



Your Attitude

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

The one thing you really can control in life is your attitude, yet most people view their attitude as the result of external things happening to them rather than a conscious decision they make every minute of every day. In this brief article, I would like to explore some ideas that can help make your choice more intentional. These ideas are not new or unique; they have been expressed by numerous authors or scientists, and yet they are easily forgotten by anyone in the heat of the moment.

When you react to a stimulus, an emotion is created in the limbic system (right side) of your brain. That emotion will translate into a "feeling" about the stimulus immediately. The reaction is a chemical one that you have no control over at all. Instantly you are caught by the emotion, and this will form into an attitude if you let it.

For example, if someone cuts in front of you in heavy traffic, causing you to slam on the brakes to avoid an accident, you instantly have the emotion of fear, realizing this might be the last conscious moment in your life. You are decidedly not happy about this. The fear quickly gives way to rage as the stimulus crosses over to the rational (left) side of your brain. That idiot nearly killed you!

Now comes the part where you have a choice. Up to this point, the entire sequence was automatic, and it happened in less than a second. As you decide whether to honk your horn at the other driver, or even tailgate to teach him a lesson, now you are using your rational brain to translate your current attitude into actions. The actions can either be good for you, or they could lead to making a bad situation considerably worse. The choice is up to you. How can you grab on to a choice that is in your long term best interest?

The moment of truth is just after you recognize the situation in the conscious side of your brain. Before taking action, if you can program in a little self talk, that slows the process down enough for you to make a rational decision, you have the opportunity to make a good rather than poor choice. To do this, you need to suspend judgment about

how you will react until there is enough time to think about alternatives and consequences. Even though the temptation is to blast the jerk with a heavy dose of your horn, if in that split second you can suspend the action, it gives you a chance to change your attitude.

One simple technique is to try to envision the best possible intent on the part of others who provide unhappy stimuli for you. In our example, you might envision that the person who cut you off might really be a victim of something else that happened to him. Perhaps he spotted a loose tire iron in the road and swerved to prevent hitting it and sending it airborne to crash through your, or someone else's, windshield. Even though the scenario might seem far-fetched, taking the time to envision the best possible intent does slow down the urge to take action simply based on your rage. It prevents the flash point reaction.

Now you have the opportunity to think through two or three options and focus on the alternatives and potential consequences. It only takes a second or two. You have the opportunity to consciously manage your attitude, and that is truly liberating. When you train your brain to slow down just long enough to think through some options, it puts you in control of your attitudes rather than the other way around. That analysis can save you from making some serious judgment errors that you will regret later.



Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of: *The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals*, *Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online*, and *Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind*. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations. For more information, or to bring Bob in to speak at your next event, **contact him at www.Leadergrow.com, bwhipple@leadergrow.com or 585.392.7763**