

Manage The Windows In Your Head¹

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Our brains have the neural equivalents of large interstate freeways, turnpikes, and state highways. These big trunks are the same from one person to the next—functioning in yours about the same way they function in mine. It's when you get to the smaller routes—the brain's equivalent of residential streets, alleys, and dirt roads—that individual patterns begin to show up. Every brain has a lot of these smaller paths, and in no two people are they identical.

— Adapted from “Brain Rules” by John Medina

The individual patterns of our brains become like windows in our heads, windows through which we see people and the world around us. These windows are powerful determinants of our behavior.

From the time we are born, the neurons in our brains grow, die, connect, disconnect, and reconnect. According to scientists, the jungle of neurons in our head is constantly changing. Learn a new language and new connections are made. Experience failure and new connections are made. Fall in love and new connections are made.

By the time we reach adulthood, our initial brain structure, influenced by our environmental and life experiences, has been modified billions of times. The result is that each of us is a very unique human being.

No matter how similar two of us may seem, the fact is, we see people and events from different, individual perspectives—through different windows in our brains. We may hear the same words and interpret them differently. We may accept or reject people according to our individual *stereotypes*—beliefs we have acquired over the years about specific social groups or types of individuals. We may differ in how we respond emotionally to a person or event. What I see as wrong or bad, you may see as right or good.



In other words, we each “frame” the world through our own, *individual set of windows*. And, those windows affect our behavior without us even realizing it's happening.

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

A good example comes from a workshop I did several years ago with a group of policemen. The Chief wanted them to become more sensitive to people, to build more connections with the community. He decided to have me come in and facilitate a human relations seminar. At one point during the session, I was talking about how we relate to someone based on our history of experiences with a variety of people. I suggested that the bulk of *their* experiences, day after day, was dominated by dealing with people in trouble, often in tragic situations. Over the years, those repeated experiences had to have an influence on how they would deal with others who are not fellow-officers.

One officer exclaimed “Aha!” and said “I’ve got the perfect example!” He went on to describe a day in which he had been faced with a horrible automobile accident in which three people were killed, with one of them being decapitated. He went home that day feeling tired and worn out. The first thing he needed was a nice cold beer.



He entered his house and his wife greeted him, appearing to be very upset. He asked her what was wrong and she said she was upset because the little boy next door had fallen on a piece of broken glass and severely cut three fingers of one hand. The officer commented flippantly, “Yeah, well boys will be boys,” as he made his way to the refrigerator for his beer.

Upon hearing that, his wife burst into tears. She exclaimed, “What has happened to you? When did you become so insensitive, so cold and uncaring?”

He was taken aback. He didn’t realize until that moment how the events of his daily life had so desensitized him to regular life. He turned to his wife, embraced her, apologized, and told her what had happened to him that day. Without even realizing it, he was seeing the world through the perspective of

his own police eyes. Cut fingers? That’s nothing compared to what he sees every day!

We do this daily, most often not realizing it. We look at the world through our individual frames. Psychologists refer to these individual frames as cognitive structures—belief systems about reality that determine how we think about, feel about, act, understand, and relate to people and events in our lives.

From the time we are born, we are constantly molding and shaping our cognitive structures without even realizing it. As a result, by the time we reach adulthood, each of us looks at and reacts to the world through our own set of windowpanes.

We develop our own mindsets, often very restrictive mindsets, such as competitive, fault-finding, self-protective, or close-minded to any new or different point of view. When interacting with other people around us in the workplace, these windows in our heads often lead to very dysfunctional behaviors, such as defensiveness, turf protection, interpersonal conflict, gossip, finger-pointing, damaging gossip—all of which destroy productive relationships.



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**SEE THE WORLD FROM
A DIFFERENT POINT
OF VIEW!**

Step Out Of Your Windows

