



## Reframing: The Way I See It

Reframing is a way to change the meaning we assign to a given set of facts or observations.

The meaning we ascribe to a situation helps us to respond appropriately. Here's a quick example:

Observation: A baby is crying. You want to respond to help the child.

Why is the baby crying?

Is the baby tired?

Is the baby hungry?

Is the baby too cold, too hot, in an uncomfortable position?

Does the baby have an earache?

Does the baby have a chronic health condition?

Does the baby miss his mother?

Asking the question “why” helps you get to the meaning of the behavior. Once you know what the behavior means, you can narrow the choices you have to respond well. If you only know of two reasons a baby would cry (hungry or tired), you have only two choices to respond: give the baby some food, put the child to bed. If those don't work and you have no other knowledge of why a baby would continue to cry, it's all too easy to get frustrated or even blame it on a bad baby who's out to ruin your day.

## Reframing: From STUCK to POSSIBILITIES

Reframing a difficult situation can move you from feeling stuck, with no place to go, to having several choices of behavior that might help.

Some basic guidelines for generating resourceful choices:

### When dealing with people:

- Keep your frame around “negative” behavior small and limited:
  - Be specific about the behavior rather than general.  
For example: “You left a dish in the sink.” Rather than, “You never clean up after yourself.”
  - Keep your focus on the behavior rather than labeling the intention or the person.  
Example: “This is the second time this week you've been more than five minutes late.” Rather than, “You care more about yourself than what's important to other people, don't you?” (Ascribing INTENTION) or, “You're turning out to be too irresponsible to have this position.” (LABELING the person).

- Look for positive intention:
  - “What’s important to you in this situation?” “What’s your intention here?”
  - “I assume you had a good reason for doing that. Let’s figure out some choices for you to get those needs met another way.
- Keep your frame around the person (rather than the behavior) as positive and as expansive as possible:
  - “Based on everything I know about you, I’m having difficulty understanding why you made that choice. Can you help me out?”
  - “This is so unlike you! What’s going on?”
- Refuse to make a situation work for anyone at the expense of anyone else.
  - What would make this work better for everyone?
  - Take on the belief of Nonviolent Communication creator Marshall Rosenberg who believes, based on his vast experience, that everyone’s needs can be met.
    - Get familiar with the language of feelings and needs.
    - What is everyone feeling?
    - What needs are unmet?
    - How can all of the important needs be met?

### **When dealing with situations:**

When a situation feels limited or impossible,

- Play with time perspective:
  - “Okay, making the committee presentation will take 15 minutes. I’ll have the rest of the meeting to sit back and listen to the others. I’ll have the rest of the day after the meeting to do quiet work at my desk. And by next Friday, I’ll be at the conference two states away. I can do this.”
  - “I know I don’t have enough time to say everything I want them to know. If I could only tell them one thing, what would it be?” “How would Abraham Lincoln think about only having 15 minutes to speak with so much to say?”
  - “No matter how this turns out, it probably won’t matter all that much when I’m 90.”
- Check in with intention and purpose:
  - What’s my purpose in this situation?
  - What’s my intention for myself? What are my intentions for every person involved?
  - What do I want to make possible in the future? What needs to happen now in order for that future to exist?

## A Reframing Map

### MAKE IT BIGGER

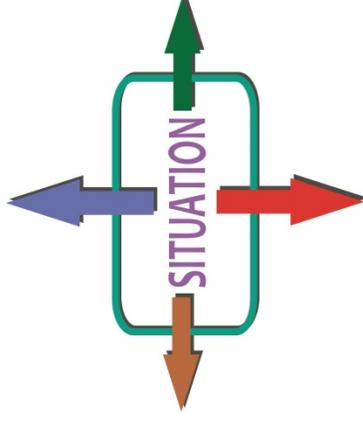
#### More Expansive, More Inclusive

- What's my purpose?
- What is their purpose?
- Who is the person (or organization) in the most positive, expansive sense?
- What is this (or could this be) an example of?
- What do I want for the future? What do they want?

### TAKE IT OUTSIDE

#### What Would Someone Else Do?

- What would \_\_\_\_\_ think, say, or do?
- What would \_\_\_\_\_ think, say, or do?
- If \_\_\_\_\_ did this, what would that mean?
- If I did this, what would I need?



### POSITIVE INTENTION

#### Assuming the Best Meaning

- What are people feeling?
- What am I feeling?
- What needs are going unmet?
- What are people's goals?
- What is my goal in this situation?

### MAKE IT SMALLER

#### More Specific, More Contained

- Isolated incident
- Environmental factors
- This specific behavior, response, etc. only
- Research or analyze: where or when do similar things happen?
- What is an example of a possible response?
- In 5 years, how much will this matter?