

Paradigm 2: I See You

The second paradigm is about seeing others as people instead of things.

When we look at others, what do we see? Do we see an individual, or do we see age, gender, race, politics, religion, disability, national origin, or sexual orientation? Do we see a member of an "out group" or an "in group"? Or do we really see the uniqueness, the power, the gifts of every diverse individual?

Perhaps we don't really see *them* as much as we see our own ideas, preconceived notions, and maybe even biases *about* them.

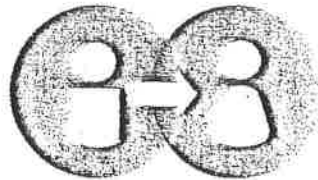
We all know when someone is "putting on," when we are dealing with the person himself or with a fake front. The question is, *Am I that kind of person? Or am I one who looks upon others with genuine, authentic respect?*

The paradigm "I See You" contrasts sharply with the typical paradigm

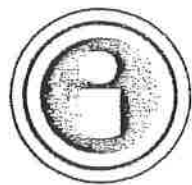
3rd Alternative Thinking



I Synergize With You



I Seek You Out



I See Myself



I See You

I See You. I see a whole human being unlike any other, a person of innate worth, endowed with talents, passions, and strengths that are irreplaceable. You are more than your "side" in a conflict. You deserve dignity and my respect.

	I See You	I Stereotype You
SEE	I see a whole human being endowed with innate worth, talents, passions, and strengths that are unique in the universe. You are more than your "side." You deserve dignity and respect.	I see the group you belong to: your "side," your party, your gender, your nationality, your company, your race. You are a symbol, a "thing," a Liberal, a Boss, a Hispanic, or a Muslim instead of a unique person.
DO	I demonstrate authentic respect for you.	I ignore you or fake respect for you.
GET	An atmosphere of synergy where we are much stronger together than separately.	An atmosphere of hostility. We are weakened by our divisions and antagonisms for each other.

"I Stereotype You," as shown in the contrasting boxes in the chart above. Remember, what we *see* determines what we *do*, and what we *do* determines the results we *get*.

The "I See You" paradigm is fundamentally a question of character. It is about human love, generosity, inclusiveness, and honest intent. With the "I Stereotype You" paradigm, I cannot be fully trusted to keep your interests as well as mine at heart, and no 3rd Alternative is possible. When I look at you, I see only the representative of a side. I might behave correctly toward you, but my show of respect for you as a person is actually counterfeit.

I call the effective paradigm "I See You" because of an insight from the wisdom of the Bantu peoples of Africa. In that culture, people greet each other by saying "I see you." To say "I see you" means "I acknowledge your unique individuality." It is to say, "My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours." It's all part of the spirit of *Ubuntu*.

Ubuntu is very hard to translate. It means something like "personhood," but more than that, it means "a person depends on other persons to be a person." The wellness expert Elizabeth Lesser explains it this way: "I need you in order to be me, and you need me in order to be you." An example helps us to understand this uniquely African concept: "A phrase such as 'Mary has Ubuntu' would mean Mary is known to be a caring, concerned person who abides faithfully in all social obligations." But there's more: "Mary does not know she is beautiful, or intelligent, or humorous, without Ubuntu. Mary understands her own identity only in relationship to other persons."¹

¹ Michael Battle and Desmond Tutu, *Ubuntu: I in You and You in Me* (New York: Church Publishing, 2009), 3.

Another way to understand *Ubuntu* is by its opposite: stereotyping. To stereotype is to eliminate from the picture the things that make us singular individuals. We say, “Yeah, he’s a sales guy—aggressive, pushy.” “She’s one of those self-absorbed types—always thinking everything revolves around her.” “He’s a type-A personality.” “He’s a jerk.” “He’s a finance guy.” “What do you expect? He’s a quitter.” “She’s one of those who are always running for CEO.” We’re unable to see these people as individuals, not as types.

In the spirit of *Ubuntu*, to really see other people is to welcome the gifts only they can bring: their talents, intelligence, experiences, wisdom, and differences of perspective. In an *Ubuntu* society, travelers don’t need to carry provisions; their needs will be met by gifts from those they encounter on the way. But these tangible gifts are only tokens of the much greater gift of self. If we refuse the gift of self or devalue it, we are no longer free to benefit from one another’s capabilities.

In explaining the meaning of *Ubuntu*, Orland Bishop, director of the Shade Tree Multicultural Foundation in Watts, California, talks about what we lose when we don’t really see each other: “Our present civilization has taken away freedoms from human beings, not because one culture oppresses another, but because we have lost the imagination of what sight means, of what these inner capacities really mean.”¹

The spirit of *Ubuntu* is essential to 3rd Alternative thinking. In a conflict situation, unless I see you as more than a symbol of the opposition, I can never get to synergy with you. The spirit of *Ubuntu* is more than just the notion that I should behave respectfully toward you. It means that my humanity is tied up in yours—that when I act in a way that dehumanizes you, I also dehumanize myself. Why? Because when I reduce you to the status of a *thing*, I do the same to myself.

Recently, a friend was driving down a city street when another motorist began honking and waving at her. She slowed down, thinking there was something wrong with her car. But the other driver sped up close to her, shouted obscenities at her about a certain politician, and nearly ran her off the road. Then she realized she had on her car a bumper sticker that favored the politician. To the angry driver, she was no longer another human being; she was a *thing*, a bumper sticker, a hated symbol.

¹ Orland Bishop, “Sawubona,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IjUkVZRPk8&feature=related>. Accessed November 22, 2010.

The angry man dehumanized my friend. But in the process, he diminished his own humanity as well. He probably has a house, a job, a family. There are probably people who love him. But in that moment of choice, he became less than human, nothing more than the blunt instrument of an ideology.

This dehumanizing of others—what we often refer to as stereotyping—starts from a deep insecurity within the self. This is also where conflict begins. Psychologists know that most of us tend to remember negative things about others more than positive things. “We hold people responsible for their bad behaviors and don’t give them credit for their good ones,” says Oscar Ybarra, the eminent psychologist. He believes this happens because seeing others in a negative light helps us to feel superior to them. Ybarra has found that when people begin with a healthy, realistic regard for themselves, the negative memories fade away.¹ That’s why the paradigm “I See Myself” precedes the paradigm “I See You.”

People Are Not Things

In his famous book *I and Thou*, the great philosopher Martin Buber taught that we too often relate to each other as objects, not as people. An object is an *It*, but a person is a *Thou*. If I treat a person as an *It*, as an object to be used for my own purposes, I too become an *It*, no longer a living person but a machine. The relationship between “I and *It*” is not the same as the relationship between “I and *Thou*.” “The mankind of mere *It* that is imagined . . . has nothing in common with a living mankind,” Buber says. “If a man lets it have the mastery, the continually growing world of *It* overruns him and robs him of the reality of his own *I*.”

By reducing other people to the status of things, we think we can better control them. That’s why companies refer to their employees by the ironic term “human resources,” as though they were just another liability on the balance sheet, like taxes or accounts payable. That’s why most people in most organizations are seen only in terms of their function, even though they possess far more creativity, resourcefulness, ingenuity, intelligence, and talent than their jobs require or even allow! The opportunity cost of seeing people only as things is very high. No balance sheet shows the astonishing size of the locked-up potential of people and their capacities.

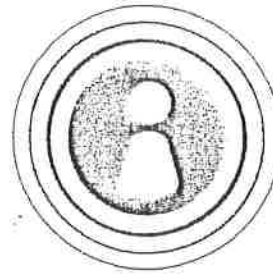
¹ David J. Schneider, *The Psychology of Stereotyping* (New York: Guilford Press, 2004), 145.

You/Thou

You = Thing



You = Thou



You/Thou. To me you are not a "thing," a tool like a wrench or a hammer I can use for my own ends. As Martin Buber said, you are a "thou," an end in yourself, a real person with strengths and weaknesses, with idiosyncrasies and amazing gifts.

By contrast, Buber says, "If I face a human being as my *Thou* . . . he is not a thing among things."¹

Buber uses the term "Thou" because it suggests more than just surface respect; it also evokes reverence for another person. It suggests intimacy, openness, and trust. To see another as an "it" suggests remoteness and indifference. It encourages exploitation.

I feel genuinely sorry for those who don't feel that reverence. To come to understand another—without the urge to control or manipulate—is to enter sacred territory and is deeply enriching. Carl Rogers eloquently describes what this experience means to him:

One of the most satisfying feelings I know . . . comes from my appreciating [an] individual in the same way that I appreciate a sunset. People are just as wonderful as sunsets if I can let them be. In fact, perhaps the

¹ Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 23, 28, 54.

reason we can truly appreciate a sunset is that we cannot control it. When I look at a sunset as I did the other evening, I don't find myself saying, "Soften the orange a little on the right hand corner, and put a bit more purple along the base, and use a little more pink in the cloud color." I don't do that. I don't try to control a sunset. I watch it with awe as it unfolds.¹

Losing that sense of awe in the presence of another human being might be one of the greatest of human tragedies.