LOGIC BUBBLE

Technological advances notwithstanding, we’ll probably never be able to know what’s going on in someone else’s mind. As a result, we often find ourselves wondering, Why is he acting like a jerk? Why is she missing the point? Why don’t they see things *my*way?

The answer to all three questions is related to logic-bubbles

A logic-bubble, according to de Bono, is that bubble of perception within which a person is acting. When people have perspectives different from yours, it could be that they’re misinformed, ignorant, or incompetent. But it could also be that their perspectives are as well-founded as your own when considered within their particular logic-bubbles.

I find the visual image of a logic-bubble appealing: a bubble with a person in the center and everything that influences and shapes the person floating around in the bubble. This notion of logic-bubbles reinforces the idea that we each see and hear things differently. Even if we’re members of the same team, working on the same project, even working in the same cubicle, we experience the world differently. Our logic-bubbles differ.

So when someone’s behavior puzzles you, it can be useful to speculate about the person’s logic-bubble by asking: What might be inside the bubble that explains the way the person is thinking? Under what circumstances could the person’s behavior be viewed as logical? Coming up with possible answers to these questions can help you see the person’s behavior in a different light. It might even lead you to acknowledge that in similar circumstances, you’d behave the same.

Now, don’t misunderstand. De Bono isn’t saying that people always act logically. Sometimes, they do. Often, they don’t. But by visualizing the person inside a logic-bubble in which the person’s behavior makes sense, you avoid the trap of automatically judging others as stupid or illogical simply because they don’t see things your way. And you can consider other ways of interacting with the person that take the logic-bubble into account.

Here’s an example from an IT organization I consulted to. The department was developing an insidiously difficult system that was mandated by external authorities and had a tight, non-negotiable deadline. Making matters worse, the director whose department would be using the system was impatient, pushy, arrogant, short-tempered, and resistant to ideas that weren’t his own. He was mean and nasty, not just to the IT manager, but also to members of the IT team who needed his input and feedback.

When it became clear that Mr. Mean-and-Nasty wasn’t going to ease up, the IT manager gathered the team around and suggested that they try to imagine what might be going on inside his logic-bubble to make him behave as he did. They came up with a long list of possibilities, including these:

* He’s under intense pressure from his higher-ups to have this system ready on time.
* He has a promotion or bonus hinging on the outcome of this project.
* He blew it on the last project and this is his last chance to prove he can deliver.
* He has limited technical experience and uses a tough-guy demeanor to mask his insecurities.
* He doesn’t believe the IT manager is capable of managing such an important project without his badgering.
* He doesn’t trust people to do what they say they’re going to do, perhaps based on some sordid past experience.
* He learned this beat-‘em-up style at another company and believes it’s the way to get the best out of people.
* He enjoys playing the tough guy, especially since he can’t get away with it at home.