

Reason

Listening to Reality



- | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|---|-------------------|
| 1 | Purpose & Outcomes | 5 | Reason Principles |
| 2 | Self Assessment | 6 | Reason Inhibitors |
| 3 | Reason Defined | 7 | Expanding Reason |
| 4 | Reason and Leadership | 8 | Connecting Points |

1 Purpose & Outcomes

Purpose: Emphasize a leader's role in distinguishing reality from perceptions.

Intended Outcome: Become more deliberate in weighing your perceptions against reality to enhance your capacity for Reason.

“Leadership is the marriage of passion and reason in the service of a vision. Reason alone cannot move people, and passion alone is dangerous. Leadership demands both heart and head; sensibility and good sense—combined with a conviction that we can make a better world.” Ann Crittenden, Journalist and Author, *If You've Raised Kids, You Can Manage Anything: Leadership Begins at Home*

2 Self Assessment

Please rate yourself for each of the following items on the 1-7 scale (1=no, 7=yes) **before** reading the chapter.

1. I actively question my views and perceptions.



2. On important decisions, I seek objective data from a range of sources.



3. When someone disagrees with me, my first reaction is curiosity rather than defensiveness.



4. Before settling on a course of action, I create several viable alternatives to choose from.



5. I have surrounded myself with people who see things differently than I do.



6. I make sure those who report to me feel comfortable giving me “bad news.”



7. I am skilled at helping others separate their perceptions from the reality.



3 Reason Defined

Reason: the ability to face and interpret reality

Unlike sports, where the scope of a player's concerns is limited to a field or court, leadership occurs on the impossibly large field of reality— the complexity of circumstances that affect us personally and organizationally. This chapter is about how to use Reason to discern what matters for our personal benefit and for our communities. We will focus on the problematic aspects of reality for now. The next capacity, Gratitude, will focus more on favorable realities.

Reason is about paying attention to the matters that require a response and making a fundamental choice— one that we make repeatedly without realizing it: to engage or avoid reality.

The realities we face, and create, can lend to, or detract from, the fulfillment of our purposes— in business, in relationships, and in our personal goals. From this perspective, Reason is ultimately about action because it allows us to determine which positive actions will produce the positive reactions we want. Before we can take those actions, we need to be attuned to reality. In short, we need to deepen our capacity for Reason.



Our relationship with reality

Reason is the antidote to complexity. More than ever, we are at risk of getting snowed under by the drift of life— the flurry of activities, commitments, and competing demands on our attention. The more crowded our figurative “plate,” the more difficult it is to be mindful of the reality that warrants attention in our life. Life is full of gaps— contrast between the things we want and things as they actually are. If we consciously apply Reason to our actions, they become increasingly positive. Positive actions close the gaps. Distancing ourselves from reality widens them.

We are repeatedly faced with the choice to face reality or avoid it. If we want to improve our health, for example, there are clearly foods that are more reasonable to eat than others. Or, we may add items to our to-do lists without assessing how realistic it is to get everything done. In our intimate relationships, we may avoid difficult topics for fear of creating conflict. How is it, then, that we strive to be reasonable, but so frequently think or behave unreasonably?

Facing reality does not always feel good. Reality says that the ideal body weight is simple math—calories out must be less than, or equal to, calories in. But, cake tastes so good. There are only so many projects we can successfully manage, but we find it hard to say “no” to things that may further our ambitions. We may wish our significant others behaved differently, but it may be risking unwanted drama to speak up. If we could just freeze time at these moments when we stray from the reasonable course, then we would get a perfect snapshot of just how skilled we are at avoiding reality and because of this avoidance head, often unnecessarily, toward greater suffering.

Directing your Reason

Just as we have experienced warping reality, we have also experienced the opposite—moments of clarity when we are snapped out of our distorted views and see things as they truly are; moments when we realize something is not working and see the course corrections that will bring us closer to our real goal.

The capacity of Reason is about attuning ourselves to reality and bringing others along with us. It is one that we can develop and one that is necessary for effective leadership, yet is so infrequently discussed. Reason is essential to our and our communities ability to thrive. The term “Reason” originated with the Greek Philosopher, Thales, to indicate **the degree to which one’s internal view of the world (perception) aligns with the world as it truly is (reality)**. One is said to be reasonable when his or her thinking is in line with reality and, consequently, unreasonable when it is not.

What I have learned, and what I hope you take with you from this discussion, is that Reason is not about reading everything ever written and it’s not about IQ. Reason is not about making our mind more active than it already is. It is actually about **attuning our minds to the current and potential realities that matter most**. Reason requires stillness. And this is exactly why it is can be so difficult. Reason requires turning down the volume of our thoughts when everything around us is turning up the volume. It is about making space for clarity.

The distinction between reality and perception

We all may have heard, or even propagated, the falsehood “perception is reality.” Perception may feel like reality, but it is not the same as reality. By definition, reality is that which exists regardless of whether or not it is perceived. We may perceive things that are not real, or fail to perceive things that are. This presents two immediate considerations:

- 1) What humans perceive of reality only accounts for a small fraction of it, and
- 2) Of that fraction some of these perceptions prove inaccurate.

It can be unsettling to contemplate what a small piece of reality we actually perceive. Consider an experiment performed by a group of Harvard psychologists: They have 100 people watch a video of two basketball teams— one dressed in black uniforms and the other dressed in white. The participants are instructed to count the number of times the members in the white uniforms pass the ball.

When it is over, the participants are not asked how many times the players passed the ball. Instead, they are asked if anyone saw anything out of the ordinary. As many as 50 percent of the audience did not see the man dressed in a gorilla suit walk through the middle of the court, face the camera, thump his chest, and continue to walk out of view over the span of five seconds.

This experiment was conducted by Harvard University psychologists Daniel Simons, Ph.D. and Christopher Chabris, Ph.D. The term they use to describe the phenomenon of missing things that should be obvious is “innattentional blindness.” People fail to see things, even those that are right in front of them, because their attention is elsewhere.

A problem requires a response: do you choose Reason or avoidance?

One winter day, I was driving and my car began making a noise. I knew it wasn't quite right, but did not want to deal with the situation. “Maybe the noise will just go away,” I rationalized. That was not the case and I knew it, but I just did not want to deal with taking my car in and interrupting my extremely busy day. I kept driving. Soon I detected the smell of something burning, but I blocked it out of my mind and went about my day. I just did not want to deal with it. Eventually I had to deal with the problem when my engine began smoking. A smoking engine became my personal metaphor for the kind of realities we would rather avoid.

How often, in our daily lives, do we experience realities that we just do not want to deal with? The problem rarely goes away on its own, and the avoidance only allows the reality to fester. For the rest of this chapter, we will use the imagery of a smoking engine to show how a reasonable response to a problem can lead to an improved reality and how choosing avoidance can lead to a diminished reality.



Avoiding a smoking engine

Here is an example of avoiding a reality that I have witnessed so frequently that I am certain you have encountered something similar: The authority figure (i.e. a manager) is informed by members of the team that an individual is creating unnecessary friction and making it hard for others to do their job (the bad apple behaviors we discussed in the last chapter). The person in authority does not want to deal with the issue (often her or she doesn't know how to deal with it) and instead suggests that the team members sort it out themselves. The authority justifies this response with something like "You are all adults. Go figure it out." This is not a solution. The manager is avoiding the smoking engine.

I remember facilitating an all day meeting for a client. Half way through the day, his team raised an issue they were having with a "bad apple" team member. The department manager said, "By 3 p.m., you all need to get over it." That was it. His solution was that everyone should synchronize their clocks and at the magical hour of 3 p.m., they were to decide to just stop being bothered by it. With one act of avoidance, this manager not only undid any progress we had made, but created even more problems in an already declining situation. His action evoked a negative reaction by making interpersonal concerns non-discussable and taught employees that bad apple behavior was tolerated.

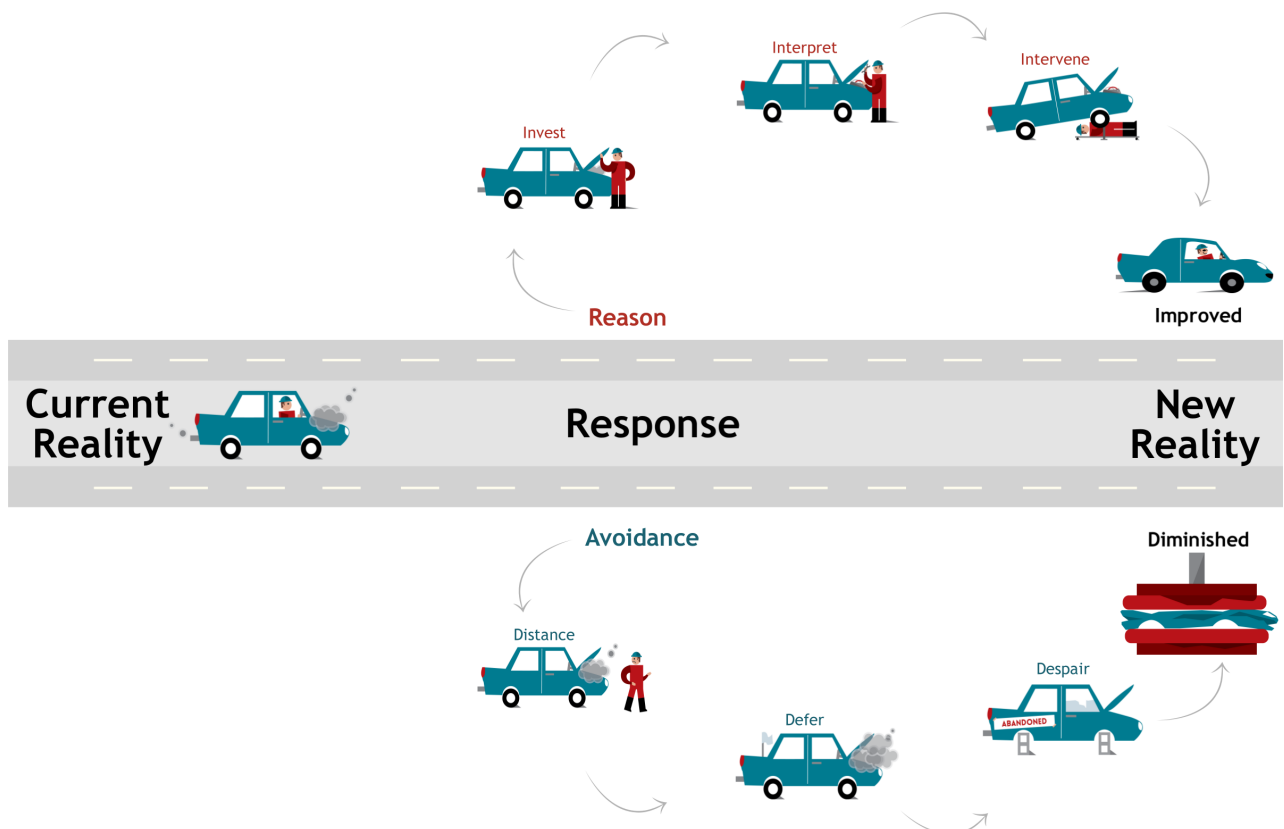
Before proceeding, take a moment to consider your example of a smoking engine. What is one thing in your life that you know, even at a sub-conscious level, you have been neglecting? Why have you been avoiding it? What toll has it taken on you to let it go unattended? What is the potential cost if you do not address it? Keep it in mind as you read through the chapter.

Two choices you can make when faced with a given reality

You have two choices as you face your given reality: Reason or Avoidance. The rest of the chapter will emphasize the difference between these two paths. Clearly, the Reason route is the *Positive Leadership* route. The path to an improved reality when facing a given situation follows this trajectory: Invest, Interpret, and Intervene and it is covered in the Reason Principles section.

When you choose avoidance, you follow the path to a diminished reality through: Distance, Defer, and Despair which is discussed in the Reason Inhibitors section. Keep in mind that avoidance isn't always the negative choice. Sometimes avoidance is absolutely the right move to make– some things need to run their course, but choosing to disengage should be a conscious choice and not a knee-jerk response to not wanting to deal with a negative reality. The model below will serve as a roadmap for the chapter as well.

Reason: two paths to new realities



4 Reason and Leadership

Reasonable leadership is the most powerful form of leadership

It is important to note that Reason is not at odds with boldness, daring, or imagination. This common misconception is perhaps why Reason is often ignored in discussions on leadership. We mistakenly think Reason must be about playing it safe, but that is simply not true. Reason is about closing the gap between reality and absurdity, and there is a great deal of absurdity that still exists and plenty of room to be imaginative and bold in addressing it.

The misconception about Reason might sound like this: “I wish there was some discussion about the need for leaders to at least occasionally be bold, daring, and not entirely reasonable in their leadership. Ghandi and MLK would not have led such movements if their imagination and path forward was dictated by Reason alone.” I understand this. I’ve had similar thoughts, but Ghandi and Dr. King were **exceptionally reasonable**. So reasonable, in fact, that it took years of accumulating positive actions in the face of incredible hardship to show the rest of us just how disjointed the world was from reality. I have tried to think of any great human advancement that was not the result of acute Reason. I cannot. Each great advocate of human advancement demonstrated a deep connection to reality, often they saw Reason in an unreasonable situation long before the rest of the world did. Imagination is not the opposite of Reason, but merely a broader application of it. The discovery that the Earth rotates around the sun was not insanity, nor blasphemy, even though it was derided as such at first. It was Reason far beyond what Galileo’s contemporaries could see.

Reason wakes the world up from slavery, genocide, and other delusions of superiority. It is the absence of Reason that allowed such atrocities. Rosa Parks, for example, was not unreasonable. She was more in touch with reality than anyone else on the bus.

A leader must demonstrate Reason

Regardless of what side of the political spectrum you fall on, would we allow politics in the U.S. to be conducted in the way they are now if Reason were so common? Would we allow our educational system to be where it is, currently? Would the obesity epidemic have gotten this far? Right now in your community, there are challenges that need the boldness, daring and imagination of leaders applying Reason. It may be the only thing that counterbalances the apathy and partisanship that allow those challenges to persist.

Reason is not optional for taking actions that evoke positive reactions. One of my favorite leadership “gurus,” Cesar Milan (the “Dog Whisperer”), helps people become better pack leaders by becoming more reasonable about their behavior and their surroundings. Each episode may appear to be about how to rehabilitate unruly dogs, but it is really about Reason, or correcting the lack of it. Milan’s core philosophy is that all dogs are healthy, but the lack of leadership of humans makes the dogs behave anxiously. Dogs need a pack leader that exudes “calm assertiveness.” When the human fails to provide it, the dog becomes anxious and exhibits aggressive behavior toward members of the pack and especially those outside of it. Or, the dog behaves in counterproductive ways. Milan advocates a reasonable approach, not an authoritarian approach to get the desired results.

The difference between reasonable leadership and authority

Let’s try a thought experiment. Consider how you would react to two statements:

A) “Do this...because I said so.”

B) “Do this...because here are the facts, here are the options and, after evaluating them this will be the wisest course of action and here is why.”

Option A is leadership based on authority. Option B is leadership based on Reason. Option A demands compliance, while option B evokes the discretionary effort that comes with people saying “that makes sense.” Option B dramatically increases one’s social force. We are much more compelled by it because it demonstrates Reason. By and large, people want to do what is reasonable. If leaders demonstrate a capacity for Reason, they wield greater social force than a person who does not.

If you want to greatly increase the likelihood of evoking positive reactions from others, you will do so to the degree you demonstrate Reason. It is, I admit, not as easy as it sounds. Here's an example that I see in just about every organization I've ever worked with: Management announces a new policy such as a reduction in workforce or change in benefits. From management's perspective, it may make sense based on the reality they see (i.e. financial performance data). They know that something needs to change in order to meet projections, but employees see a different reality. The customer service lines are too long already; the employees know this firsthand. They see a need for more employees, not less. What is reasonable to one person may not be reasonable to another based on entirely different relationships to reality.

A leader must communicate Reason to the community

So, from an employee perspective, how could it possibly make sense to have less employees? How could it be good for business to make customers wait even longer and get even more frustrated? The result is a growing divide between management and staff. As a consultant, the problem is always presented as a "morale problem" or a "communication problem," but never as a "Reason problem." Almost every kind of problem, at some level comes, back to Reason. Either there was a failure to pay attention to a reality early on that allowed the problem to reach the level of harm, or there were many missed opportunities to resolve a problematic reality. Or, the current reality is the result of a lack of reasonable forethought. Many personal problems could be avoided if people were more dialed in to choosing Reason instead of avoidance.

How many times do we look back and say "I should have done this instead" and part of you knew it at the time? Of course, we need many of those experiences to grow and become who we are today. We call this "wisdom" which is not too different from Reason. The capacity of Reason is not about being flawless, but it is about reflection, inquiry, and learning.

Operators vs. Technicians

As with the other capacities, leaders have the potential to develop Reason. Operators unquestioningly react to the information brought to them. They deal with only the things that scream for immediate attention rather than setting priorities based on purpose. When confronted with challenges, operators go with their first impulse and dive into motion. They personify the expression, "Don't confuse me with the facts because I've already made up my mind." A strong arm does not serve today's leaders as well as a discerning mind. The ability to finely observe reality and harness the opportunities it presents distinguishes leaders in business, politics, social entrepreneurship, and beyond.

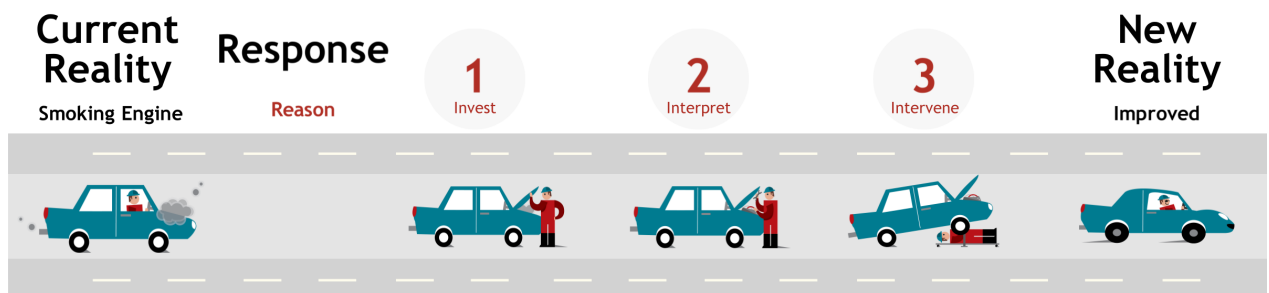
Technicians of Reason understand that there is often way more complexity beneath what is presented to them. They purposefully expand their array of options and they seek other's views. Operators are mental energy misers, choosing the thought pathways of least resistance, while technicians realize that informed action requires a rigorous interrogation of reality. To an operator, research, analysis, and strategizing are luxuries they cannot afford. Technicians **inspect, invest, and intervene**. They use penetrating problem diagnosis, data gathering, and scenario planning to vastly enhance the potency of their actions.

"In a room where people unanimously maintain a conspiracy of silence, one word of truth sounds like a pistol shot." Czeslaw Milosz

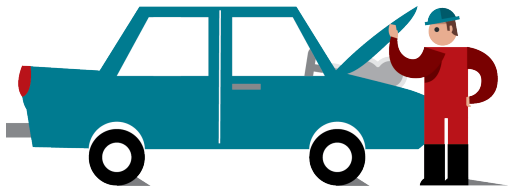
5 Reason Principles

Choosing Reason: the path to an improved reality

Our searchlight attends to certain aspects of our current reality and if we choose Reason we can use three action steps to reach a new, improved reality. Below is an overview of all three, which we will discuss throughout the rest of the principles section.

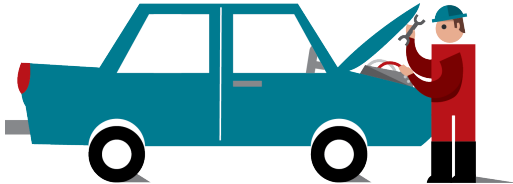


Reason: Invest, Interpret, Intervene



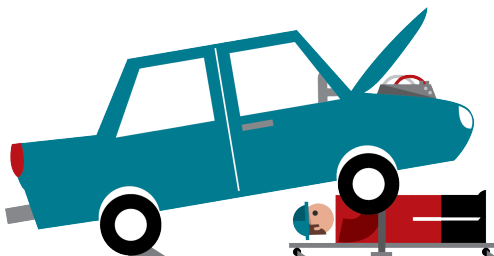
Invest: look under the hood

Invest: This is the gathering data phase. You base observations on facts (instead of reactionary emotions) and identify desired outcomes based on the Purpose. You actively seek to learn more about all the angles of a given issue. When you invest in something, you get involved in a problem solving mindset. You take on a sense of ownership (as in an “investment”). You choose to be part of the solution, which we also refer to as a “moment of accountability.”



Interpret: diagnose the fix

Interpret: In this stage, you synthesize the data you gathered. There are various types of data to interpret (metrics, expert opinion, personal observation, conversation, accounting for all perspectives). As you decipher the meaning of data and the potential implications, you can generate possible courses of action and select the best one. From there, you can plan your approach and advocate your chosen course of action to others.



Intervene: get to work

Intervene: This is the action stage where you take actions that evoke reactions from others. Evaluate your results and course correct if necessary. Role model Reason for others. Build credibility. Get others involved so they can become advocates for the solution. Follow through to completion.

Invest

Invest is the first response when you wish to take a reasonable approach to a current reality you wish to change. When you invest in a venture, you become an owner. You dedicate your resources to something you determine to be valuable. Investing gives you an ownership mindset and so demands a definitive commitment. I have an old friend named Alfie. He is a man known to get things done. He built a career and a fortune on just this trait of taking action. I met him when we were part of a group project. The first words I heard him say when the group determined a task needed to be done were, “I am on the hook for doing that and will have it done by Monday.” I am on the hook! That is what it means to invest. You have chosen to be on the hook. You are not leaving the responsibility up to someone else. Investing is not just saying “I will do it,” but meaning it and taking action to demonstrate your commitment to achieving the desired outcome.

When someone is invested, the discomfort of a problem takes second place to the resolution of the problem. The conversation inside of our head shifts from “I don’t want to deal with this. How can I avoid this?” to “This needs attention. Why is this important? What needs to be done, How can I get the result I need?” It is an attitude that **focuses on the purpose, not the problem**. As we know from the Purpose chapter, outcomes are the tangible results of a fulfilled purpose. When you invest you ask, “what outcomes do I want to attain?” In this stage, you clarify, you define the problem, identify the desired outcomes, and gather data about the problem. Try to gather as much information and seek as many perspectives as possible to inform your reality. Data does not always have to be quantitative. It can also come in the form of expert opinion, direct observation, or perspective taking. Get creative in your approach to gather your data as you try to get the most accurate picture of your reality.

Interpret

Investment is about the mindset to take an action that evokes a positive reaction. It isn’t yet the time to actually take action. There are many possible ways to address any reality you face. You want to choose the best, most informed action you can possibly take. For example, you don’t just want to start climbing the ladder, you want to make sure the ladder is against the correct wall. Part of a reasoned response is first making sense of the situation (Invest) before taking action. The second stage of Reason is Interpret. Accurate interpretation is essential as there are multiple interpretations from any given set of data. In **Invest**, you gathered your data. In the second stage, you **Interpret** your data.

It's important to consider what can happen if you interpret without first investing: You could end up with the correct intervention, but weak solutions. Strong explanations for why you are doing what you are doing supercharges your social force. You could end up with the incorrect assumption, or an unreasonable intervention plan. To illustrate: one of my clients explained that one of his vice presidents was really frustrating him. He described her as immensely capable, but was upset because she always showed up late to meetings (meetings she is supposed to lead) and she arrives without an agenda. His interpretation was that "she didn't care" about the meeting. As a side note, he added that she was more interested in bringing cookies to the meetings than being on time. In our discussion, I pointed out that someone who didn't care was unlikely to make the effort to bring cookies. I offered an alternative explanation: "Perhaps she's never received feedback on how the lack of an agenda hinders progress. Maybe, though it is supposed to be 'her' meeting, she doesn't feel like she's been given ownership of the team. Bringing treats is, for her, an alternative way to contribute to a sense of community." He thought over this explanation and I noticed his frustration melt away. This, to him, became a more accurate explanation. In the **Interpret** phase, you make sense of your data and choose the most reasonable response. Plan how you will **Intervene** in this stage. Play out multiple potential scenarios. Hone your explanations here so you can generate Advocacy for your planned solution. Intervention must be based on valid interpretation and that, in turn, must be based on investment. I learned from past failures when I attempted to intervene without being invested, or intervened too soon before I had useful interpretations of a situation. Others may not see the work you put into your investment and interpretation as this is work done behind the scenes and in the laboratory of your mind. They will, however, see your intervention. Of everything presented in *Positive Leadership*, the **Intervene** stage is one of the most powerful expressions of social force; someone taking positive actions that produce positive reactions. What is more impressive than someone who knows how to intervene to get things working the way they need to work? It is an underused word and an under observed phenomenon, but there is nothing more worthy than artful intervention.

Intervene

Once you invest and interpret, you can intervene. I love this word even though it's become associated with reality TV interventions when a person's family and loved ones come together to confront a person about some sort of destructive behavior. But even that application of the word serves to illustrate the point, as the purpose of such gatherings is to snap a person out of delusion and back into reality. When people ask me what I do, I say some variation of "I'm a consultant" or "I'm a coach" or "I'm a trainer." But what I really want to say is "I am an interventionist" because consulting, coaching, and training are just different forms of intervention. I learned the term "interventionist" from organizational dynamics professor Chris Argyris. He cited the three functions of an interventionist: 1) provide the client with accurate and relevant data 2) offer free and informed choice and 3) inspire the client's commitment to the choice that they made.

Improved reality

What can be more central to effective leadership than the ability to create improved realities? This is why our communities are often in such dire need of leadership. Reason is one of the most necessary qualities in a leader. We have all seen the results when leaders detach from reality. Consider the things that are important to you in your professional and personal life. Before moving on to the opposite side of Reason (Avoidance), reflect on these questions: What are the things I am aware of, even at an intuitive level, that I am neglecting? Am I taking ownership of the things that require my leadership? What are some realities I may not have considered that would be worth investigating? What are the improved realities that I am striving for? How can I intervene more effectively to bring about those improved realities?



6 Reason Inhibitors

Avoidance: the path to a diminished reality

Now let's look more closely at the response to reality that can lead to trouble: avoidance. It is personally important for me to say that there is no judgment in our conversation on avoidance. It's impossible to avoid...well...avoidance. In many ways, avoidance is a necessary reaction to the torrent of situations and information we encounter every day. Without a way to block out the deluge of reality, we would not be able to function. I hope this discussion offers you a way to be more mindful about the things you avoid. It is meant as a helpful reminder to consider when avoidance can be a detriment.

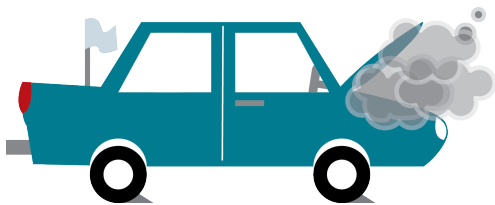


The path to a diminished reality: Distance, Defer, Despair



Distance: ignore the problem

Distance: Often, without awareness, we immediately resist aspects of reality, especially unpleasant ones. Our first response could be to physically or, more often, emotionally separate ourselves from it. On occasion, we may need to distance ourselves to calm our emotions in order to come back to it later with a possibility of a reasoned response. Most often, however, we avoid out of fear.



Defer: leave it for someone else

Defer: The result of distancing is that we remove ourselves from being able to take action. We leave the situation up to someone else, or to chance. Signs of deferring are procrastination or denial. We hope the problem will just go away or that someone else will work the problem out for us.



Despair: give up and regret

Despair: Sometimes we get lucky and the problem never escalates. Usually, however, a negative reality persists and eventually intensifies. Manageable issues that go unaddressed can magnify to the point that we, or our communities, show signs of wear and tear. The stress eventually reduces our ability to thrive and maybe even survive.

Distance

When we encounter an aspect of our reality that strikes us as problematic, our initial response can be one of investment or it could be one of distance. When we distance ourselves, our response is a reflexive desire to put as much psychological (or sometimes, physical) space between us and the reality. It simply means we are not ready, willing, or able to address it. Sometimes, it makes sense to distance ourselves. If an immediate reaction is not required, there could be benefits to taking a step back to gain perspective. Harvard's William Ury describes this viable strategy as "getting to the balcony." Getting to the balcony (vs. being on the dance floor) gives us the space to gather our thoughts.

It is entirely possible, and valid, to initially distance ourselves from the immediate reality. For example, if someone approaches you with an important or emotional issue that you were not expecting, you may want to ask for some time to hear the person out or to consider the situation and provide a response. Then, you can move into the Reason response (invest, interpret, and intervene). There is a difference between distancing ourselves based on strategic wisdom and distancing out of sheer denial. Personally, I can tell the difference by how I feel. If I recognize the issue as important and know that it must be addressed, but I just don't have the answer, then strategic distancing may be appropriate. However, if I feel **frustration, fear, or guilt**, then it is a pretty certain that I am distancing out of avoidance. You may be able to identify your personal triggers for healthy or unhealthy distancing.

Defer

Distancing merely pushes the problem away, but deferring denies your investment in a given reality. Avoidance through distancing is not something we can ever eliminate. It's not a matter of if it will happen, but when. A key difference between technicians and operators of Reason is the ability to "catch and correct." In other words, it is about recovering from an unhealthy distancing response. We must be able to catch ourselves in the midst of our avoidance routine and correct it.

My experience over the years is that we each develop our own distancing response. For me, it shows up as feeling mentally foggy. I don't know what move to make and become mentally frazzled. Then, I will find something non-productive to do (watch a movie, or take a nap). The tricky thing about your personal avoidance strategy is it often takes the form of something you need to do once in a while. Often, your default mode is something you enjoy. That is why it is important you realize at what point you begin using your strategy to avoid handling reality.

Again, you are not trying to eliminate these activities from your life. You are trying to catch and correct when necessary. Recently, I was talking to a friend who is working on an issue he has with anxiety. His distancing response is very different. He chooses a project and hyper focuses on it. He gets into task master mode, dealing with other non-emotional busy work to avoid the one he knows he needs to face. While this response may seem productive, he has noted that it creates some very real problems in both his personal and professional life.

When we defer, we are essentially turning our back on the problem and saying any combination of the following: "I want this to sort itself out." "I don't want to deal with this." "I have no idea how to handle this." "I am not confident in my ability/knowledge to resolve it." "I just have too much going on right now." "I am fearful." With awareness we can quit deferring and invest ourselves. Other times, deference can perpetuate to the point of no return.

Despair

If we defer the negative reality for too long, we may suffer. Physicians see this often with patients that need to make a lifestyle change. Often a severe health crisis is the only thing to trigger a more reasonable response to the reality. Despair is the stage where your reality seems insurmountable. In regard to crises of health, wealth, or relationships, what really happens is some version of the boiling frog parable. This parable asserts that if you put a frog in boiling water it will jump right out, but if you put it in room temperature water and slowly heat it, the frog will remain there until it boils to death. When we reach a high enough pain point, we are forced back into Reason or we remain in despair.

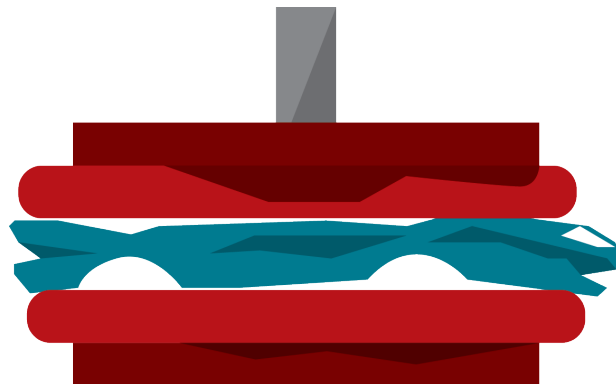
Think of your response to someone who has put off dealing with important issues. Perhaps you try to talk sense into the person to no avail. If this person is trying to lead a group, his or her social force is severely diminished. The key is to catch ourselves in the midst of our avoidance routine before getting to despair and trigger a response that gets us back into Reason mode so that we can invest, interpret, and intervene.

When problems are left to fester, we begin to feel negative effects. We show signs of stress, anxiety, or depression. When we are in despair, we often need help to get out of the crisis. A common phrase we use is "hitting rock bottom." We feel like we have sunk to a level where we cannot go down any further and the only place to go is up. This is the ultimate sign of avoidance. It can trigger us into the Reason mode, but at a point when too much unnecessary damage has been done.

The diminished reality

Ultimately, the avoidance response rarely makes things better and can lead to the creation of further problems. Take our smoking car example that has been left to the elements and abandoned. Many businesses, careers, communities, and relationships experience the equivalent fate of the “car crusher” for a simple lack of reasonable leadership. Realities that may have started off as inconveniences or small, solvable problems can lead us toward diminished new realities if we do not lead them toward improved ones.

Alternatively, a reasoned response can strengthen our circumstances and even lead to new possibilities for growth and renewal. Reason is a capacity that can be enhanced and will greatly improve your ability to take actions that evoke positive reactions.



7 Expanding Reason

This is where you develop your personal capacity for Reason. As with all seven capacities, you have already developed your Reason to some degree. The activities listed in the Field Guide are resources for expanding your level of Reason. Take time to go to the Field Guide now and do a couple of the activities.

Over the next month you can focus on Reason by completing some of the activities in the Field Guide:

We suggest completing 3-5 of the Reason Field Guide exercises.

Observe your capacity for Reason by journaling or sharing (with at least one other person).

Developing Reason in others

An effective leader not only develops the capacity in himself or herself, but in others as well. Consider ways you can do the following:

Share the concepts you found valuable from this chapter with your staff, co-workers, etc.

Have your team members or family complete one, or more, of the exercises in the Field Guide and discuss with others.



8 Connecting Points

Authenticity: We cannot be authentic unless we understand the reality of who we are. Conversely, the more authentic a leader is, the bolder he/she is in the face of reality— to question it, accept it, and adjust to it.

Purpose: How much time, effort, and resources are wasted on things that do not matter? Reason is that quality of discerning what is truly important and valuable. It allows us to hone our attention to worthy purposes and align resources in that direction.

Advocacy: What do you want to hold up as important, or advocate? Reason reveals the intersection between what the world needs and you can provide. It adds potency to your Advocacy as you are able to reveal deeper insights to those around you.

Resilience: Overextending yourself is caused by a failure to recognize the disparity between the demands you have accepted and the resources available. Reason guides the necessary adjustments for you to return to integrity and wholeness. How are you currently stretched beyond your resources? How is your community currently suffering? What adjustments are needed?

Community Building: Being a leader means caring for the space beyond your own personal borders. Often that requires a keen awareness of how the people around you are faring. Do your people behave more like a place of association than a community? If so, what are you going to do about it? What broken windows need to be fixed and how are you going to fix them?

Gratitude: In the absence of sincere Gratitude, we neglect the valuable aspects of reality— people, good fortune, ourselves. Reason reveals the positive aspects of our leadership journey and helps us renew and invigorate others. Max Depree sums it up nicely in his book, *Leadership is an Art*: “The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say ‘thank you’.”