

Raising the bar – getting things into perspective for success

Last month I attended a Women's Network event about perspectives and how they influence raising the bar run by Executive Coach, Halina Jaroszewska reflected Louise Wade.

Mike Grant whose personal mantra is 'Raising the bar' encouraged all the sales professionals to raise theirs. He wrote 'I truly believe that as individuals we function best when we are stretched beyond our comfort zones. I hope that the business environment in which you work allows you to do that in a supported way. If it has been some time since you pushed your own personal limits then take a moment to read the article on changing perspectives for success. Look forward 10 years - if you were attending a function where someone was giving a speech about you, what would you want them to say?'

The Women's Network events are not what you might imagine! Let me dispel any myths! Both sexes participate and this one was no exception. 54 of us were intrigued by the title 'Raising the Bar' and showed up from all corners of the UK to discover how our perspective counts: how it can help or hinder us. I knew we were going to work hard and be challenged to confront our beliefs when the pre-workshop tasks popped up in my mailbox.

Back to perspectives and I was thinking all the time how I could apply what we were experiencing to my work, within teams and in other areas of my life. We had been invited to reflect on what had happened in 2005.

Take a few moments to do the exercise!

- What was 2005 like for you? How did it compare to other years?
- In what ways did 2005: astonish you; fall short of your expectations; shock you; deliver more than you had imagined; seem to be quite mundane; make you laugh; bring to the surface your worst fears; tickle you pink; highlight your reasons why; call forth your excellence. Add on any other perspectives which are appropriate or come to mind.
- What might you have missed or not noticed about 2005 that needed attention or change?
- How could you use your experience gained in 2005 to inform how you manage 2006?

What we captured from this information were perspectives which are simply one way to look at an issue or situation. We can choose to try on other perspectives which can give us more understanding. Powerful questions helped us focus.

However the way we look at things makes a difference. We tend to take a stand: we tend to argue strongly as to whether a perspective is true or false. For example 'Blondes have more fun' 'real men don't cry' 'It always rains on Bank Holidays' ... true or false? Actually it doesn't really matter. What matters is, if you take it on as a belief or a way of looking at situations or issues, things are coloured in a certain way. Each perspective is simply a different way of looking at the same data. The facts or issue or situation remain essentially the same no matter which perspective we are in. The emotional charge which comes with our way of looking at the facts or issue or situation will have enormous impact.

When we can expand the range of ways from which we can look at a situation a universe of possibilities opens up which could also be true or not. Too often we take historical experience and make it into 'the way I am' or 'the way IT is' whatever the situation. It is as if we were powerless to have it any other way. We forget that we have choice. We forget that we can create a different reality.

Halina helped us see that the facts remain the same but everyone's perspective is different. She also helped us begin discovering how understanding perspective can increase our communication skills and help us choose powerful perspectives to drive our work and home lives.

Having looked at 2005 we were tasked with 'Raising the Bar' for 2006. Here are some of our perspectives around raising the bar:

- Raising the bar gives me more room to manoeuvre
- It stretches me beyond my limits

- I'm happy where I am
- This bar is not high enough
- Even thinking about being asked to raise my bar scares me
- Even thinking about being asked to raise my bar excites me
- Where's the challenge 'cos I'm ready to go
- Whatever ... this is too easy ... head down is the best option
- It's hopeless. I'm just not good at selling myself ...
- You have to sacrifice yourself for the good of the team's bar
- To be successful you have committed to raising the bar

These absolute statements are just one way of looking at a situation. Quite often we will find that we have an automatic response which is the perspective we revert to. This is the time to be curious. To wake up and pay attention to how we look at this part of our lives. Good questions to ask are: What does it get you? What's the payoff? What's the cost? Then look for other possible perspectives. Explore them, weigh them up, try them on. The idea is to challenge your perspective and make sure it supports you in what you want to achieve.

If you are struggling with perspectives why not try this useful tip? Take a piece of A4 paper. In the centre draw a circle with the issue/question/situation in the middle. Then consider the perspective you are in at that moment. Draw it in like a piece of pie and label it. The next step is to come up with other perspectives ... opposites ... unreasonable ones ... absolutely won't go there ones ... fairy tale ones ... the one you really like and so on. If you get stuck remember to change your perspective and move somewhere, anywhere so that you can look at it differently. Even stand shoulder to shoulder with someone/sit in their chair or walk somewhere, anywhere just to gain a different viewpoint. Try asking someone else what their perspective would be and try that on to see how it fits.

What will be your '**perspective for success**' this year? How will anyone know?

We all made ourselves accountable to the group by setting three goals with achievement times attached. Being practical and taking action was key. Remember the SMART approach to goals? Well we went one better by using the '**IES**' factor. So our goals were SMARTIES by adding **Interesting, Exciting and Special**. My visit to the rollercoaster ride at Alton Towers certainly reminded me to add the magic '**ies**' ingredient to all my goals. Next time you're setting goals buy a tube of Smarties to remind you to raise your bar and explore those other perspectives!

The Women's Network are always exciting, thought-provoking, great for making contacts and fun. Make sure you take advantage of the excellent opportunities offered.

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