

The Power of Perspective in Problem Solving

“Try walking a mile in their shoes...” We’ve all heard this simple phrase and yet all too often we fail to do this in simple and powerful ways.

Generating Empathy, Understanding, and Perspective

We know empathy and understanding are vital to healthy relationships and effective collaborations (personally and professionally). Investing time in seeing things from multiple perspectives can help generate options, promote agility, and prepare us to engage with diverse audiences. To foster deeper awareness, try standing in and taking different perspectives. The field of Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP) refers to this practice as perceptual positioning.

Actively, intentionally shifting perspectives helps us...



In relationships

to understand what others are thinking, seeing, feeling, and believing.



In leadership

to anticipate how others will react or respond to initiatives and policies.



In sales

to better target markets and clients proactively anticipate their reception to different tactics



In conflict

to see things from the other party’s point of view.



In promoting ideas

to understand why others may not immediately be ready to offer buy-in.



In life

to cultivate the skills needed to become more empathic while also remaining neutral.

How it Works

POSITION 1

Your Direct Experience of the Situation

See the situation through your own eyes:

Perceive the situation through your own values, beliefs, needs, and emotions

POSITION 2

Stand in the Other Party’s Shoes

See the situation from the other party’s perspective:

What do you see when you look at the situation through the lens of their perceived values, beliefs, needs, and emotions?

POSITION 3

Take the Perspective of Another Observer

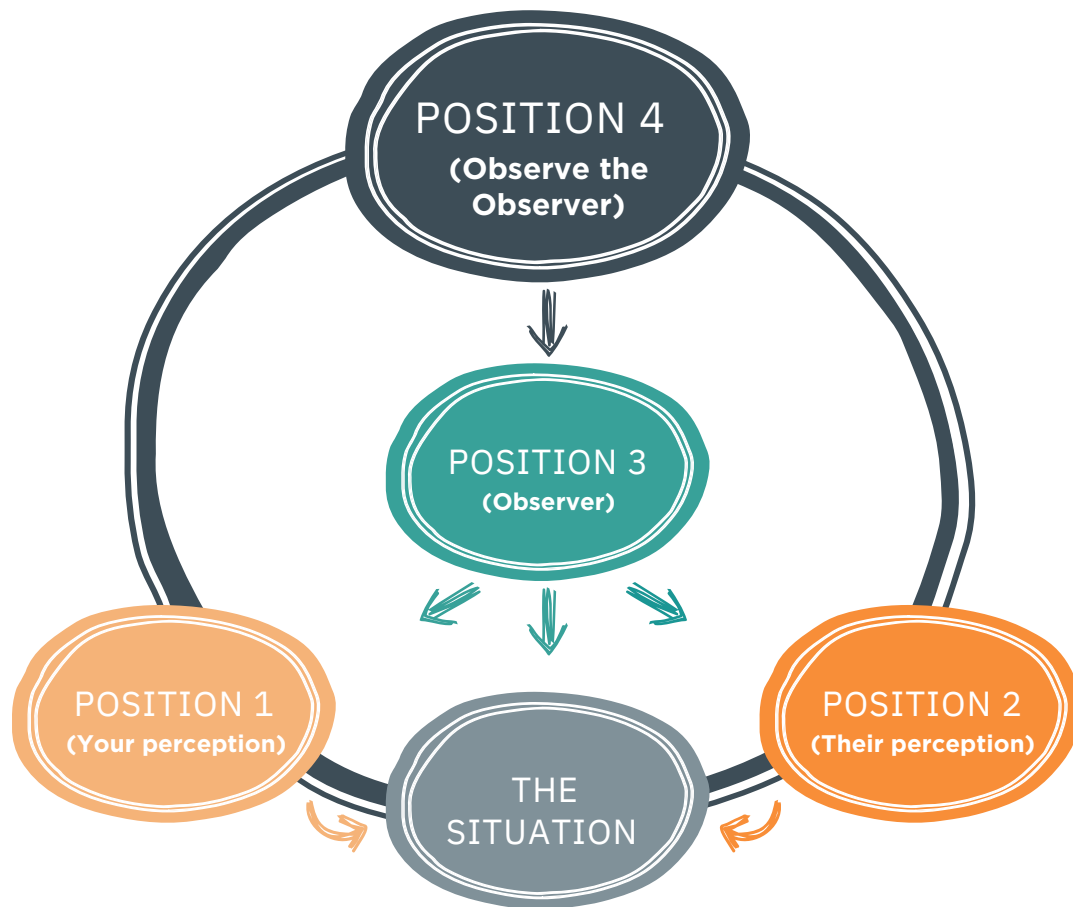
See the situation from a neutral or emotionally detached stance:
Looking down at you, the other person, and the interaction you just had, what you see?
What does the situation look like when you approach it from a more neutral position?

POSITION 4

Observe the Observer and Repeat

See the situation from an even more distant perspective:
What do you see when you take in the entire picture?
Step into all four positions again and reflect on any new insights that arise as you step in and out of each position.

Creating Agility in Action



To optimize this process, enact the following process:



Stand in your own shoes and reflect on what you see, feel, and know.

Try to speak to the other person from your perspective about the opportunity



Stand as they would stand, act as they would act, and physically engage in the process. So much information is locked in our physical bodies. Get uncomfortable and trust the process.

Try to speak as they would (from their perspective) about the situation.



Stand on a chair looking down at your shoes (where you were standing as them and the other person).

From this detached, removed, and neutral observer position, what do you see, notice, and hope for?



Tips

- Physically transition between positions.
- Try to embody the other person's physical, emotional, and mental stance.
- Repeat this process multiple times, allowing each cycle to educate and inform you.
- Notice the energy it takes to shift from position to position.



Questions

What needs to happen...

In your shoes?
In their shoes?
Detached looking at the entire situation from above?

What kind of leadership is needed...

In your shoes?
In their shoes?
Detached looking at the entire situation from above?

What makes this situation difficult, and what are the thoughts, feelings, sources of tensions...

In your shoes?
In their shoes?
Detached looking at the entire situation from above?

Zooming out and away from the situation (observing the observer)...

What makes this situation difficult?
What kind of leadership is needed?
With this perspective, what needs to happen?

In Position 1 (in your shoes), what makes this situation difficult?

What are you thinking and feeling?
From where does the tension or challenge stem?

In Position 2 (in the other party's shoes), what makes this situation difficult?

What are you thinking and feeling?
From where does the tension or challenge stem?

In Position 3 (neutral stance), what makes this situation difficult?

What are you thinking and feeling?
From where does the tension or challenge stem?

In Position 4 (observing the observer), what makes this situation difficult?

From this point of view, think about how your third position relates to your first position.

For example, in third position, were you angry with yourself?
Resigned about the situation?



Awareness

- Where do you feel stuck? Where are you currently engaged with conflicts?
- Where do you demonstrate agility and approach challenges from multiple perspectives, and where do you encounter barriers?
- What personal qualities do you observe that facilitate your ability to consider various perspectives? What strategies could enhance your chances of success moving forward?

Accountability

- Revisit high-stakes conversations or conflicts retroactively to gain deeper insight. What was effective? What could have been improved? What is your next level of awareness?
- Recommit to proactive planning.

Activation

- Leverage this process proactively and in private. Begin high-stakes-with-low-emotion challenges.
- The more we can stand in someone else's shoes, and see things from their perspective, the more we can adapt and adjust to speak in a thorough, inclusive, and collaborative manner.

Integration/Acceleration

- Share successes as a gateway to opening future alignment.
- Explore systemic changes that foster greater awareness and perspective-shifting.

Agility Building

- Engage in harder, more charged, or conflictual topics.
- Notice perspective shifting.
- Practice observing while detached/disengaged from the emotion.
- How can you learn from each perspective?
- What are the different seats or chairs that you can stand in that might elevate your capacity to see from a different perspective?

Commit to better understand who your stakeholders are and what matters most to them.

Cycling through the different positions is an investment of time that returns dividends over time.

Be proactive in building and deepening relationships.