

JUDGMENT

A Point of View

by Stephen Reynolds

This article focuses on a point of view about how the judgmental ness of our thinking and speaking affects each of us as individuals, our relationships with others, and our society as a whole. This material and these concepts are purely **points of view**. Nothing contained herein is “right.” You are encouraged to consider this material in the context of whether you find it useful and helpful to you. If you do this, rather than thinking of it as either “right” or “wrong,” you will have taken an important step in “trying on” these concepts.

THE CATEGORIES WE USE

In our society, we have a tendency to categorize many things (ideas, philosophies, rules, procedures, etc.), individuals, and groups/organizations. Categorization in itself is useful and necessary in dealing with the complexity of our lives. Whether or not the categories we choose are helpful or counter-productive to us depends upon the **nature of the category**.

Observations

When we observe something or someone, we simply **take in that which we are experiencing**. We do not compare it with anything else. We see the situation/people from purely a factual standpoint.

Opinions

We develop an opinion about something we have observed when we begin to compare it with something else. We bring our beliefs into the equation. **We give meaning to what we have observed.**

Judgments

We begin to develop judgments about people and situations when we characterize what we have observed. This happens once we **attach a value to our opinions**.

WHAT DO THESE LOOK LIKE?

How are our judgments manifested? We can see these most clearly in our speaking and our thinking. (This is not to say they are not present in our non-verbal actions; we just cannot see them as clearly.) We do not need to look far; they are pervasive. Here are some examples:

<u>Observation</u>	<u>Opinion</u>	<u>Judgment</u>
That boy is pulling the girl's hair.	He is hurting her.	He's being mean.
You said you would be here at 5:00; you arrived at 5:15.	You did not keep your promise to me.	You're inconsiderate.
A woman takes a young boy's hand across the street.	She is watching out for the boy's safety.	She is a good mother.
A woman puts her half-eaten meal in the garbage.	She did not like the food I fixed for her.	She is wasteful.
A man stops his car and changes a tire for the woman with the flat.	He helped that woman.	He is a very considerate person.



HOW WE BECOME JUDGMENTAL

Where does our judgmental ness come from? Family, teachers, ... all kinds of adults and children in our lives. A parent tells their child, "That's Rude!" or "Don't be mean!" or "Stop being so impatient!" or "That's very impolite." Why? Because being judgmental is **easy and quick and requires no personal involvement**. We do not have to open ourselves up when we say judgmental things. Saying "I don't want you to do that" or "I'm upset with you for doing that" or "Please do not do that" or "I am scared you will hurt her" or "I don't like that" **takes more time** to think about and to say; these also **leave us more vulnerable** to questions or comments from the child.

Judgmental exclamations like those listed above are more likely to close out conversation; they are difficult to refute. Less judgmental alternatives, on the other hand, leave a **greater chance of dialogue**. It is this very dialogue that **builds intimacy**. Responding to a child's "Why?" question can build an emotional bond between parent and child. The child learns why the parent thinks certain things, not just what the parent thinks. This in turn increases the likelihood of the child coming to ask for advice in another situation.

A child who is taught "right and wrong" tends to learn decision making in terms of "rules." They do not have to think for themselves when they have a hard and fast rule they can apply. Their decision-making will be in terms of the consequences of following the rule or "disobeying" it --- rather trying to figure out what kind of person they want to be. Such a child may comply with the rule while in the presence of the rule maker(s). However, in the **absence of an internally developed process for making decisions**, such a child will more likely grow up with "voids" in their decision making criteria --- leaving them to making choices that do not serve them or the relationships they are in, as they grow older. [To parents who wonder "How can I affect my child's decision-making process in a positive way?" --- one answer is to model the behavior you want the child to exhibit. For example, to get a child to say "please" and "thank you," **always say please when asking the child to do something.**]

SO WHAT?

What difference does it make which method of thinking and speaking we utilize. Our choices have profound and pervasive effects on our self-esteem, the quality of our relationships, and the extent we meet our goals. Will we be "better" people if we focus more on our opinions and less on our judgments? Probably not. We will have consequences for the choices we make. Again, these consequences are neither good nor bad. **We may like or dislike the consequences, which is different from being right or wrong.**

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