

The Tale of Two Minds... ...A Big Mind & A Small Mind

Have you observed how some event can happen and one person responds negatively, as if everything impacted only that person, as in her own “me..me..me-self world”? Yet another person’s response is entirely different, seeing a much larger view and having a response that flows from a larger, insightful understanding?

Moving to a larger mind is an “awareness process” that involves a way of understanding and responding to whatever is going on. It is a way of relating (of being in relation to) the big picture.

Stephen Covey in his book, “*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*” (New York: Simon & Schuster Fireside Book, 1990) shares the first habit as “**Be proactive.**” “**Develop the capacity to choose your response.**” Covey equates proactivity and reactivity to the large and small mind. The event happens—someone makes a cutting remark; the response follows immediately—an angry retort. *Reactivity*—no conscious ability to choose one’s response. On the contrary, *Proactivity* gives the ability to choose one’s response. Covey describes this as “response-ability”, or the ability to be responsible.

Is this a new philosophy for living? No. Nearly 2500 years ago in ancient China, Confucius discovered a fundamental distinction for human living. (See I Ching or Book of Changes, Princeton University Press, 1967). Confucius taught that two “person-types” dwell within each of us: the small-minded-person in us and the large-minded-person in us.

The small-minded person in us is narrow, self-seeking, driven by fear and desire, ever comparing. In small

mind, we see the world in dualistic (black and white) terms. (Us vs. Them, Win vs. Lose).

The large-minded person in us has a more expansive way of relating—seeing more of the human face, sensing a larger, abundant context, recognizing the web of people affected, viewing the consequences of actions within a larger frame of time.

Confucius saw both capacities in each of us, both the capacity for small-mindedness and the capacity for large-mindedness. He came to the insight that all of us can achieve the nobility of large-minded living. (Yes!!!)

No matter what is happening to us, (hurricanes, floods, sickness, accidents, loss, grief) we still have an important *freedom* – the capacity to recognize how we relate to what is occurring in our lives. By cultivating awareness, we realize that we are free to choose how we will understand and respond to life’s events.

For any situation there will be at least two ways of relating to what is occurring—one small-minded and one large-minded. Confucius would invite us to choose the large-minded way—the “*wisdom way*”.

It is not what happens to us in life, it is how we respond to what is happening that matters most!

Try journaling for the next few weeks your responses to life’s events. Example: Are you ready to let go of small-minded conversations (personal and cultural)?

Helping people to move from smaller to larger mind is something we all can do... “we can lift up the positive”.

It is also what deep training in leadership and personal growth is all about. It’s about making conscious response choices with our **Lights On!** (Ref: /Adapt: Meridians, Spring 1996 Article, John G. Sullivan, Ph.D; Small Mind, Big Mind)