

Understanding Your Attitude

Chapter Outline

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What It Takes to Be a Leader

*Patience and perseverance have a magical effect
before which difficulties disappear and obstacles vanish.*

John Quincy Adams

LESSON 1

Interpreting Events and Experiences



Quick Write

In the middle of a successful political career, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was stricken with polio, a disease that left him unable to walk or use his legs. Despite this, he went on to become governor of New York, establish a treatment center for polio patients, and serve as president of the United States for four terms—leading the nation through the Great Depression and World War II. What do you think was his attitude about these challenges, and why was that important?



Learn About

- interpreting events and experiences
- the hierarchy of needs
- the importance of a positive outlook on life
- how perspective molds your understanding of life
- how perspective molds your purposes, passions, and practices
- how personality shapes your perspective and motivation
- how actions reveal your attitudes

Interpreting Events and Experiences

Learning how to interpret events and experiences is a big part of growing up. Your experience—what happens to you and what happens in the world around you—and how you interpret that experience have an enormous influence on your daily life and your future.

In history classes and elsewhere, you've read about how people like President Abraham Lincoln, pilot Lieutenant Colonel Jimmy Doolittle, and activist Rosa Parks made crucial decisions based on what they believed they were capable of doing. Their early life experiences helped them understand their potential.

Potential is your promise—what you are capable of doing or becoming. Respected people such as retired Army General Colin Powell, US Senator John McCain, and actress Meryl Streep frequently speak about how experiences early in their lives helped them decide what they wanted to do as adults.



Your perspective and personality—your attitudes and behaviors—make you who you are.

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Vocabulary

- potential
- maturity
- personality
- attitude
- behavior
- motivation
- hierarchy
- self-actualization
- perspective
- affiliation need
- belief
- desire
- goal
- intrinsic motivation
- extrinsic motivation
- achievement

That's not to say people who achieve greatness never make mistakes—they'll admit they've made plenty! But they also say that their experiences molded them into the successful people they became. They accepted challenges and kept going. They persevered. *They became the result of their potential.* As one old saying puts it, "As the twig is bent, so grows the tree."

Growing up isn't just about getting older, even though at times you may think so. That's because for some things, such as getting a driver's license or being able to vote, age alone is an important requirement. But really growing up—reaching maturity—is much more. It means learning what's required to develop a positive attitude and then putting that attitude to use to meet life's challenges.

Maturity is *the state of being fully grown or developed.* Reaching maturity is the process of bringing your personality and experience to bear on your life in a positive, constructive way. Attaining maturity means becoming more aware of your abilities, your goals, and your place in the world. It also means understanding how your attitudes and behaviors affect you and influence others.

Experience shapes your personality. **Personality** is *what you are inside and what you show to others. It includes your actions, opinions, beliefs, biases, desires, and ambitions.* Personality is the foundation of your attitudes and behaviors. An **attitude** is *a thought, feeling, or belief.* A **behavior** is *an action that others can see you doing.* Attitudes are internal, and behaviors are external.

This lesson will help you become more aware of how your attitudes and behaviors make you who you are and who you are becoming as a result of your experience. Some people humorously define experience as "that thing you get just *after* you need it." That observation is true. Your experiences are a rudder as you navigate the course of your life. And just as skiers usually do better the *second* time they ski down a mountain course, you'll make better decisions as you mature. You will learn how to interpret events and experiences to make better decisions about where you want to go, what you want to do, and who you want to be.

The Hierarchy of Needs

Psychologists, who study people's mental processes, have always been interested in the ways personality, attitudes, and behaviors affect each other. Researchers have developed a number of theories to explain why people behave the way they do. These theories have two things in common. First, they all deal with both the inside and the outside of the person. Second, they all describe a series of steps, or levels, of human motivation.

Motivation is the inner force that drives people to act. The desire to get good grades is a source of motivation. It drives you to work hard, study for tests, and hand in your homework on time. The desire to be well liked and have friends is also a motivator. But motivations can also be physical: Consider that urgent feeling you get after school that moves you directly toward the refrigerator or snack bar! Some psychologists say it's possible to study, describe, and rank the factors that motivate people.

In the 1950s, psychologist Abraham Maslow proposed a "hierarchy of needs" to describe people's needs and motivations (Figure 3.1). A **hierarchy** is a ranking, or series of steps, that follows a specific order—for example, largest to smallest, oldest to newest, most important to least important, basic to complex. Maslow's hierarchy of needs includes five basic human needs:

- **Physiological needs**—food, water, breathing, shelter, clothing
- **Safety needs**—personal and community security
- **Love and belonging needs**—family, friendship, affiliation, group acceptance
- **Esteem needs**—self-esteem, confidence, respect, recognition, achievement
- **Self-actualization needs**—realization of potential

As you can see, this hierarchy moves from the most basic needs, such as food and water and safety, to more-complex needs. Maslow believed people must satisfy each need in a particular order beginning with basic physiological needs. When the needs are satisfied at each current level, a person can progress on to the succeeding level.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs

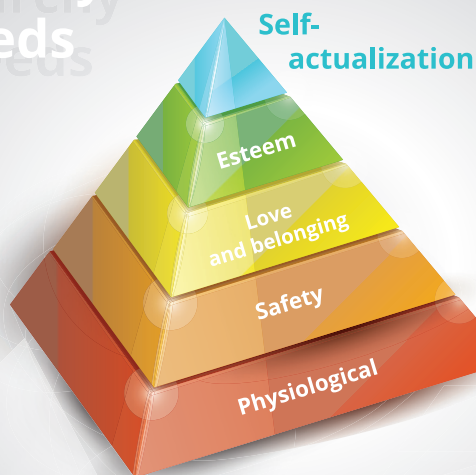


FIGURE 3.1

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

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After people fulfill their physiological and safety needs, they look to satisfy their needs for friendship, group acceptance, and love.

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According to this theory, as a person meets the needs at each level, he or she becomes more flexible and has more options. In other words, you can't make good decisions about your future if you're constantly hungry. Or, if your family is undergoing a crisis (belonging need), getting good grades (realization of potential) might not be one of your priorities.

Self-actualization, or personal fulfillment, is the highest need on Maslow's hierarchy. **Self-actualization** is the process of becoming what you are capable of becoming. It is realizing your potential. The drive for self-actualization is inborn in every human being. But again, other needs precede self-actualization. To become a major league baseball pitcher, for example, you first must have a place to live and regular meals. You must also belong to a team.

The Importance of a Positive Outlook on Life

Always look on the bright side of life.

Let a smile be your umbrella.

When life gives you lemons, make lemonade!

These everyday sayings emphasize the importance of a positive outlook on life. But you've also no doubt heard people say, "Colin has *such* an attitude," or "Sophie needs to chill." Those observations reflect negatively on Colin and Sophie. Why? How would their ongoing bad attitudes affect your friendship with them?

Your Attitude Is a Compass

Remember, your attitude is made up of your thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. It's your "slant" or "angle" on life. Your attitude determines your outlook and approach to life. It's like a compass—you go in the direction the needle points.



When you do positive things, you develop a more positive attitude.

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I'm OK, You're OK

In 1969 psychologist Thomas Anthony Harris wrote a book called *I'm OK, You're OK*. It became one of the most successful self-help books ever published. For many readers, Harris's ideas clicked. The ideas were very simple, yet they reflected what millions of people have experienced in their lives. Harris and his colleagues, basing themselves on the work of Canadian psychologist Eric Berne, summarized personality as one of four life positions or attitudes. The four positions are:

1. **I'm not OK, you're OK**—disapproving of yourself, approving of others.
2. **I'm not OK, you're not OK**—disapproving of both yourself and others.
3. **I'm OK, you're not OK**—approving of yourself, disapproving of others.
4. **I'm OK, you're OK**—approving of yourself and others.

According to Harris, most people hold Attitude 1: "I'm not OK, you're OK." These people might lack self-esteem or self-confidence. They feel inferior to other people. Someone with Attitude 2, "I'm not OK, you're not OK," would tend not to look on the bright side. Such a person would need to do a lot of work to be happy. People with Attitude 3, "I'm OK, you're not OK," might have suffered from abuse or trauma as children, according to Harris, and the results of that abuse still affect their relationships with other people. Attitude 4, "I'm OK, you're OK" is the attitude of a healthy, well-adjusted individual.

Harris believed that no matter what your attitude is to start with, you can change it for the better. Anyone can move to Attitude 4.

Fortunately, your attitude is largely under your control. It's essential to understand this. Attitude is not something you are born with. Some experts say that you can "program" your attitude like a computer, just by repeatedly thinking and saying positive things about yourself and others. You can change your attitude and mood simply by changing how you think and talk. Psychologists think that's how attitude works. It *follows* your behavior. If you *do* positive things, you'll slowly develop a more positive attitude.

The Value of a Positive Attitude

Why is a positive attitude important? One good reason is that it increases the chances that others will like you. People enjoy spending time with individuals who express positive attitudes. They tend to avoid individuals with an ongoing negative attitude. Psychologists use the term *toxic personalities* to refer to people who never have a nice thing to say about anyone or anything. That's not to say you can't occasionally have a bad day or a bad week: Ups and downs are a normal part of life. So if your friend Aaron is "down" from time to time, you try to cheer him up. And he does the same for you.

But it's not pleasant to spend time with someone whose attitude is always negative. What's more, this toxic, or poisonous, attitude can rub off on others without their even being aware of it. Hanging out with toxic people, in other words, can affect your own attitude. That's why it's so important to pick your friends wisely. There's an old saying from Latin, "If you lie down with dogs, you'll get up with fleas." This points to an important truth: Bad habits, poor behaviors, and negative attitudes are contagious.

A good attitude is essential for leaders. They know that a positive attitude has a powerful influence on others. Good leaders know that "throwing out positive vibes" is essential to gaining respect and encouraging others to follow them.

How Perspective Molds Your Understanding of Life

Like everyone, you look at things in your own individual way. That's what makes you unique—an individual. Your way of seeing things is special. This diversity is one of the things that make human beings so interesting. You can constantly compare your perspective with other peoples' perspectives—those of your friends, family, teachers, counselors, rivals, heroes, and villains.

Perspective is *your way of seeing the world*. It's your take on the world—your worldview. On a deeper level, perspective includes your insight into people, things, and events. Your perspective drives the way you interpret your life experiences. It helps form your attitudes and your personality. It guides your behaviors.

"But I'm still a student," you may be saying. "My perspective is really limited." That's not the case, if you really stop to think about it. Your current perspective as a student puts you in a lively and interesting world of discovery.



Is this glass half empty or half full? It depends on your perspective. Which perspective is correct?

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You have many experiences and exciting things to look forward to in the near future: getting your driver's license, getting a part-time job, dating, graduating, voting. In the longer-term, you may look forward to going to college, getting a job, marrying, and raising a family. On the far, far horizon may be retiring to a home on the beach. As you mature, you'll enjoy a broadening perspective—just as when you ride an elevator to the top of a building or climb a mountain, you start to see farther.

As you mature and accumulate experience, you'll probably start thinking more and more about how you formed your unique perspective. Human beings have done this since the beginning of history.

In fact, the ancient Greek philosophers thought that the yearning for self-understanding was as essential to human life as food and water. They believed that everyone strives toward this knowledge. It's natural for you to want to understand *why* you are thinking and doing certain things at your age. In grasping the *purpose* behind your perspective, you'll gradually begin to see how a healthy, well rounded, fair-minded perspective can guide you in your studies, your job, your friendships, your family relationships, and your future.

Right now, your perspective may be based largely on the influence of your parents, guardians, friends, and teachers. This is a normal phase of your development. These influences give you a good foundation for growth. Feeling supported and loved is an important part of developing a sound perspective on life. In fact, you may even find yourself thinking or saying that your friends and family support your worldview. But questioning assumptions is also important. Both are signs of a growing, dynamic perspective.

How Perspective Molds Your Purposes, Passions, and Practices

Your perspective drives the purposes you strive toward; your passions, or the things you feel strongly about; and the practices you follow in your life. This means that your perspective will significantly affect your success—in school, at work, in friendships, and in family relationships.

By nature, human beings are social creatures. People want to belong to a group or an organization. They want to have friends—sometimes desperately so. The need to have friends and to belong is particularly strong among teenagers. But old and young people alike seek group acceptance. This natural human characteristic is called an **affiliation need**, *a desire to be and feel a part of a group*. It is that comfortable sense of belonging you feel when you are part of a group.



Human beings are social creatures who want to belong to a group or an organization.

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Especially when you're young, the desire for affiliation can sometimes lead to actions or behaviors that run counter to the influence of your family and teachers. Sometimes peer pressure to do the wrong, unwise, or inappropriate thing is almost irresistible. When you face a choice between going along with the group or sticking with values that your parents or teachers believe are best, you put your perspective to the test. The more you know yourself, and the better you understand what you believe and why, the better you'll be able to pass that test.

Cultivating a Healthy Perspective

People's beliefs and desires help shape their perspectives. A **belief** is a strong and deeply held idea that forms the basis for much of your thinking. It can be religious, social, political, or personal. A **desire** is something you deeply want for yourself and those close to you. Desires are frequently part of your emotional and psychological motivation.

Developing a healthy perspective requires keeping an open mind and seeing things as they really are. It also involves recognizing the short-term and long-term effects of mistakes or poor choices.

Everyone makes mistakes—the trick is to learn from them. That means adjusting your behavior after you make a mistake and committing yourself not to repeat it. This self-correcting ability is your ticket to success, and it's part of a healthy perspective.

Want to avoid mistakes as much as possible? Pay attention to the signs along the road. For example, a parent or guardian may have encouraged you to participate in school clubs, sports teams, or associations. Or they may have urged you to join a religious youth organization. As you've matured, your affiliation need may have led you to experiment with involvement in various kinds of groups.

When you're trying to decide which affiliations are appropriate, focus on the big picture, not the immediate situation. Some affiliations are dead-end streets. They might seem exciting for a moment, but in the long term they might also be counterproductive, or downright dangerous. Certain social media sites, cliques, gangs, or secret clubs aren't a good breeding ground for developing a mature, positive perspective. Similarly, focusing all your attention on violent movies, music, and video games can't be good for your developing worldview.

In the 1985 movie *Witness*, one character says, "What you take into your hands, you take into your heart." That simple statement points to the direct relationship between your experience—what you see, hear, touch, taste, say, and do—and your ever-widening perspective on life.

People who have made names for themselves in the world—some of whom you probably admire as heroes—expanded their worldview by concentrating on productive purposes, passions, and practices. They set goals, got excited about them, and then worked to achieve them. You can do it, too.



People and teams who are successful set goals, get excited about them, and work to achieve them.

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How Personality Shapes Your Perspective and Motivation

As you might suspect, your personality has a big influence on your perspective and motivation. Personality influences what you think is important and unimportant. Those beliefs, in turn, influence what you strive for daily and what you aspire to in the future.

Since people are so different, it is not surprising that they are driven by different things. These things are their purposes or goals. A **goal** is *an external aim, or end, to which you direct effort*. Psychologists call goals “incentives.”

The Cycle of Goal-Directed Activity

How do your goals relate to your motivation and behavior? Your motive helps you form a goal. You then choose a behavior that is directed toward that goal. If it all works, you meet your goal.

The process works for intangible goals as well as tangible ones. Suppose you're hungry—that's your motive. Your goal activity is to satisfy your appetite—to eat. In a behavior that will lead to accomplishing your goal, you go to the kitchen. In three goal-directed activities, you put two pieces of bread in the toaster, wait until the toast pops up, and butter it. Finally, you perform the goal activity: You eat it.

Goal-directed activity and goal activity form a cycle. You learn how to get better at fixing toast, you get used to how long it takes, and you satisfy your hunger whenever it hits you. One issue that may affect this cycle is competence. For example, if you never burn the toast, other family members may start asking you to make toast for them. On the other hand, if you start getting sloppy—leaving butter all over the counter—your family members might ask you to stop.

Two Types of Motivation

Researchers divide motivation into two main types: internal (intrinsic) and external (extrinsic).

The desire to get good grades is an example of intrinsic motivation. **Intrinsic motivation** is *a drive people feel that is based on internal factors such as the need for affiliation, achievement, power, wisdom, and security*. Intrinsic motivation originates from within. The things that motivate you from within are your goals, needs, desires, beliefs, and attitudes—in other words, your personality.

Your teacher's offer of an extra-credit project might be an example of an extrinsic motivation. **Extrinsic motivation** is *a force that drives people to act that is based on factors outside the individual*. Extrinsic motivations are beyond your control, but they still have an influence on you: In other words, it's the teacher's choice to suggest an extra-credit project, but it's up to you to decide to do it.

The difference between these types of motivation can get fuzzy. In fact, one motivation theory proposes that all motivation is intrinsic. Other theories hold that you can use external factors to motivate by linking them to people’s intrinsic motivations.

For example, suppose that you really want a 10-speed bike. After some thought, you decide to get a job to earn money to buy one. Your intrinsic motivation to get a job is a desire for the independence and mobility that a new bike will provide. Your boss offers you an extrinsic motivation—pay—to keep you showing up for work. Together, the two motivating factors shape your perspective, or work ethic: “Working is good because it will enable me to earn money to buy a bike, which will help me get around faster.”

How Actions Reveal Your Attitudes

You’ve probably heard the expression “Do as I say, not as I do.” It points up the close—and at times contradictory—relationship between your attitudes (perspectives, purposes, beliefs) and your actions (practices, behaviors).

If you’re like most people, you want your actions to be in harmony with your attitudes. “Walk the walk, and talk the talk,” right? You’d seem hypocritical or two-faced if you expressed one attitude or belief and then did something that was completely contrary. A third familiar saying, “Actions speak louder than words,” also comes to mind here.

Ultimately, it’s what you do, not what you say, that counts. It’s through your actions that you realize **achievements**—*the attainment of goals and accomplish of objectives that are in line with established standards of performance or behavior*. The desire to achieve shows itself in your efforts to make friends, earn good grades, be a part of your family, join the team or band, win awards, and produce results. All these things may be part of how you define success. You direct your actions to achieving these goals.



You can’t separate actions from attitudes. Your actions, for better or worse, reveal your attitudes. Showing up late for school, practice, or work, for example, sends a message about your attitude. Dressing in a deliberately provocative, sloppy, or outrageous manner might be one way of expressing your individuality, but it probably won’t score points with your family, teachers, coaches, or employer.

As a potter shapes her clay, your motivations shape your perspectives and work ethic.

Nenad Aksic/Shutterstock

See if you can tell what each of the following *actions* might say about the person's *attitude*:

- Chewing and snapping gum during a lecture
- Texting a friend during dinner
- Failing to use *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, *Ms.*, *Sir*, or *Ma'am* in talking with adults
- Not using a turn signal when driving
- Never saying *Please* and *Thank you* in normal conversation
- Avoiding eye contact with others
- Putting your feet up on furniture
- Losing something that you've borrowed from a friend
- Ignoring personal hygiene with hair, teeth, bathing, and clothing

Ice hockey legend Wayne Gretzky once said, "You miss 100 percent of the shots you don't take." Think about your life as a sport for a minute. Are you a team player? Do you follow the rules? Take your shots? What's your attitude?

Teachers, coaches, leaders, and managers know that winning breeds winning. In other words, an achievement-focused attitude can become a way of life and a positive, contagious habit. On the other hand, an attitude of negativity and "What's the use?" can create what coaches call a "culture of losing." Fostering an achievement-focused attitude leads to better results: The more you achieve, the more you're likely to achieve.

But you can't win if you sit out the game. You've got to throw yourself into it. Winning and success motivate those who value winning to push themselves even harder. On the other hand, repeatedly losing (or accepting repeated poor performance) will drain your enthusiasm and effectiveness. You'll develop a "What's the use?" attitude.

So, which team would you rather play for?

Intrinsic Motivation

Common intrinsic motivations include:

- **Affiliation**—wanting to belong to a group or to have friends
- **Achievement**—wanting to succeed
- **Power**—desiring to have control of your time, other people, situations, or things
- **Wisdom**—desiring to understand
- **Security**—wanting to be safe

Extrinsic Motivation

Common extrinsic motivations include:

- Grades
- Money
- Food
- Threats or fears
- Status or promotion
- Awards and recognition

✓ CHECKPOINTS

Lesson 1 Review

Using complete sentences, answer the following questions on a sheet of paper.

1. What do people who achieve greatness say about their mistakes and experiences?
2. What does “attaining maturity” mean?
3. What are some examples of Maslow’s five basic human needs?
4. Where does the drive for self-actualization come from?
5. How can you “program” or change your attitude?
6. Which attitude did Thomas Anthony Harris believe most people hold, and which is the attitude of a healthy, well-adjusted individual?
7. What does your perspective do?
8. What did the ancient Greek philosophers think about the yearning for self-understanding?
9. What puts your perspective to the test?
10. How do you decide which affiliations are appropriate?
11. How do your goals relate to your motivation and behavior?
12. Which types do researchers divide motivation into?
13. What is the relationship between your actions and your attitudes?
14. What can an achievement-focused attitude become?

APPLYING YOUR LEARNING

15. Think about a decision you recently made. Describe the experiences that formed the basis for making that decision.

