



Appendix II – Acceptance and Rationalizing

People confuse rationalizing and accepting until their perceptions, other's perceptions, and reality reasonably reconcile to each other. This becomes more complicated when considering that not only do we have perceptions about what is happening right now, we all also have perceptions about what may happen and what has already happened.

1. Having aching muscles after too long of a walk shows a great example of **present** reality and present personal expectations (perceptions) being in conflict can cause physical **stress**.
2. Listening to your child explain how they will become the first self-taught lion tamer is a great example of how personal expectations conflicting with a possible **future** reality can cause **worry or anxiety**.
3. Reflecting on how the past use of a ***permanent*** solution, as a poor way to solve a past ***temporary*** personal problem, is a great example of how reality, in conflict with a **past** perception, can also cause **anxiety or worry**.

One way that people start to understand acceptance is through the serenity prayer that American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971) introduces in his Massachusetts sermons around 1930. The words are commonly thought of as: *God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference;* but the original version is recorded as being:

*God, give me grace to accept with serenity
the things that cannot be changed,
Courage to change the things
which should be changed,
and the Wisdom to distinguish
the one from the other.*

*Living one day at a time,
Enjoying one moment at a time,
Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,
Taking, as Jesus did,
This sinful world as it is,
Not as I would have it,
Trusting that You will make all things right,
If I surrender to Your will,
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life,
And supremely happy with You forever in the next.
Amen.*

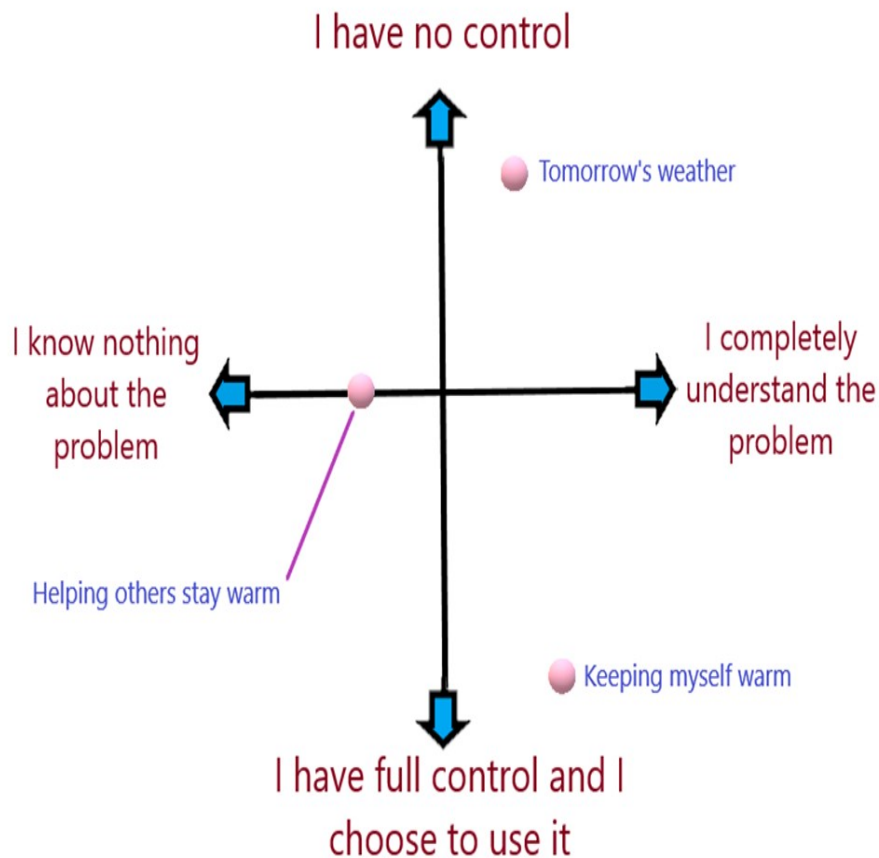
Either version of this prayer ended up being a little vague for me, and I ended up *faking it till I make it*, so it took me about three-decades before I put some pictures together to help me understand acceptance visually before I could really get a grasp of the concept.

This means that I ended up simplifying things only after complicating them first, because I put the serenity prayer in four dimensions using these examples.



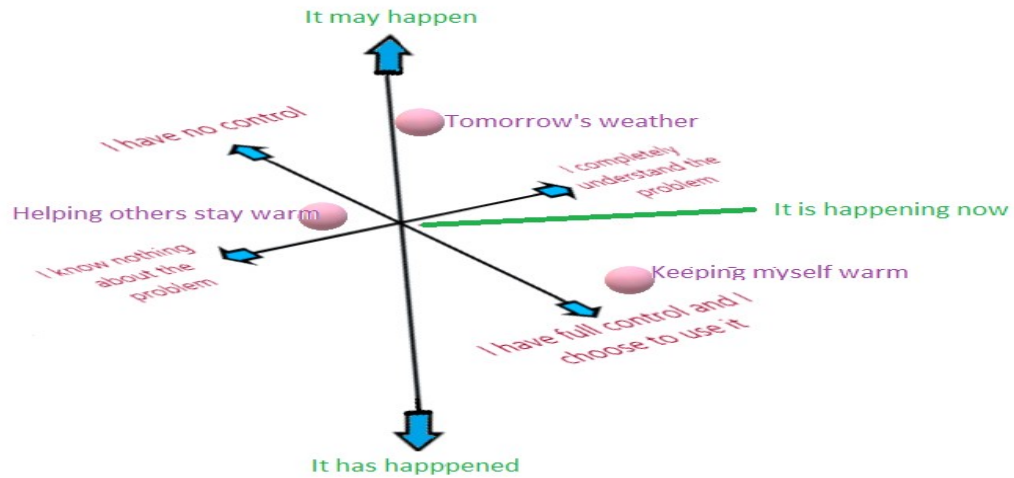
The single dimension picture above made some sense after I plotted the example points, but then I thought about some of the points that could have been added that were sort of abstract to me.

With the next picture I started considering how close things were to being more or less concrete, so I added another axis to understand acceptance in two dimensions.

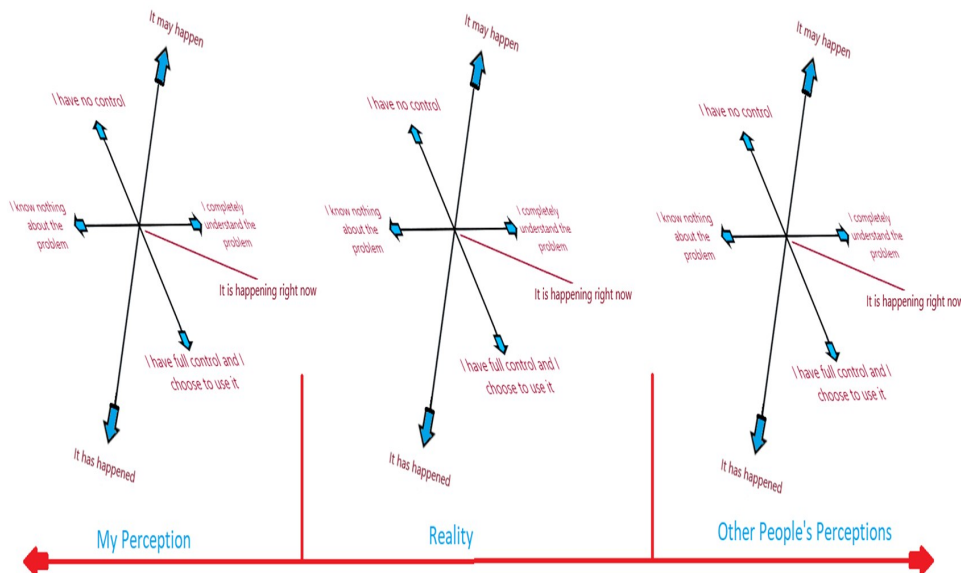


This turned out being pretty good view for me, until I found out that I must be able to accept the things that 1) Are happening now, 2) Did happen in the past, and 3) Might happen in the future, so I had to add another axis (dimension) that considered these things too.

This is what my simple Serenity Prayer picture looked like in the three dimensions of control, knowledge, and time.



As you can probably guess, I still wasn't quite there complicating a simple 27-word prayer enough for me to understand, so I added the only other dimension that I could think of...the points of view of me, others, and reality.



Cutting to the chase, acceptance is what happens when my expectations (past, present, and future) are adjusted to reality, and to what most other people can agree that reality is, was, or likely will be. Until my perceptions reconcile to other people's perceptions and reality, I am doing something called rationalizing instead of accepting, and rationalizing is almost like acceptance except that rationalizing includes extra baggage called worry, anxiety, and stress.

This means that for the entire three-decades that I was faking-it and thinking that I was having a free lunch because I had found a way to get around being able to accept things, I was really paying for it with worry, stress, and anxiety.

Even though having three versions of the serenity prayer is more complicated than faking-it with one version, this extra version helps me avoid the extra emotional taxes that rationalizing charges me, so I try to keep this final version of the serenity prayer in mind too:

*God, grant me the serenity to grieve and accept the things I cannot
change,*

*The courage found in learning, training, and practicing to change the
things I can, ~~and~~ which will usually provide me with most of*

The wisdom I need to know the difference.

Amen