



Black bear hiding behind a tree.

I Know What You Need, But You Don't

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“Honesty is the first chapter in the book of wisdom.” — **Thomas Jefferson**

Getting a Straight Answer

Many of my clients struggle with contradictions. Contradictions are to be expected and resolving them is healthy. We are assailed by many counter productive forces woven into necessary situations.

I rarely presume to know more than my clients, but some people's evasion is so exceptional that their self-denial is obvious. I not only see what they need, but I know what they refuse to admit.

This does not become immediately clear. Once I start to suspect ulterior motives I test for them, and the results are uncertain. It takes some time to see through a mask of lies, many of which are quite pleasant.

All of us evade our contradictions in our efforts to assert what we believe to be true. And the closer you come to the conflicts you yourself have created, the more obstacles you create to seeing them. People's dishonesty becomes more evident the closer you get to the truth that they don't want to admit. This applies to almost everything you believe.

Seeing the Truth But Not Saying the Truth

Client X had a troubled relationship with their spouse. This was exacerbated by X's repeatedly bringing up a certain topic of conversation. X hired me to help them stop bringing up this quarrelsome issue. They didn't want to resolve the problem, they simply wanted to avoid it.

I advised them to approach the problem directly but they said this was impossible. Nevertheless, over a period of weeks their relationship with their spouse was improving probably because they were showing some integrity in dealing with the issue. This is what they told me and I believe what I'm told. I have no alternative, barring access to greater insight or more accurate information.

Then, they abruptly canceled all future sessions without discussion. They said they had decided they suffered from an unrelated and implausible mental condition and were going to seek help from someone who specialized in it. As this new condition had never been an issue, I had not revealed to them that I specialized in this issue.

It was clear to me that they were evading the issue which is what they typically did. They were making up an excuse that one part of them believed while another part of them knew was false.

There was a small amount of honesty in their change of direction as they really did need to perpetuate their troubled relationship, but they were dishonest with me and, I suspect, always had been. I did not contradict their self-diagnosis and I did not object to their decision. When a person commits themselves to dishonesty and wants to escape, it is best to let them go.

Internal Truth Versus External Truth

What is or is not obvious depends on context. If you accept general rules of social behavior—such as the kind of relationships and responsibilities you should have—then you'll ascribe various motives to the people who play their parts. But when you evaluate behaviors on their own you discern less obvious intentions. The benefit of being an outsider is the opportunity to see motivations for what they are.

Two parts to understanding interpersonal situations are the context of the whole and the motivations of the individuals. Understanding the motivations requires an understanding of what people expect. This

gets complicated when you, the outside observer, have your own expectations. A counselor needs to remove themselves from their client's equation.

To understand the situations I encounter in therapy, I ask for the context and the intentions of those involved. This is a question that will have layered answers. There will be the simple answer, the social answer, the personal answer, honest answer, and the subconscious answer.

The simple answer is a defense of the role you want to play, which can be a good or bad actor depending on your need. The social answer is the one others will most readily agree with. This is the explanation of your behavior according to what others endorse.

Your personal answer is a reasonable story based on your situation. It's a story you can argue and, if others don't support you right away, you can always add more detail. It's your story so you'll always have the last word.

Your honest answer is crafted to create empathy and support. It's more emotional than logical and it's what you honestly want to believe. There is some truth to it, but generally not that much. It's easy to insist that you're being honest when the truth is subjective. Subjective truth is an area where you can always improve yourself to positive ends.

The subconscious answer is the most interesting because it has the largest scope. It combines as much of the past, present, and future as you can hold in your mind. It combines the greatest number of different threads and makes the least sense. It is the picture closest to reality.

It would be better to call this the subconscious story as it doesn't have a point or answer any question. It is your attempt to understand yourself, and while you can always improve your story it will never feel complete.

Seeing Is Not Believing

I now live in British Columbia where people are cautious about bears. I've seen people put up signs when there's a bear in the neighborhood. I've been here 7 years and I've seen one bear in a large woodland park.

When I lived in upstate New York no one made a big deal about bears because they were everywhere. They'd be walking along the street in the middle of the day if there was no traffic. And if you put anything edible in your trash can the night before pickup, then you could be sure it would be all over the street the next morning.

These were big bears, twice the width of a large motorcycle and lower to the ground. I put out popcorn and watched our bear munch, belly on the ground with feet splayed out behind and its black coat shimmering. It made a cute picture but an unwise invitation.

The more I learn about people, the more similarity I see with other animals. I learned about love from my dog, who certainly knew more about it than any partner I've ever had. A bear taught me about evasion with a simpler than human demonstration.

I was walking through the woods along a trail I'd made for myself when I encountered a particularly large black bear. Like most adult bears this one was skittish. I could see he was hiding because, as I kept an eye on him, he kept moving so as to hide his face behind a small tree. The 6-inch white birch tree in front of him made a vertical white line across his black bulk extending a foot to either side.

I imagined that he was thinking, as a child thinks, "If I can't see you, then you can't see me." I thought such behavior was an urban legend but, as I've since come to understand, people think this way all the time.

What Are You Hiding Behind?

Animals perceive a less filtered reality. They see what is really there rather than what it represents. The bear eliminated my threat by positioning himself so that he could no longer see me. We do much the same but with thinking rather than seeing. We'll make up a story in which the threat is removed even when the threat is plainly in front of us. The bear based his feelings on what he saw; we base our feelings on what we think.

Consider the way you present yourself. If you're like most, you'll feel others see you as you present yourself. You won't have much awareness of your reputation. You'll feel that if you mask yourself others will only see what you present, unaware of how much is still showing. People remember how you've made them feel. You only control a small part of how others see you.

My father often made disparaging comments that reflected his frustration. When he wanted to be light hearted he'd turn to humor but, for those of us who knew him his satire reminded us of his insecurity. He was another black bear hiding behind a birch tree.

The Lies You Believe Are The Problem

As I work with clients to move past their public presentations, I see patterns and notice the shades of their different behaviors. I glean what's beyond their short-term thinking and begin to understand what's behind their personalities.

It takes a good actor to fool people. If a person acts in order to deceive they are dishonest, but if they believe in their own deception they are deluded. And if they are consistently false they are either hiding or have no identity. They may control or be controlled by several false presentations.

It takes more than a good listener to see through a dishonest presentation. You must also know some of the facts and be honest about your own feelings. If you feel yourself being manipulated, then there's a good chance that your being manipulated is the purpose of what you're experiencing.

Honest people are dominated by one personality, or so we think. We may be only marginally aware and in control, but we're consistent under normal circumstances. Honest people normally manipulate, but we apply positive human values in relating to others. We know that dishonesty will make us targets for the deception of others as we have little control over how others present themselves.

The sooner you recognize others' delusions, the sooner you can distance yourself from them. It's not a question of rejecting attachment or obligation, it's a question of reciprocity. Illusions can be inspiring, but delusions are insane. A deluded state of mind might be temporary and it might be correctable, but it should not be indulged, encouraged, or accepted.

Deceptions unaddressed metastasize, they do not resolve by themselves. Delusions and misrepresentations may be honest errors, but don't assume they're insignificant. Our brains are designed to perceive similar realities, not identical but close enough to draw the same conclusions.

Radically different conclusions belie radically different perceptions or thoughts. When the outcome is destructive it's likely a crisis is in the making. This is why we spend so much time trying to understand each other. Undisclosed feelings, hidden attitudes, and repressed concerns are always a bad sign. When they are fundamental to the relationship, they can destroy it.

Honesty Cannot Be Negotiable

The personalities of other animals are more stable than ours and their presentations are more authentic. Whether they're displaying affection, fright, or anger, an animal's presentation is based on their perception, and animals' perceptions are more sensitive than ours. They may quickly switch between behaviors, but only in response to situations.

People, on the other hand, manipulate presentations toward preconceived ends. They react as much to what they imagine as to what they perceive. And while a person will give you an explanation where an animal would not, it is unlikely that it will be a full and honest answer.

All the failed relationships in my life have failed due to a lack of honesty. This spans the full range from girlfriends, wives, social friends, siblings, parents, business partners, teachers, employees, and clients. I only think of them as failures when the other party has ceased further interaction. It's always worthwhile to resolve disputes, disagreements, and disillusionments, but few people bother.

The most important failed relationships, such as with my mother and wives, failed for a lack of courage and commitment. It may seem heartless to say that most parents are not committed to their children, but it's true. Even the friends we lose drift away because of a lack of commitment.

It's easy to say that these relationships lacked clarity, which is true, but the critical flaw was a lack of connection. The fundamental importance of the relationships was never recognized, they were simply seen as opportunities.

Returning to the client who created an imaginary diagnosis in order to avoid any further self-revelations, they invented a fictitious excuse because they were not ready to resolve their problem. The

excuse allowed them to continue their presentation of virtue in trying to repair their relationship when, in truth, they were only exploiting it.

A similar situation occurs when I explain to a prospect how I can solve their problems. If I say too much, they reject my proposal because it's not what they expect, or it threatens to upset their pattern of evasion, or it costs too much. Naturally, it's the people who are willing to pay the least who are the least committed to change.

Open Your Dreams

Other animals are not a threat to themselves. Humans will not only sabotage themselves, but they will destroy their family, community, culture, and ecosystem. It's unclear what it takes for a person to face their self-destructive tendencies.

The problems between people are rooted in their personal problems. Not the stated disagreements but the unrecognized personal values, the problems rooted in fear and righteousness. It's not forgiveness that's needed, it's exploring your emotions.

If you're unsure of your feelings, learn to remember your dreams as they reflect how you really feel. Hold on to those feelings and allow them to guide your thoughts. They will present you with your honest, ambiguous feelings. These are usually not the good feelings that rise to consciousness, but the unresolvable ones that don't. They will not be ignored and they will not go away.

Focus on these issues and you will make progress. Maybe not rapid or easy progress, but it will be real, life changing progress. Pleasant or unpleasant, these are the issues you need to confront for your benefit and the benefit of those closest to you. This is called "the good work." You can learn to appreciate it.

We all dream all the time. Waking consciousness is just the rug we roll out in the daytime to cover the shifting patterns of our subconscious. If you are willing to replace your ego with your true feelings, you will remember your dreams. Take them to heart and let them motivate you.

And to take this further, I'll consider your personal situation. Book a short, free call on my calendar at <https://www.mindstrengthbalance.com/schedule15>, or click this button to access the calendar:

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