



**“Well, I just *assumed* . . .
[fill in the blank]”**

I used to conduct a seminar called “*The Down Home, Plain Talk, No Frills Guide to Personal and Professional Effectiveness.*” Participants wrestled with various topics—some of the seminar material may be found on the “Effectiveness” page of my website. One of those topics was *assumptions*: statements or thoughts accepted or supposed true without proof or demonstration.

Why assumptions? Well, we all embrace assumptions all of the time—assumptions about ourselves, the people around us, the world and how it works, the cosmos. Some assumptions are useful. Some of them are more or less grounded in “reality” and tempered by our experience. Others are not so well founded but may be generally serviceable. But some of our assumptions are suspect when it comes to their “trueness.” Some are downright dangerous, such as assuming a driver approaching the intersection will obey the Stop sign.

Most of the time, we get along pretty well without thinking about (much less critically examining) favorite and other assumptions. There are times, however, when life can become difficult and complicated because we *assumed* such and such. Although assumptions can be useful, *unexamined* assumptions can sometimes lead to trouble.

I, like many of my other classmates at AHS, entered High School with a head full of assumptions about classes, teachers, other students. I assumed, for example, all the girls thought I was “nerdy” (there may have actually been more than a touch of reality to that assumption!) and that attending Doc Harrington’s “Dawn Patrol” *at 5 a.m.* would be very tough (which turned out to be true!).

Some students held assumptions about us kids who came from the South Valley; so, we did not always receive courteous and fair treatment from those who thought (wrongly) South Valley kids were less acceptable than students from other parts of town. Some assumed if you had an Hispanic surname you spoke Spanish, an assumption often dispelled in first year Spanish class.

Many of our assumptions were eradicated or modified appreciably in classrooms as our teachers and other students opened our minds. Socializing with students from different backgrounds provided other eye-openers. Science classes required we challenge assumptions made about lab experiments. Anthropology class opened our eyes to other peoples and cultures, dispelling erroneous assumptions. For many—perhaps all of us—High School was an introduction to examining our assumptions about others and about our world.

It could be refreshing (even though we didn’t always think so) to look at others and the world in ways different than what we usually assumed.

But it turns out our love of and our attachment to our assumptions is strong and deep. In years well beyond High School we may still cling dearly to flawed assumptions that prevent embracing life and others fully and fairly. Sometimes the media offers perspectives which cause us to rethink our assumptions but, more often, we select media messages which confirm or at least don’t counter our cherished assumptions—assumptions about age, gender, race or ethnicity, occupations, religions, politics, the state of our nation, world conditions.

How is it we can so quickly lose the lesson of examining our assumptions? Are we just “too busy” to be bothered with keeping an open mind? Are we too “set in our ways” to ask open-ended questions of others and then *really listen* to what they have to say? We no longer have our teachers to point out the limitations our assumptions put on our thinking and understanding. But we can still examine our own assumptions and we can help others examine theirs. We just need to remember to do it kindly.