

The ‘Little You’ and the Four Human Endowments

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2009, published in the *Houston Home Journal* on May 16, 2009

Last week, I introduced the concept of a “little you,” a small imaginary third-party observer of your interactions with other people. When you are actively engaged in the content of your dialogue with someone, your “little you” ally remains sensitive to your facial expression, body language, and tone of voice. In the absence of a human observer, the “little you” provides you with insight and feedback.

The other person typically observes your delivery to determine its consistency with the words you are saying. Your effectiveness in communicating is a function of both the content of your message and your presentation of it. While you are thinking about the points you want to make, the “little you” can concentrate on how successfully you are achieving your communication intent.

In their 1994 book, *First Things First*, Stephen Covey and Roger and Rebecca Merrill introduced a concept called the “four human endowments.” These four characteristics separate humans from the rest of the animal kingdom. Together, they allow us the freedom to choose our response to any given set of circumstances.

The concept of the “little you” as a third-party observer fits very well with these four human endowments.

Imagination and the “little you”

The “little you” is an application of your imagination. I like to think of the “little you” as about three inches in height and stationed in a position to see the facial expression and body language of both you and the person you are addressing. Of course, the “little you” can’t literally see your facial expression, so you have to use your imagination. However, your sensitivity is significantly enhanced when you visualize the “little you” as a skillful witness of your behaviors.

Self-awareness and the “little you”

The purpose of the “little you” is to raise your awareness. In the absence of a human third-party observer, the “little you” provides feedback. The “little you” examines your motives, thoughts, and behaviors, helping you determine how effectively you are engaging the other person. The “little you” reduces blind spots that are often more detrimental than weaknesses. At least with known weaknesses, you can work around them. Blind spots can create problems you never anticipated.

Conscience and the “little you”

Excellence starts with a desire to serve others extremely well. The “little you” can help by evaluating the selfishness or other inappropriateness of your behaviors. If you act (or even consider acting) inconsistent with your values, the “little you” will recognize your variance from acceptable performance.

Sometimes my clients wrongly think of the “little you” as being like those cartoon images from years ago, where the devil is on one shoulder and an angel is on the other. The “little you” is more of an observer and feedback provider--a teller of truth--than an advisor or counselor.

Independent will and the “little you”

Like all other feedback, information gained from the “little you” is nothing more than an aid to help you decide what you want to do next. The real you is still in control when it comes to choosing to change or to continue your behavior. The “little you” may stimulate you to seek feedback from the other person, wanting to learn how successfully you are serving him or her. Despite your moods and tendencies, you are still able to generate options and choose your response to any situation.

You are trapped in your own body. You can see the responses of the other person, but you can’t see your facial expressions and most of your body language. The “little you” affords you a second perspective for evaluating the effectiveness of your communication. Many times, the insights provided by the “little you” contribute a paradigm shift, a new awareness that may change (and hopefully improve) your future perspectives and behaviors.

Dennis Hooper improves culture and reliable processes by enhancing the organization’s quality and depth of leadership. Contact Dennis at dennis@buildingfutureleaders.com or call 404-575-3050.