
OPEN-MINDED

“Everyone you will ever meet knows something you don’t”

~ **Bill Nye**

“Everybody has a story, and there’s something to be learned from every experience.”

~ **Oprah Winfrey**

“The mind is like a parachute. It only works when it is open.”

~ **Dalai Lama**

“True wisdom comes to each of us when we realize how little we understand about life, ourselves and the world around us.”

~ **Socrates**

“Don’t criticize them; they are just what we would be under similar circumstances.”

~ **Abe Lincoln**

Philosopher and best-selling author Tom Morris tells the story of a man who often criticized the late great Apple founder Steve Jobs. This man who criticized Jobs’ business innovations said, “You know, as it turned out, Steve was often right, and I was often wrong. I’m sorry I almost always doubted him. He showed us that things could be done in very new ways, breaking the paradigms that governed our thinking, and sometimes turning things on their heads. I should have been more open minded.” ¹

Being open-minded unleashes our creative potential and improves our likelihood that we will

achieve our goals and make things better for us and the people around us. We have nearly unlimited potential, but we must understand that we can't do it all. We have nearly unlimited potential, not necessarily as individuals but us as a whole. We can (and must) utilize others. We must collaborate. We must be creative. We must embrace different possibilities and have the courage to look at things from different perspectives and paradigms.

Oprah Winfrey has personally experienced poverty, racism, and sexual assault. She has also experienced wealth, fame, and influence. Not everyone has extreme experiences in life like Oprah but that doesn't mean we can't see another person's perspective. Having an open mind comes from a continuous effort to see things the way someone else might.

Having an open mind is not having an empty mind; in fact, it is the opposite. It does not come naturally, so one must fight for it. With an open-mind, new ways of thinking are introduced, forgiveness can occur, and we add someone else's pool of information to our own. It is worth the discomfort of leaving a narrow line of sight towards something full and powerful.

Oprah was raised on a small farm in Mississippi and was passed back and forth between her mother and grandmother. They lived in deep poverty and Oprah was physically and sexually abused by relatives while combatting normal teenage problems like loneliness and desire for a dream. She ran away and lived with her father who taught her to love education. She became a gifted student. Oprah won

a full ride to Tennessee State University in a public speaking contest and was named the host of a morning show after college. Her career was rising and then she took a job as a host of A.M Chicago, which later became The Oprah Winfrey Show.

Oprah is now a household name and is often quoted for her “You get a car! And you get a car!” iconic symbol of her generosity. With Oprah’s fame and fortune she has chosen to serve others and to empathize with whatever hardship they may be experiencing. She is not giving cars away just because it is fun, but rather because giving someone a car opens doors and dreams and helps them in life.

She has been one of the most generous people in the world because she believes in helping those in need. Rather than assessing the cause or root of their need she sees a person who needs help and helps with the resources she has. She often brought people on her show to discuss their issues and they resolved them by empathizing with the other person’s perspective. It is not a complex concept to put ourselves in someone else’s shoes, but it is a difficult task to actually do.

Not everyone will have as extreme of life circumstances as Oprah, but anyone can have an open mind. She has been rich, and she has been poor, so she is able to easily relate to both walks. Taking the time to view the world and even talk to someone with a differing life situation will shed light on their own personal needs, desires, and hopes.

A problem can be prevented or solved often by believing the best in someone else and assuming there is more to their life than we know, rather than

growing impatient with what we view to be their flaws.

In the book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey said, “If you’re like most people, you probably seek first to be understood; you want to get your point across. And in doing so, you may ignore the other person completely, pretend that you’re listening, selectively hear only certain parts of the conversation or attentively focus on only the words being said, but miss the meaning entirely. So why does this happen?”

“Because most people listen with the intent to reply, not to understand”, Covey continued. “You listen to yourself as you prepare in your mind what you are going to say, the questions you are going to ask, etc. You filter everything you hear through your life experiences, your frame of reference. You check what you hear against your autobiography and see how it measures up. And consequently, you decide prematurely what the other person means before he/she finishes communicating.”²

Being open-minded isn’t the same as empty-minded. Open-minded people still use critical thinking skills, but they realize that they might not know everything. They realize that they can learn from others. We all come from varied backgrounds. There is more to life than we have experienced. We can learn from everybody that we meet and from every new situation that we encounter. The more that we understand others, then the more we can see things that might make the situation a win-win.