

# The importance of assumptions in business <sup>1</sup>

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Every time a person working for a company meets others for the first time (for instance, new employees, new suppliers, new customers, etc.), this individual should have positive assumptions about them. Whenever a person has positive assumptions regarding others (for instance, this individual assumes they are benevolent, honest, credible, etc.), these assumptions affect the way this person perceives others.

It is interesting to note that people never relate directly with others, but through their own mental representations of these very people. These representations about other people are very subjective, but never precise nor complete. Steiner (1986) stated that our knowledge about others begins with, but cannot go beyond, our representation of them. These mental representations can have different names, for instance, assumptions or mental images, among others.

These assumptions (positive or negative ones) toward other people are mental projections, which act like glasses colouring the way others are perceived. For instance, when a person has positive assumptions about others, their words and actions are filtered through these assumptions and tinted positively in the eyes of this individual. A person who holds positive assumptions about others is also more inclined to treat them kindly, which contributes to the development of deeper and more meaningful relationships with them.

In other words, when a person intentionally has positive assumptions about others, this individual's overall attitude toward them becomes more constructive. This person is more inclined to have positive thoughts, emotions, words, and actions toward these people, which in turn prompts them to behave accordingly, that is, in the same positive way they are treated.

According to the psychological principle of consistency, a person tends to naturally behave in accordance with how they are treated by others. For instance, a person who assumes others are co-operative treats these people as if they were really co-operative. In this example, these people will tend to behave collaboratively with this individual.

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<sup>1</sup> How to cite this article: Cignacco, B. R. (2022). The importance of assumptions in business, *PM World Journal*, Vol. XI, Issue IV, April.

Likewise, research demonstrates that when a person has high expectations of another individual, the latter is prone to show improved levels of performance. Psychologically speaking, this is also called the “Pygmalion effect.” There is a very simple technique people can use to have more positive assumptions about another person.

Before interacting with this individual, people should say to themselves “My positive assumptions about this person are ...”. This sentence should be completed with some positive attributes and qualities regarding the other person. When people use this technique, their perception regarding others is affected positively, as a result of the constructive assumptions of the former about the latter.

Even though this technique is very simple to use, its powerful effects should never be dismissed. As a consequence, a company’s people should give this tool a try in order to improve their relationships with the organisation’s main stakeholders. This technique of purposely adopting positive assumptions about others can also be applied to people one meets for the first time.

An individual can also apply this tool to known people, especially those whom were involved in past feuds or disagreements with this person. When a person has positive assumptions about others, this person’s perception of them is shifted almost instantaneously, making the communication with them more constructive and pleasurable.

To sum up, having positive assumptions about others always helps a person see them in the best light and prompts these people to adopt a congruent attitude, which in turn makes interactions more flowing and graceful. The opposite is also true; when a person has negative assumptions about others, they tend to behave according to these very unproductive assumptions, which makes communication less spontaneous and more defensive.

## References

Steiner, R. 1986. *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*. New York, NY: Anthroposophic Press. This is an excerpt from the best-selling book “*The Art of Compassionate Business*” (Routledge, 2019). There is an interesting discount on this best-selling book. You can use this code **ACB230** which offers 30% off all editions of this title. Link to the book: <https://lnkd.in/dvJNYuS>

## About the Author



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