

## Perspective, Opinion, Point of View

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2009, published in the *Houston Home Journal* on February 21, 2009

Synonyms are words having the same or similar meanings.

A thesaurus is a collection of synonyms. As I write this column each week, I frequently consult my computer's built-in thesaurus. I appreciate that tool when I'm looking for just the right word.

This article isn't about synonyms, but it's about a few particular synonyms that I find useful in my work.

**Perspective.** I was in an art class in seventh grade. We were studying "perspective" drawings. The teacher said to put a dot on the page. That dot represents the focus of your eye on the horizon. Lines that are parallel from your vantage point can be drawn as if they converge on that point.

I didn't get it. My teacher asked me to imagine myself standing in the middle of a set of straight railroad tracks as they headed off into the distance. She asked me to draw what I saw in my imagination.

I drew two parallel lines on the page. She took my pencil and put a dot in the center of the page. She started one line at the bottom of the page, a little left of center, and connected it to the dot. She started another line at the bottom of the page, a little right of center, and connected it to the dot.

I was stunned! I liked it much better than my drawing. She then put another dot off to the left. Starting where the original lines began, she drew two new straight lines to it. Aha! I got it! I put a dot on the right of the page and drew two "parallel" lines to it. Yep, we celebrated the concept of "perspective"!

**Opinion.** One day, as a senior in high school, I was walking down the hall. I felt the guidance counselor's hand on my shoulder. He asked where I was going to college. I said, "I don't know." (No one in my family had ever gone to college. I didn't know you had to apply.)

He whisked me into his office and said "What do you want to study?" I said, "I don't know." He said that since I performed well in math and science, maybe I'd want to be an engineer. That sounded okay to me.

He asked, "What kind of engineer do you want to be?" I said, "I don't know. What kinds are there?" He started naming the varieties. For no compelling reason, I chose electrical engineering.

I often wonder how he remembers that conversation. I look back on those few minutes and realize how significantly his opinions influenced the direction of my life.

**Point of View.** In the summer of 1992, Procter & Gamble negotiated to sell the facility where I worked to the Weyerhaeuser Company.

My P&G colleagues and I bristled at the thought of being "sold." My wife, daughter, and I spent an evening in our living room evaluating three options: insist on a transfer elsewhere with P&G, stay and become a Weyerhaeuser employee, or use this as the opportunity for starting my consulting business.

We captured convincing arguments for all three options. I chose to stay, and for seven years I consulted with Weyerhaeuser leadership teams, helping them improve their work systems. I could easily have adopted a different point of view. I wonder how my life might be different today.

We all make choices. Rarely do we realize the potential impact we have on others. We can only guess at the long-term outcomes. We think our perspectives are accurate, but we are often deceived. Any two people can look at the same situation and "see" something different.

Rarely is one opinion "right" and the other "wrong." Yet we often expend energy justifying our point of view.

How would your life be different if you listened to understand the other person's perspective? If your awareness were more complete, would you make better decisions? Recognize that your paradigms are incomplete. What might you learn by considering different perspectives, opinions, and points of view?

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