companies having leaders who didn't squander resources or use people merely to gratify psychological needs. He thought, "What if a leader utilized her resources to understand, develop, and direct the creative energies of her people?" Maslow spent decades researching the greatest leaders and found popularly known examples in President Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr. He found in his study of great leaders that, without exception, they were invested in serving something greater than themselves. He called this brand of leaders "self-actualizing" leaders; and he encourages that great leadership starts today, not just as an ideal, with the people we manage.

## Self actualization...

*...acknowledging something greater than oneself.*

Maslow overlooked that these most evolved leaders were not so just because their need for self-esteem was finally gratified, but because what they possessed was a more accurate and meaningful perception of "other". King's vision of equality was not embedded in anger. In fact King's vision was "equality" itself and any external differences were subordinate to this idea of equality. His perception was at the level of equality, in its true meaning, in the sense that he understood that all people are no different in nature than he was. King was a human being and therefore he too had all of the same propensities toward slavery, segregation, fragmentation, and destruction in himself; however, King could perceive it. To act negatively toward

others is the inevitable outcome if the lower aspects of human nature are not perceived in oneself.

### THE EVOLUTION OF LEADERSHIP

**H**umanity is evolving, and its psychological evolution is found in the function of perception. It is quite interesting to note the parallels between this phenomenon of perceptual development in early childhood and the "Enlightenment" that dawned out of the Middle Ages. The discovery that the earth is not the center of the universe, nor even our solar system perfectly mirrors an individual's perceptual development toward a greater and more accurate perception of "other".

We can observe more perceptual intelligence in those leaders whom we have admired the most, not for the things they possess, but by what they have accomplished and how it has helped others. Organizations need to invest in helping their leaders and employees develop their evolutionary "muscle" of greater perception, because today creativity, change, and need for greater intellectual output is greater than ever.

### CULTIVATING PERCEPTUAL INTELLIGENCE

**G**reater perceptual intelligence is cultivated in the continuous and unceasing pursuit of greater self-awareness. To understand what impedes my perception is a continuous process. For organizational leaders, however, self-awareness has gone no farther than the use of personality tests. Organizations administer personality tests (or employees take them on their own) ostensibly to help them understand their motivations and how these might fit into the organization's work and goals. But peoples' real motivations cannot be found externally in the statistically compiled results of other peoples' ideas of what one's answers mean. Thus personality tests, while superficially helpful, really limit perceptual power because they place the perceptual power in the hands of someone else.

And so decisions about how best to fit an employee into the organization are all too often based on a very shallow and limited appreciation of who the worker really is and what really—at the deepest levels of the psyche—motivates her.

Ultimately, if organizations are going to get the best out of their employees, they are going to have to develop their leaders' ability to perceive what really makes the employee tick...not just some standardized, superficial, collectivized, normalized version of what somebody thinks ought to motivate the employee, but a deeper and truer assessment of what the employee is really made of. To do this through leadership training and development has to extend beyond personality tests. This is done through leaders seeing that there are higher levels of perception, that this higher perception is directly applicable to their success, and that they can learn how to utilize this latent talent. The most difficult step though is the first one, to see that what he or she perceives is limited at best, and that greater perceptual growth can only occur when one realizes that one is not “already” the leader one esteems to be.

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*Chad Hatrup, PhD & Todd Hollow-Bist, PhD are the founders of Pathwise Management. Pathwise aims to introduce Top Caliber managers to powerful, but widely unknown tools for life and business gained through over 150 years of psychological thought. Our hope is that these efforts will contribute to the trend in corporate life to build a more effective and socially responsible America.*

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