

## A Three Dimensional View of Events

We are surrounded by our environment, relationships and the events that take place in our lives. Some events are pleasant and some are not. Some events invite togetherness and some invite disconnection. As human beings, we respond to pleasant and unpleasant events differently. Some of us respond to events optimistically and others respond pessimistically. Why is that some people respond to an unpleasant situation more optimistically than others? The answer is not that they are luckier than others or they don't get into these kind of situations. The answer, I think, is that they interpret an unpleasant event differently; they have less pessimistic internal dialogue with self; they have fewer critical voices and try to make things easier for themselves.

In this article, I am going to explain how I think that our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors influence each other; and how they generate a feeling, thought, or action that give us a pessimistic or optimistic view, and how they make our lives fulfilled or miserable. I am going to give you a few pointers on enhancing your relationships with self and others.

I am hoping that you will see how these three domains work together, and how you can have control over your thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Let's start with an example.

A friend is to meet you for dinner at your house at 6:00 p.m. But it's now past 7:00 p.m. and there's been no sign of her, not even a phone call. How are you going to think, feel, or behave about this?

Well, there's more than one possible answer: **You** may be person #1, #2, #3, #4, or ...

#1. **What you think:** She might have been hurt on the way here.

**How you feel:** Worried or nervous

**What you do:** Call hospital to find out if she is there

#2. **What you think:** She didn't bother to let me know she was delayed

**How you feel:** upset or angry

**What you do:** criticize, or act chilly, when she does show up

#3. **What you think:** It doesn't matter to me whether people are on time.

**How you feel:** indifferent

**What you do:** Nothing in particular

#4. **What you think:** I needed the time to fix the house up anyway.

**How you feel:** Relieved

**What you do:** Relax and call her later.

These are different ways in which someone might interpret a friend's being late, and different ways in which one might react emotionally and behaviorally. That is how a person 1 is different from a person 4. Your feelings follow your thought processes and therefore lead your mood into different directions. The important note here is your thoughts about your friend's lateness don't affect just your feelings, they can also influence the actions you take. As the philosopher Epictetus said almost 2,000 years ago:

"The thing that upsets people is not what happens  
**to them** but what they think it means."

People routinely distress themselves and others with arbitrary interpretations of what is going on. Sometimes this is done out of habit, learned from others, or under the influence of past experiences; sometimes it happens for quite other reasons, which we may not understand. However what is crucial here is NOT WHY we make arbitrary interpretations of events but HOW to not make them.

Our pathway to either a fulfilling or sad life is based on how we perceive an adversity in our life. It is not about the nature of the adversity or difficulty that we experience or its severity, it is mostly about how we perceive an adversity, how we explain it to ourselves and how we interpret it. We have a capacity/ ability to look at an adversity differently, to explain it optimistically, and to interpret it realistically. Our understanding of these three domains will allow us to develop strengths in ourselves and in our thinking, feeling and behavior in general.

In conclusion, one small change in one domain,- either thoughts, feelings, or behaviors- will affect the other domains. Our behaviors, feelings and thoughts are not totally out of our control. We are able to direct them in the direction of well - being and in a new pathway of life experience. I suggest that you pay attention to the way you perceive your current adversity and then think how you could make a small change in one of those domains to have a different view of it.

Happy possibilities!

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