

Tunnel vision

It's a truism that as people, we are programmed to see those things we look for. I've mentioned this before, but it's obvious: if you look for white cars, you will see white cars all around you. This type of "selective seeing," if you will, is one of our greatest strengths as human beings -- otherwise, our minds would be overwhelmed with all the extraneous "stuff" that surrounds us as we go through our daily activities.

But it can also work against us. When looking at all the white cars around us, you may not see the blue cars, or the red cars, or the yellow cars -- or the car with blue and red blinking lights. At any rate, you get the idea.

Sometimes, therefore, we can see only what we look for -- at the expense of other good things we aren't looking for at all. We can become like the race horse fitted with blinders before the start of the race -- and while that may be great for race horses, going through life with blinders on is rarely good for human beings.

Let's look at some of the ways people are hurt by these blinders, isolation, single-mindedness, tunnel vision.

1. We see only the worst in people.

Those of you who watched the Disney movie "Pollyanna" with Hayley Mills will remember a quotation attributed to Abraham Lincoln (but actually written by a screenwriter). I'm sure Abe would have been proud to have said it. Anyway, the quotation, which forms a turning point in the movie is this: "If you look for the worst in people and expect to find it, you surely will."

Most of us saw Pollyanna when we were children, and possibly later on as adults when we might have watched it with our own children. I hope that quote sunk into your brain -- and if not, please allow it to sink in a little bit.

Sure, we could also be the opposite, seeing only the best in people. Somehow, I don't think that's a big problem, aside from the occasional fraud artist who comes off as a nice guy.

But for many of us, we concentrate so much on the negative in others, that it becomes the only thing we see. I have a former friend who got a job where all he does is criticize others. He used to be a nice guy -- now, he's a real pain in the backside. He used to be positive -- but now, he is only positive that everybody

around him is evil (well, to be absolutely accurate, he is positive that he is the only one who isn't evil). Let me ask this: what kind of good is this guy doing in the world? When he dies, will anyone care? If he happens to compliment someone, will anybody believe him? People won't turn their back on this guy, because they will always be looking for the knife.

The Pollyanna quote is really true -- if you look for the worst in others, you're sure to find it. And if you look for the best in other people, you're going to find that as well.

2. We ignore other possibilities.

This is another big one -- when we concentrate on only one solution -- whether or not that solution is ultimately proven to be the best one -- we eliminate the possibility of all other solutions.

Bertrand Russell said this: "**The greatest challenge to any thinker is stating the problem in a way that will allow a solution.**" In other words, we restate the questions until it allows us to open up our vision to other possibilities. By asking the question in different methods, we cause thinking to occur down the lines of those methods. As a very simple example, a manufacturer could ask "how can we sell these can openers" or "what's the best way we can invent to open this can?" The one question limits answers, the other one facilitates possibilities. (If you don't believe me, check out the "Good Grips" line of kitchenware at Amazon.com) [OXO Good Grips Angled Measuring Cup, Set of 3](#) . Sometimes, the solutions presented are not the ones you ever thought you'd get -- but when you get them, it seems obvious, and as a result, the product sells itself, almost.

3. We limit our future.

Chose a road, you choose a destination. Unless you're one of those rare people in life who actively tries new roads, new paths, or new alternatives, you're going to choose a road through life, and by doing so, limit yourself from other options. Decide to be a plumber? You're likely never going to be a brain surgeon (yes, I've heard the plumber/brain surgeon jokes). Become a urologist, you're not going to be doing a lot of plastic surgery (and if you do, I don't want to know about it). Except in downturns like now, where violent change comes to the careers of a whole lot of people, uprooting the world around them and forcing them to choose different paths through life, people tend to follow whatever general area of expertise they started with -- and that limits their future. Again, this is good and bad -- we lock ourselves into one particular area of interest, and we can gain a more specialized knowledge that will serve us well, but it eliminates areas where we could have made a greater contribution.

Think, if you will, of all the people who get to a later stage in life, and then find they have a talent for a different discipline. A man may take a low-end job

because he has to support a wife and family -- but unless he makes a change, he's likely to stay in that job the rest of his life. Perhaps he had a God-given talent to be a great teacher -- but because he chose to work in a fast food restaurant, his talent will never be developed.

In my own family, this is driven home quite well. My sister-in-law went back to school in her late 40s, and gained a teaching degree. It changed her life, and the lives of her daughters and sons who followed her to universities and new lives. Her life had been on one track, but she uprooted it and moved to another path instead. She gained a better working future than she might have otherwise had, because she moved to a different path.

All of us are selective in one way or another, but even though we may choose one path or another through life, let's not limit ourselves in the ways that matter.

In the words taken from the play Auntie Mame: "Life is a banquet, and most poor fools are starving to death."

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