

## **YOU'VE BEEN FRAMED**

When late Robert Goizueta took over Coca-Cola, the company was passing through a rather difficult time. Indeed analysts talked of a crisis. Everyone felt that the market had matured and all that anyone could do was to grab marketshare from a rival, and that was what Coca Cola was trying to do in relation to its main rival Pepsi Cola. Wall Street was all but ready to write Coca Cola's obituary. Goizueta did not buy this doomsday theory. How does one break the mindset of a mature business—with deeply ingrained set of beliefs that sets up boundaries to everyone's thinking? This was the question he posed to himself. He then had a stunning insight. What, he asked his colleagues, was the average daily per capita consumption of fluids by the world's 4.4 billion population? The answer was: 64 ounces. And what, he asked, was the daily consumption of Coke? Answer: less than 2 ounces. Finally he asked: What is our market share of the stomach? Not Coca-Cola's share of the US cola market or the world's soft drink market, but of all kinds of fluids everyone in the world drinks on a given day. Coke's share was scarcely measurable. The enemy for Goizueta was not Pepsi but coffee, milk, tea and water! With a few well-defined questions Goizueta redefined Coke's market to be bigger than anybody had ever imagined. And he changed the psychology of his people. What was till then a depressing scenario metamorphosed into a grand opportunity. The company went on to become a great market value creator.

This true story illustrates the power of frames. Frames are different ways of looking at the world. These are mental structures that simplify and guide our understanding of a complex reality. We must adopt some kind of simplifying perspective in order to make sense out of the information being bombarded at us. This is an automatic mental process to which we scarcely pay any attention. Unfortunately frames not only limit our view but they can be hard to see and change. When we make decisions we are usually slaves to these frames which are like windows through which we look at the world. We tend to make the mistake of assuming that what we see through one or few windows is in fact the total view. Conflicts arise when we believe that ours is the only window or frame through which we must see the world. When we forget that our frame does not capture the whole of reality we can be lulled into thinking that our decision making perspective is more complete than it really is. Frames distort what we see by controlling what information is being attended to. We are often unaware that we are looking through a particular frame. Our minds complete the gaps in our information giving us an erroneous feeling that we have seen the entire picture. We also find it difficult to see more than one frame at a time. Once we are locked into a frame we find it difficult to switch without great effort. When we are emotionally attached to a given frame we feel threatened when we face the need to change the frame. Frames tend to draw our attention to certain aspects of a situation highlighting them while leaving other equally important aspects in the shadows, out of our view. Unfortunately, for decision making, elements lurking in the shadows of our frame can come back to haunt us later.

A major pharma company, in an effort to reduce costs, increased the carton size by about 15% on all dimensions, for the same quantity of medication. They thought they would save much money. The results were exactly the opposite .because the product was to be kept in refrigerators and the users had only limited space in their refrigerators. The repackaged product took up more space per unit of drug, forcing the clients to order less of the drug. Rather than save money the idea in fact led to loss of income and customer dissatisfaction. In this case the traditional manufacturing frame emphasized such things as cost reduction, profit enhancement, efficiency etc. Issues like how customers use and store the product were in the shadows of the frame and ended in a disastrous decision.

Years of conditioning and training can lead to a freezing of frames. These frames help us to simplify the world but the danger lies in oversimplification and holding on to frames after they are no longer relevant. Albert Einstein admonished his colleagues “Make it as simple as possible but no simpler”.

A winning decision maker has the ability to look at something through several frames. Indeed ,says Scott Fitzgerald ‘The test of a first rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposite ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function’. The ability to frame a problem is itself a key to its solution. There is a story about a Franciscan priest and a Jesuit , both being heavy smokers. This troubled them especially since they could not resist smoking while praying to the Lord. The Franciscan decided to see the prefect and asked him ‘Father, would it be permitted to smoke while I am praying to the Lord?’ The answer was a resounding no. The Jesuit also sought counsel but framed his question somewhat differently. ‘Father, when in moments of weakness I smoke would it be permitted to say a prayer to the lord?’ The answer ‘Yes of course my son’.

This story demonstrates the power of frame control. Decision makers have a responsibility to consciously control their frames rather than being controlled by them and should attempt to overcome as far as possible the inherent limitations of any single frame. An approach to becoming a better decision maker in the context of frames is to follow these three rules

1. Notice what frames you are using
2. Evaluate whether your frame fits the problem. If not then
3. Find yourself a better frame or build one if necessary, Help others change their frames if you are working with a group..

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