

(Some) Basic Understandings of General Semantics, by Steve Stockdale

Scientific Approach

- Our ability to time-bind is most evident when we apply a scientific approach, method or attitude in our evaluations and judgments.
- A scientific approach involves the process of continually testing assumptions and beliefs, gathering as many facts and as much data as possible, revising assumptions and beliefs as appropriate, and holding conclusions and judgments tentatively
- Hidden, or unstated assumptions guide our behavior to some degree; therefore we ought to make a special effort to become more aware of them.
- We live in a process-oriented universe in which everything changes all the time. The changes may be readily apparent to us, or microscopic, or even sub-microscopic. There's always more than we can sense or experience.

Observe → Hypothesize → Test → Revise, etc.

Abstracting and Evaluating (“Behavior Awareness”)

- As human organisms, we have limits as to what we can experience through our senses. Given these limitations, we can never experience ‘all’ of what’s ‘out there’ to experience. We ‘abstract’ only a portion of what’s ‘out there.’
- Our awareness of ‘what goes on’ outside of our skin, is not ‘what is going on;’ our awareness of our experience is not the silent, first-order, neurological experience.
- Given our ever-changing environment (which includes ourselves, and our awareness of ourselves), we never experience the ‘same’ person, event, situation, ‘thing,’ experience, etc., more than once.
- To the degree that our reactions and responses to all forms of stimuli are automatic, or conditioned, we copy animals, like Pavlov’s dog. To the degree that our reactions and responses are more controlled, delayed, or conditional to the given situation, we exhibit our uniquely-human capabilities.
- We each experience ‘what’s out there’ uniquely, according to our individual sensory capabilities, integrating our past experiences and expectations. We ought to maintain an attitude of ‘to-me-ness’ in our evaluations of our own behavior, as well as in our evaluations of others’ behavior.

What Happens

≠ What I Experience

≠ What I Report

**≠ What I Infer, Believe, Assume, or
the Meanings I Generate**

Perceive — Construct — Evaluate — Communicate

Verbal Awareness

- We can think of language as the unique capability that allows humans to ‘time-bind,’ or learn, from generation to generation, as well as within generations.
- However, language has evolved with structural flaws in that much of the language we use does not properly reflect the structure of the world we experience ‘out there..’
- Among the mistakes we perhaps unknowingly commit:
 - confusing the word itself with what the word stands for;
 - acting as if the meaning of the words we use is contained solely in the word, without considering the context and the individuals;
 - confusing facts with our inferences, assumptions, beliefs, etc.;
 - not accounting for the many “shades of gray,” simplistically looking at things as if they were black or white, right or wrong, good or bad, etc.;
 - using language to ‘separate’ that which in the actual world cannot be separated, such as *space* from *time*, *mind* from *body*, *thinking* from *feeling*.
- Revising our language habits by using the *extensional devices* will help us become more aware and more deliberate in our everyday talking and listening: *indexing*, *dating*, *quotes*, *hyphen*, etc., *E-Prime*, and *English Minus Absolutisms (EMA)*.

Sensory Awareness

- We ‘experience’ our daily living on the silent, non-verbal levels; in other words, on a physiological-neurological level different from our verbal awareness.
- Our ability to experience the world is relative, unique to our own individual sensing capabilities.
- Our language habits can affect our physiological behavior; we can allow what we see, hear, say, etc., to affect our blood pressure, pulse, rate of breathing, etc.
- As we become more aware of our own non-verbal behaviors, we can practice techniques to achieve greater degrees of relaxation, less stress, greater sense of our environment, etc.

Time-binding

- Only humans have demonstrated the capability to build on the knowledge of prior generations. Alfred Korzybski referred to this capability as *time-binding*.
- Language serves as the principle tool that facilitates time-binding.
- Time-binding forms the basis for an ethical standard by which to evaluate human behavior.
- Acknowledging our time-binding inheritance dispels us of the ‘self-made’ notion and encourages us to ‘time-bind’ for the benefit of those who follow.