

Assuming Positive Intent

Key points

Covey in, *“The Speed of Trust”* says that we judge ourselves according to our intentions but we judge other people according to their behaviour and make assumptions about their intentions. The assumptions that we make impact on whether we trust them. Assuming positive intent means consciously choosing to assume that our colleagues are operating to the best of their ability and are acting with the best interest of the school and their colleagues in mind.

The principle of positive intention is that at some level all behaviour is (or at one time was) "positively intended". Another way to view it is that all behaviour serves (or at one time served) a "positive purpose". We should therefore look for the positive in what others are trying to say.

If a person offers us advice, we often dissect it to figure out what their "real" agenda is. If someone disagrees with us or identifies an area where we might need improvement, we may become defensive because we feel criticised on both a professional and personal level. Assuming positive intent is to assume that people aren't out to 'get us' that their purpose is to help us.

For success, attitude is equally as important as ability.

Walter Scott

When confronted with a situation in which we feel criticised, it is helpful to take a step back and look at it from a different point of view. Rather than being suspicious of other people's motives we need to assume that they are doing the best they can and that their intentions are not to attack us but to help us grow and be more successful. Assuming positive intent is to believe that the other person doesn't have a hidden agenda.

If we assume the other person's intentions are negative and are directed at attacking us then we are immediately defensive, less likely to trust them and less likely to listen to what they are saying.

PepsiCo CEO Indra Nooyi in Fortune magazine said, *“When you assume negative intent, you're angry. If you take away that anger and assume positive intent, you will be amazed. Your emotional quotient goes up because you are no longer almost random in your response. You don't get defensive. You don't scream. You are trying to understand and listen because at your basic core you are saying, “Maybe they are saying something to me that I'm not hearing.”*

Being aware of our disposition, whether we are naturally likely to trust people and assume they have good intentions or more likely to be suspicious of other people and assume that their intentions are not good, is the first step in reflecting on our thought patterns and the impact it has on our interactions.

Our disposition stems from both nature and nurture. To some extent our assumption of the other person's intent is part of our personality but it is also the result of our experiences. We've been raised to be careful who we trust and we've learned that not everyone who smiles at us is our friend. We have also been conditioned to be suspicious, to think that if something seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Assuming positive intent means consciously taking on a mindset that assumes that other people are genuine and well meaning, even if their method of delivery could be improved.

We judge ourselves according to our intentions but we judge other people's behaviour and assume their intention.

The assumptions we make impact on whether we trust them or not.

Assuming positive intent means consciously choosing to assume that colleagues are operating to the best of their ability.

The principle of positive intention is that at some level all behaviour is (or at one time was) "positively intended".

Rather than being suspicious of other people's motives we need to assume that they are doing their best and are trying to help us grow.

Take on a mindset that looks for the learning in all situations.



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