

Perceptual Positions

"When we understand the other fellow's viewpoint and he understands ours, then we can sit down and work out our differences"

Harry S Truman

What are Perceptual Positions?

A model to allow you to gain insight from looking at things from 3 different perspectives and in different ways. They are also described as Life Positions as we tend to have a preferred place to view or experience the world.

Your own. (fully associating into what's important to you)

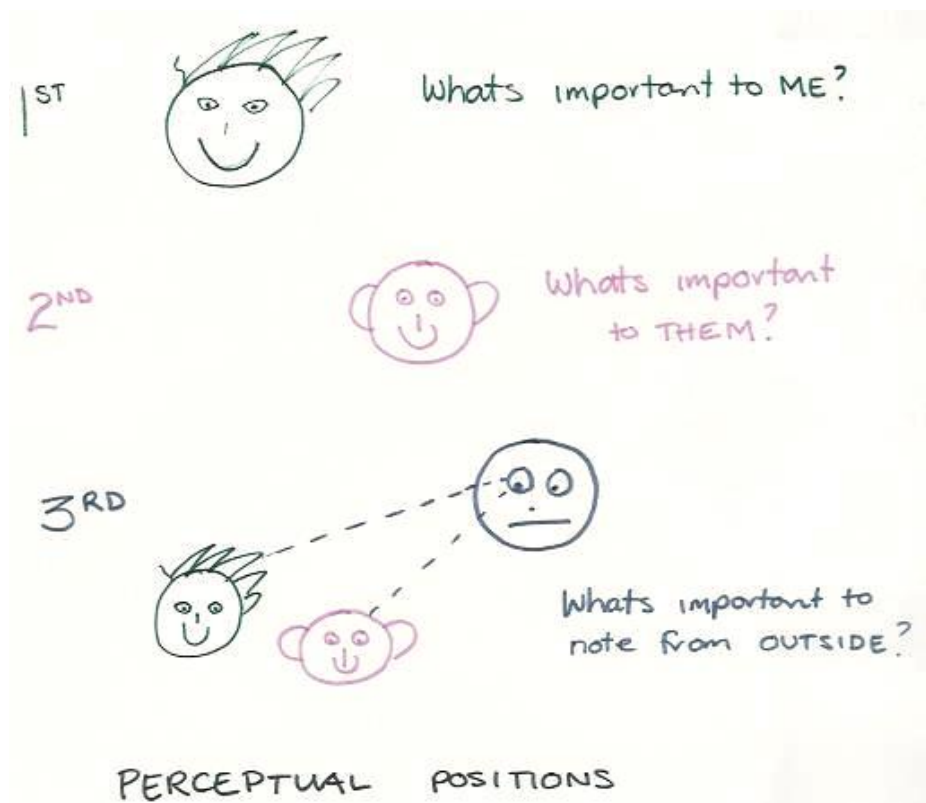
Another persons (fully associating into what is important to the other person)

From the outside (a disassociated analytical view of what patterns are running)

Why is using different perceptual positions useful?

By understanding things from more than one perspective we can increase insight, options, flexibility and choices about future actions.

Model



Detailed description of perceptual positions

First perceptual position (the *I* position): You see the world from your own point of view, and from your own reality within yourself. You simply think 'how does this issue or communication affect me?' You actually fully experience how you feel about this. The state you are in is known as being 'associated' into your experience. To make sure you are in 'clean' first position ask 'How am I feeling in this position? What is my outcome / what do I want to happen from this position?'

Second position (the *you* position): you process the experience from the position of the other person. You take into account how the experience would be from the other person's point of view. You see, hear, and feel the world from the other's position. You also imagine their beliefs, values and thinking. In this state you 'associate' with the other person's reality. To make sure you are in 'clean' second position ask: As (name) how am I feeling? As....(name) what is my outcome / what do I want to happen?

Third position (the *they* position): you move to an uninvolved position, as someone who is outside the situation. You are an independent observer. You ask yourself 'how would this event be experienced by someone totally uninvolved?' Perhaps as if they were watching a wide view movie filmed from high up. This is a way of analysing from a detached view what is happening. In this position you are 'disassociated'. To make sure you are in third position ask yourself 'what am I noticing about the position of (your name) and (other person's name)'. 'What am I noticing about the relationship between them?' This is sometimes referred to as the "meta" position from the Greek above or beyond.

One way of understanding these perceptual positions is to think of the three roles in the story below:

In first position – *I am in a hole.*

In second position – *someone comes and jumps in with you – and empathizes with your position*

In third position – *someone comes along, sees what is really happening and calmly finds a rope and pulls you out (and possibly the person in second position!)*

If you become stuck in any one of the three positions as a life condition, the following may happen:

A person stuck:

In first position	becomes	egotistical
In second position	becomes	a rescuer, caretaker
In third position	becomes	cold and unfeeling

A person stuck in *first position* only perceives issues from their position. In *second position*, the person is constantly over-influenced by other peoples' views, and lets the state of others determine their state. They become co-dependent. They are not in control of their own state. In *third position* a person becomes detached and unfeeling. They may become the loners of the world, detached and able to analyse objectively.

Using this approach as a coach

You have already explored the power of physically shifting to anchor and separate thinking, experience and insight. In Transpersonal Therapy they have a similar technique modelled on NLP termed "Chair Work". A great way to work with this technique is to physically shift between positions to experience different perspectives and get different insights into a situation.

Consider setting up 2 chairs for the coachee.

One in which they sit when they experience 1st position. Invite them to fully associate and experience what is happening for them. What they are seeing, hearing and feeling about the situation. What is important to them here? What is the outcome they want? Having experienced this what advice would they give to themselves?

Cleanly move

Ask them to move to the second chair to experience 2nd position. Step into the "other" person's world without judgement. Fully associate into this by genuinely taking on their physiology, voice, energy etc. Experience what else is going on in their world. What are they seeing, hearing and feeling about the situation? What do they see, hear and feel about that you? What is important to them here? What is the outcome they want? Having experienced this what advice would they give to that self in the first chair?

Cleanly move

and finally stand back from a position that is equidistant from the 2 chairs, where you can observe what is happening. Be disassociated. If you still have any feelings then step further away or even imagine rising above it. See that self and see the "other" What is the pattern there? What is really important there? What is the headline advice to that self?

Cleanly move

To conclude, invite them to sit back in associated first position, and having heard the 3 pieces of advice, take on what they need. Ask them to say what can now be changed by them. Future pace this change and see what is possible. Has their outcome changed?

What if?

You used perceptual positions to unpick different views of difficult relationships?

You used perceptual positions ahead of an interaction where you wanted something to go particularly well and it involved meeting the other persons criteria for "going well" too.

You noticed where you spend most of your thinking time? How useful is this balance? When/where might it be useful to take on different positions?

You developed the skill of recognising when you are associated and when you are disassociated?