

Chalkboard

By

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Black and White. Up and Down. Night and Day. East and West. Love and Hate. Plus and Minus. Perception and Reality. All opposites, right? A little more reflecting might lead one to think an issue, which on the surface appears to be iron clad, could have some chinks.

Regarding the colors black and white, is black the opposite of white or the absence of white? If a person points down toward the ground, is his finger pointing in the same direction as someone on exactly the opposite side of the earth pointing up at the sky? Does darkness make it nighttime? In the summer when it's still light at 9:00 p.m. is that night or day? At one second after midnight when it's still dark outside is that the beginning of a new day thus making it daytime? If there were a highway that followed the earth's equator, how far could you drive east before you went west? Can you love and hate the same person at the same time? If minus a minus makes a plus, how come plus a plus does not make a minus?

Some might debate whether the pairs in the first paragraph are opposites or not, but few would posit that the pairs are identical in nature. Yet there is at least one pair, I think, where the words may seem to mean the same.

Perception is reality. I have hung my hat on that thought for many years. That core concept has spawned many corollary statements that I have been duty bound to pass on to my work mates. Here are four of them.

"It's not enough to do a good job, people must think you are doing a good job." "If someone thinks you are ___ (*Fill in blank-* an obnoxious jerk, a push over, a weak disciplinarian, a slacker, an imbecile, cold-hearted, lazy, compassionate, professional, flippant, arrogant, caring, disciplined, etc.), then to that person, that's what you are; that is their reality." "What you hold to be true, others may hold to be an opinion." "Just because that train doesn't look like it's moving doesn't mean you should drive through the crossing guards." Make up examples of your own. It's not a difficult concept.

Understand I am not proposing alternate realities; nor am I proposing moral relativism. To the contrary, I have always been the type who believes in moral and professional absolutes. I will always believe that within the population of all perceptions on any issue, there is only a single truth.

Unfortunately for me sometimes, and perhaps for you also, I often act as if my perception of any issue is closer to that singular truth than others. But before you judge me, or yourself too harshly, understand that is the nature of the beast. If I do not believe, or you do not believe, that what we think is the truth of the matter then what exactly is it that we do believe.

Sometimes, I find out that my perception of an issue doesn't match the reality of a situation after more facts of the matter are made known. For me, the greatest detriment to matching my point of view to the truth of a matter is being able to possess all the facts. Unless it is some individual matter that I have personally experienced, I am forced to rely on the perceptions of others to shape my own perception.

Since I am in the education business the chief perceptions that I must rely on are the perceptions of the school board members, staff, parents, interested citizens and students. In the next circle would be city government officials, county government officials, state government officials. That's a lot of perceptions to synthesize into an opinion of what the truth really is. I have perceived that the person who has the most first-hand knowledge of a matter and who has a history of demonstrating objectivity is the one from whom it is best to glean facts.

What has all this dime-brand philosophizing been about? I think it was driven by recent stories in the media where references to our school were at least part of stories that dealt with the community as a whole.

What do I think; what is my perception? I think we have a wonderful community. I think we are experiencing growth and all the positive and negative attachments that accompany growth. I think some of the minor problems our community has could become serious problems if not dealt with in a timely manner. I think our local police department is working extra hard to stay on top of any surge of criminal activity that often comes with growth.

I think we are becoming a diverse community with regard to race and culture. I think that's okay. I think that, as parents and as people trying to make a living, we are all more alike on the inside than we are different on the outside.

I think we have some good community leaders both in business and community service. I think we have a city government that wants the best for the city. I think Main Street Gentry/Chamber of Commerce is smart to be planning for the future now.

I think the community has good churches staffed with pastors and staff that have a love and concern for the eternal souls of their members. I

think the GYO and other groups are heroes in their efforts to find constructive things for youngsters to do.

I think the Gentry School Board is working hard to provide quality programs and facilities for all the students. I think the teachers and staff at the school are good or better than anyone else's. I think recreational drug use among some students and where they are getting them is a far greater problem than concerns of gang activity in the community. I think the Pioneers are #1.

In my perception, Gentry is still a good place to live, to work, to shop, to get an education, to worship with others, to raise children, and to be happy. I think we will have to be both diligent and vigilant in maintaining this.

Nope. Not running for office. Not wanting a millage increase. Not asking for a raise. Not seeking a debate. Just sharing my perception.