

Filters, Mental Models, Generation Y, And Diversity¹

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What we experience about people is the result of our sensory perceptions, *filtered through what we assume, believe, and think*—the “mental models” we carry in our heads, which have become wired into the circuitry of our brains. For example, if we assume it’s human nature for people to be out just for themselves, we probably will see most everyone that way, even if they are not!

As “filters” to our perceptions, these mental models are like snapshots or descriptions of how the world works or how you think it should work. Some are “rules” that begin with words like *you should* or *you should not*, or *you ought to* or *you ought not*. These are the “good’s” and “bad’s” and “right’s” and “wrong’s” that guide us in our daily choices. Others are pictures and stories about how things are—our very personal definitions of reality.

History is alive with dramatic illustrations of the power of mental models.



Take, for example, trepanning, which means cutting a hole in the head. Many trepanned skulls have been found, from the Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Eastern, Chinese, Indian, and African cultures. Historians think that holes were cut in the skull to cure headaches, treat brain disorders, let out evil spirits, or treat insanity. *They felt it was their responsibility to help people rid themselves of evil spirits.*² So they figured out a way to do it. How’s that for the power of a mental model?

Another example, familiar to all of us, comes from Puritan times. In those days, people thought that some women were witches who threatened the community. They had to be dealt with. So what did they do? They burned the “witches” at the stake. The idea of burning witches, one of the cruelest forms of execution, is said to have originated with Saint Augustine (354-430), who said “that pagans, Jews, and heretics would burn forever in eternal fire with the Devil unless saved by the Catholic Church.”³ Talk about radical solutions to a problem!



So, what does all of this have to do with business today? A great deal!

Just as you do in the rest of your life, your mental models determine the way you do business or manage an organization. You make decisions and take actions, often with little awareness of how they are driven by your mental models, the filters that define your realities.

¹ From: <http://arniedahlke.com/timelytips.htm>

² From: <http://library.thinkquest.org/J0111742/Trepanning.htm>

³ From: http://www.themystica.com/mystica/articles/b/burning_times.html

Hard economic times like these present an opportunity for you to change your filters and challenge your mental models. Let me explain.

To begin with, if your business is typical of most organizations today, many of your employees (and maybe even you) are from Generation Y, the Millennium Generation.

This generation was born between the second half of the '70's and the first half of the 90's. They have grown up in a digital age, a world with diverse Internet resources. They text and Twitter with their iPods. They form global networks with Blogs, MySpace, and FaceBook. They are more culturally diverse than any previous generation.

This generation is generally characterized by a number of traits:

- ◆ They are a more highly educated, learning-oriented generation with an ability to be more open to new ideas and more quickly able to grasp new concepts.
- ◆ They are more optimistic with a sense of security, more goal-oriented, and more ambitious with high expectations.
- ◆ They feel more confident and empowered, and are more skeptical—they are more willing to speak their minds and question everything.
- ◆ Having grown up in a culture of praise, they expect good treatment from their managers and fellow workers.
- ◆ They are efficient multi-taskers, more quick to adapt to change, more comfortable in a variety of situations, and often more impatient to get things done.
- ◆ They are more culturally diverse and more racially and culturally tolerant.

Utilize these personal characteristics of your Millennium Generation employees. They share things openly and work collaboratively. They respect what they can learn from cultures other than their own.

The new perspective they bring to business, their flexibility and ability to adapt to change, and their eagerness to succeed offer you a potential treasure chest of opportunities to change your filters and find new ways of thriving in this economy.

Pull them all together. See the world through their filters. Learn from their mental models.

Instead of attempting to solve problems based on what has worked in the past and looking for quick fixes, enlist their help in finding new, creative, more long-range, and more effective solutions.

Challenge them to offer new ideas and solutions to the problems you face. Engage them in brainstorming sessions, using enjoyable and exciting creativity tools such as Mind Mapping, Free Association, Assumption Surfacing, Six Thinking Hats. etc.⁴

Feeling challenged and empowered, not only will they be more than willing to help you reshape your business, they will take you in directions that never even occurred to you!

In our current economic downturn, the biggest since the Great Depression, the Y Generation, with its strong optimism, its will to succeed, and its passion for collective action can help you change your filters and challenge your mental models to help you thrive!



⁴ See sites such as: http://www.mycoted.com/Category:Creativity_Techniques