



FOCUSED FEATURES

CHALLENGING ASSUMPTIONS

How many times a day do we make assumptions about the people with whom we interact?

It doesn't matter how well we know a person, how often we interact with them, or where the interaction takes place, and we all make assumptions about each other. Most of the time, we don't even realize it because they start in our subconscious mind.



Our beliefs, knowledge and experience open the door for us to accept assumptions as truths, without the need for validation. When they remain at the subconscious level, they are less likely to become harmful to anyone but ourselves. But, when we add *fear*, an assumption can turn into a much larger and negative situation. If we let fear take root, we risk damaging relationships, causing confusion and frustration, and diminishing trust with the people we come in contact with for one reason or another.

If we train ourselves to challenge our assumptions by clarifying expectations and getting the facts, we can reduce or eliminate fear and lessen the harmful impact they can have on people, situations, companies, families, communities, and beyond.

What assumptions did you make today?

We typically start making assumptions when our alarm clock goes off. Simple ones include - having enough hot water for a shower, leaving the house at a certain time to avoid traffic, or thinking we will be interrupted from our work a number of times during the day. It's what we know, or think we know that leads us to making experienced based (not fact based) assumptions and decisions.

When assumptions get out of control.

We may assume, by leaving the house at a certain time every day, we will arrive at work on time. But, what happens if there is construction, a traffic accident or other elements that interfere with our assumption about our timeliness? If we challenge ourselves to get the facts by checking conditions ahead of time, especially if we have an important meeting to attend, our assumption about arriving on time becomes reality.

In a more complex situation, what happens when a manager with a seemingly "door open all the time" policy meets with a staff member or person unfamiliar to the staff, behind closed doors. Observant employees may start making assumptions that their jobs are in jeopardy - their being replaced, someone is being fired, or worse.

Had the manager briefly communicated to their employees about the upcoming closed door meetings, or moved the meetings to another location, *fear* based assumptions would not have taken root. The manager could have provided the *proof* observant employees needed, so they would be less likely to Tweet their friends in other departments to see if anyone knew what was going on.



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Assumptions provide fertile ground for damaging rumors to grow.

The “closed office door” is a common scenario known in many businesses. Paying attention to this situation, and preventing employees’ fear based assumptions from taking root, will help reduce mistrust, accusations, lost time, and misdirected energy.



Preventing assumptions from getting out of control.

Mohamed Kanu, Associate Director at Prospectus Berco, recently summed it up by saying, “Don’t let your assumptions eat you.”

When assumptions are magnified by fear, they can become disproportionate with the actual circumstances. Stepping back and communicating our expectations of others, and inviting them to do the same with us, will get us closer to validation with little to no room for assumptions to manifest.

By challenging ourselves and asking “**why was the assumption made,**” it helps us identify *where* it came from and *how* to work through it. Here are a few common examples of where they come from.

- A previous experience - “We’ve always done it this way, why would the new manager want it done any other way.”
- A fear - “If I give this project to Sue, it won’t get done on time.”
- A lack of clarifying expectations - “I have no idea what Joe wants me to do, so I’ll have to do what I *think* he wants me to do.”
- A person’s body language not matching their verbal communication – “What are they really saying? How do I get the proof / facts I need to do my job.”

In each of these examples, we should be looking for clarification, the facts, the truth, or other missing elements that will help us eliminate damaging assumptions.

The best way to gain full understanding of *how* assumptions develop is to keep a log for 2-3 days. Enter some of your personal assumptions, and some made by people with whom you interact. In the log, note - *who* made it, *what* was it, *why* was it made, and, *how* was it eliminated. This log will act as a great tool to monitor progress. Keep in mind *awareness* is a key component of learning. Use what you learn to teach others.