

Three Perspectives Method. Uncovering Blind Spots

A method for uncovering our blind spots in all the situations where we keep doing the right thing but still get the wrong result, so we can figure out what actually needs to change.

This is the method to apply when there is an obvious pattern where the same unwanted situation involving other people keeps repeating. It often looks like that: we thought about the issue, we analyzed it from every side, we tried everything to make things different, yet the same result just happened again.

Please keep in mind that this is a method for finding what makes the same situation repeat and keeps us from reaching our goals. This is already, as you will see, a process requiring a few steps and a deeper explanation. It is not a description of how to fix what we uncovered.

Let's look at three examples of this mismatch between what a person thinks and what happens:

- John always goes to interviews well-prepared and has an objectively good resume, yet he never gets the job.
- Mary clearly sees that loads of guys are attracted to her. It's obvious, but it's just as obvious that no one ever asks her out.
- Tim tries his best to stay kind, calm, and nonjudgmental while arguing with his wife, but she almost always ends it by slamming the door and calling him an asshole.

In situations like that we often end up asking the same question: "What is wrong with me?" That's a terrible question not only because the very way it is constructed suggests that something can actually be wrong or right with us. It also completely blocks any chance of finding a real solution. It's not surprising though when we've genuinely tried everything and nothing changes.

So what happens next?

John decides that only people with connections get hired, which his friends reinforce by saying, "You're such a good worker, you should definitely have gotten that job!" Mary concludes she must look like a walking one-night-stand, but absolutely not like a girlfriend or even date material. Tim settles on the idea that his wife must be the problem. The final outcome? Nothing changes.

The problem starts looking like a grudge. Some incomprehensible force is ruling their lives and blocking them from reaching their goals.

There are some good questions to ask yourself whenever something repeats and does not seem to make sense: “What if there is something I don’t see?” Or, “What if I’m doing something that’s obvious to everyone else, but not to me?”

The Three Perspectives Method is a way to find out for ourselves what’s behind a pattern that involves other people.

There are three questions you can ask yourself:

1. What do I think I’m doing?
2. What others think I’m doing?
3. What am I really doing?

What makes us start digging? The inconsistency.

The signal to start using this method isn’t just that a negative pattern repeats and involves other people. The biggest clue is the inconsistency between what we believe and what happens. John has a great resume, prepares well, and feels confident, yet he never gets the job. Mary is clearly attractive and thinks she is open, yet no one approaches her. Tim tries to be calm and kind, yet each argument ends in explosion.

The feeling that your effort should produce a different result—the gap between your belief and the external outcome—is the single biggest indicator that these three questions are worth asking.

1. What Do I Think I’m Doing?

This step means writing down what we believe about the situation: how we think we come across, how we see it, and why we think things happen the way they do.

Mary writes down what she thinks she’s doing: “I’m presenting myself as open, kind, and vulnerable. I’m giving guys chances. I’m staying positive and open. I think I might in fact be too open, and this is why guys think I am too available and not girlfriend material. ”

John: “I prepare very well, I have plenty of relevant experience and a good CV. I think I present myself as a humble yet confident professional. I think my answers show my composure, and I think I’m seen as a professional, so the problem has nothing to do with me. I think that only people

with connections get those positions, so whatever I would do or say, it would end up the same way anyway.”

Tim: “I think I approach my wife with kindness. I always ask her how she sees the situation. I always try to listen without interrupting. I never present my view as the ultimate truth. I even read a book on this! I always say, “Well, I think...” or “In my opinion...” I think I’m doing the best I can. I think I’m giving her space. I think I’m not doing anything wrong. I think the problem is with her reactions.”

2. What Others Think I’m Doing?

We do not have access to other people’s heads and this is exactly where the problem comes from. We are so used to ourselves, our perspective and the stories we tell ourselves, that we automatically assume that everyone thinks the same way we do, and see us the way we see ourselves.

Just asking “what others think I’m doing?” already introduces the idea that not everyone reads us the way we believe we come across, which is a necessary step to see our blind spots.

There are three ways to discover what others think we’re doing:

1. Ask them directly, or ask someone you trust
2. Infer from how they react, what they say, and what their body language says
3. Infer from how your behavior and body language would be read if anyone other than you acted this way

The difficulty rises as we go down the list. We tend not to see what we do, and we mix up what we believe about ourselves with how others see us. So inferring requires good observational skills and a willingness to have our story challenged.

The point is not to discover perfectly, and down to the smallest detail, what others are thinking. What they think is in no way more important than what we believe about ourselves. The whole point of this part is to start noticing that other people see us differently from how we see ourselves, and that certain things we don’t notice cause other people to read us very differently from how we would like to be read.

John: He has two choices here: He can ask the recruiter for feedback, but that can be skewed and isn’t always reliable or even available. He decides to try to observe the reactions himself (option 2.)

During his next interview, John watches the interviewer’s body language. She asks what John would do if he were asked to work on Saturday, and John answers, fully confident: “Of course I would say no. Why would I give up my private time?”

John immediately sees the negative reaction from the interviewer. She first raises her eyebrows, then frowns, then slightly shakes her head. That's when John recognizes that what he thought came off as confident might look different. Maybe like arrogance? The interviewer finishes the interview early, which confirms his suspicion.

John does not know exactly what the interviewer thought, but he recognizes that this is how people react to someone annoying.

Mary: She decides to do the observation to infer how anyone would read her behavior from the outside (option 3). When she sees a guy glancing, instead of letting her mind run the same story, she observes herself. She previously thought she was very open, but is she? She is sitting with legs wrapped around one another, and arms crossed, so her posture is completely closed. The guy is looking, but they never make eye contact because she keeps looking away, pretending to read posters. When the guy gets up, she gets nervous and starts looking for her phone. When he finally catches her looking, she quickly looks everywhere else.

This makes Mary realize: she thought she was welcoming, but she was doing everything to make sure the guy didn't approach her. She then thinks: What must he think? Am I acting open towards him? Probably not, I'm constantly playing with my phone. Would he think I'm interested? Absolutely not.

Tim: After yet another argument, he decides to go straight to the source and ask his wife (point 1). He sits her down and asks, "You call me an asshole, but you never explained why. I'm trying my best. What exactly am I doing wrong?"

His wife is clearly annoyed, and she lays it out: "Are you serious? You make all our arguments sound like a therapy session, like you're above it all. It all sounds like an interview, not a talk. 'Well, wife, tell me what is the problem here.' When I try to have a real discussion, you don't even answer. You just let me talk like I'm talking to a wall. And then you hit me with those statements that make me furious, like, 'Well, in my opinion, you've got some unresolved issues.' So the talk is always about me and never about what you did wrong!"

This shocks Tim as he never even considered that all the effort he makes might come off as acting superior.

3. What am I really doing?

Question three might seem the most difficult, because it sounds like we need to precisely identify our motivations and describe them in fancy psychological terms. The idea is way simpler than that. We ask what we are really doing because to change the root of the behavior, not just what others see, we need to know what drives it.

There are two ways to dig into what we are really doing, and both involve a question:

Method 1. The advantage

Works for: patterns we can analyze calmly

Question: what the pattern is buying us, or in other words, what advantage do we get from behaving a certain way?

How does it work: The goal is to look at our behavior and figure out what the advantages of behaving that way are. It helps to imagine the opposite behavior and ask: what would I lose if I did that instead?

John can ask the advantage question first: what am I getting out of acting in a way that might be read as arrogant? If I acted less self-assured, if I talked less during the interviews, if I hadn't said no to working on weekends, what would I lose? John can then see that this behavior has quite a lot of advantages for him. He would feel weaker, and as if he looked less manly and professional if he acted differently. That is the list of the advantages: making the impression of a strong, manly professional.

Method 2. Why would someone dear to me act this way?

Works for: patterns that are shameful, emotional, and generally difficult. Asking what we get from the pattern might not work here, because the answer can easily be used against ourselves.

Question: If someone I appreciate a lot, like a friend or a family member, was behaving that way, why would they be doing that?

How does it work: The goal here is to see a pattern not as a personal failure, but something explainable and normal, something other people could do for reasons that have nothing to do with being "wrong".

Mary finds it hard to imagine how someone could think they're open and still look closed. She thinks of her little sister and possible reasons for why she would find herself in that situation. Imagining her sister in a cafe instead of herself makes it clear pretty quickly: the little sister would act that way if she actually did not want men to approach. But there is still something more to unpack: why would she not want the men to approach but not know about it? Maybe so she can believe she was trying? Or maybe just because she is shy, or does not want to look too obvious?

Tim has an example ready to analyze: his father behaved exactly like him during fights with his mom. As a kid, Tim always thought that his father looked composed and stable, and his mom as if she was the unstable one. He thinks to himself that this might be the point: to be the one in control, rather

than the one who gets all worked up. He tries to think through different reasons why one would act that way if they did not have any malicious intent. Maybe his father believed that this is how a head of family should behave? Maybe his father was also acting the same way, and he just copied it without thinking much? Tim can also mix method 1 and two and ask: what was the advantage of behaving like that for my father? If he acted in the opposite way, what would he lose? This makes the picture clearer for Tim: his father would lose a position of being the unmoved head of the family. Tim understands that the pattern is buying him the same thing.

Why try to understand what we are really doing?

Without step 3, it might seem like the goal is to make our beliefs about ourselves align with what other people think about us. If someone thinks John is arrogant, and John believes he is just confident, then John should just adapt his behavior to look less arrogant.

But what if recruiters find his behavior arrogant, but women find the same behavior compelling? Should John adapt to one, and not the other? Or maybe he should act one way with recruiters, and another with women?

The Three Perspectives Method has nothing to do with trying to manipulate how we come across and everything to do with aligning what we believe about ourselves with our goals.

There is nothing inherently wrong with **Mary** acting closed off, and many people are perfectly happy to act that way openly. The problem is the misalignment: Mary wants to find a partner; that is her goal. What she believes about herself is that she is acting perfectly in alignment with that goal. As long as she does not notice that things do not add up here, nothing much will change. But even when she does, noticing does not change anything on its own. Mary needs to understand what she is actually doing and why to change it. Change looks different when the underlying problems are different. She needs a different approach if the issue is lack of self-esteem, or stress, or thinking that looking too obvious is unacceptable. If, for example, she is afraid of looking desperate, then forcing herself to look more available would backfire.

If **John's** goal was to not get the job, because he prefers to keep his unemployment benefits, coming off as arrogant would actually be the perfect tactic. This means that being read a certain way is not a problem as long as it brings us closer to our goals.

What to do with answers to three questions?

Sometimes the answer is obvious once we finally see what we are doing. If Tim inherited the pattern from his father, repeated it without noticing and there is nothing much more underneath it, then he

just needs to stop using the superior tone and the problem is solved.

But what often hides behind our blind spots are deep-rooted beliefs, long-standing patterns that buy us something, and what we learned in childhood to be unacceptable.

If Tim is in fact buying a superior position in his marriage and is not ready to drop that advantage, then even if he stops the surface behavior, the pattern will surface somewhere else.

This is exactly why uncovering what stands behind our blind spots is worth doing. It makes changing things possible, instead of pushing the problem somewhere else.

How to know if this is a surface problem, or a deeper one?

The simplest method is to try to change the behavior and see what happens. In **Mary's** case, this would mean looking at the other person, smiling, sitting in an open posture and not using her phone as an escape route.

Changing a long-standing behavior is always a bit uncomfortable, so Mary might seem a bit tense and awkward, but also curious and somewhat excited. If that happens, the problem is probably a surface one, and will require trying over and over and being ok with feeling awkward.

If Mary tries to act differently but barely manages to do it, is flooded with negative thoughts about how ridiculous and pathetic she looks, gets very stressed, and closes up even more as a result, then the problem is probably much deeper than just the behavior and would require working with underlying beliefs before she tries to change the behavior.

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