



The Dangers of Recognition

Willie Horton

www.Gurdy.net

We all have the ability to recognise – someone we already know, a difficult situation when we see one, an opportunity that’s staring us in the face or a problem that needs our attention. However, our psychological ability to recognise is just as much a curse as it is a blessing.

We take in raw data through our body’s five senses – a psychologist would term this “bottom up” data – through the process of cognition. At this point, the data, of itself is meaningless – we need to interpret it. This is done by adding our “stored knowledge” or “top down information” to the raw data and, in this way, we make sense of what is going on. This is the process of re-cognition.

As I said, this process enables us to make sense of the present moment. Or does it? The big problem with our stored knowledge or top down information is that, generally speaking, it is decades out of date. We generally start storing key elements of that “knowledge” between 12 and 18 months – when we create “schemata” (or pigeonholes) into which we then fit anything similar that we might encounter in later life. From an evolutionary perspective, this gave us a huge advantage – we didn’t have to waste our precious attention on routine day-to-day stuff – we needed that attention to watch out for the next man-eating tiger that might otherwise devour us!

But the result is that, in the modern day, we pay little or no attention to what our senses are actually telling us in the present moment – we prefer, automatically and subconsciously of course, to let our top down information make sense of what’s going on for us. And, in the process, we make nonsense of the present moment and react accordingly.

Somewhere between 12 and 25 years (adolescence), we generally stop taking in new top down information. That has drastic implications for the rest of our lives because, for the rest of our lives, we live in an illusory world of make believe – we create what we think is going on based on out of date information. As a result, so-called “normal” people never really appreciate what is actually happening – everything is “filtered” through their stored knowledge – and, as result, they react to what they think is going on. And, as you and I know, reacting generally makes matters worse, not better.

Quick example. Somebody at work asks you to do something. Because of the way we automatically pigeonhole people, you will have made up your mind whether you like or dislike the person who’s doing the asking within four minutes of meeting them for the first time. Say, for example, she

reminds you of your sister-in-law (and you hate your sister-in-law because she reminds you of someone who bullied you at school thirty years ago). Also, the thing you've been asked to do is something that you think you don't like doing – you might, for example, have a hang-up about putting together some sales figures because, when you were small, your father gave you grief over how awful your math marks were (these are all true client stories, by the way).

So, someone, who not only could be the nicest person in the world but who might also have a major impact on your career and on your life, asks you to do a simple task – and you snarl at them in return. It's an automatic reaction. The request is the raw data – but you've made nonsense of the request based on a load of out-dated notions that are stored deeply on your subconscious. And that's the process of recognition.

And that's what gets normal adults into trouble. Conflict breaks out at work and at home – not because of what's actually going on but because of what normal people think is going on. But, worse than that, real opportunities are missed because they are never spotted in the first place. The opportunity could be staring you in the face and, because of your top down data, you wouldn't recognize it for what it truly is.

Normal people need to stop recognizing and start cognizing all over again. That's why so many business and sports people meditate – it enables them stop recognizing and start experiencing what is actually and really going on, using their five senses, in the present moment. Watch your TVs – all the great sports people “meditate” before a field kick or a tee shot, before a penalty or a serve in tennis. And I meditation was good enough for someone as prolifically successful in business as Thomas Edison well then, it's good enough for me.

Start paying attention to what your five senses are actually telling you. Stop analyzing, judging, adding your top down out of date information. Whether it's through some form of formal meditation or just “stopping to smell the roses” – break the vicious cycle of the normal repetitive behaviour that normal recognition automatically produces.