THE
DISCONNECT PRINCIPLE

VISIBLE VS. INVISIBLE

How Do We Talk About Others?

When we describe people, what are some of the adjectives we use?

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How about when we are unhappy with or disappointed in someone's performance? What words might we use to describe them?

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Circle the descriptors in your notes above that are clearly observable. Indisputably observable.

Observable?

Read the list below. Put a check mark next to the statements you think describe observable behaviors.

●	1. George was rude to his coworkers this morning.
●	2. Lori took lots of notes during the project meeting.
●	3. Peter is careless.
●	4. Jamie acted pleased with his team.
●	5. Taylor wasted a lot of time yesterday.
●	6. Megan has poor judgment.
●	7. Justin is smart.
●	8. Melissa leaned forward in her chair, frowned and bit her lip while others spoke, and then spoke when it was her turn.
●	9. Jim leaned back, put his feet on the desk, and chewed on his pencil while Greg was showing him how to use the app.
●	10. Linda yawned, rolled her eyes, and looked out the window while I was talking to her about a production problem.

Let's take a closer look at those ten examples.

1. George was rude to his coworkers this morning.

What does 'rude' look like? What might you actually see that would lead you to conclude that George was rude?

Can think of other reasons why George did what he did? Might he have been preoccupied? Worried about something else? Mad at himself? Suffering from a medical condition or just had something in his eye? Might he be an introvert?

You can't see 'rude.' All you can see are behaviors that you interpret as rude. And you could easily be wrong.

2. Lori took lots of notes during the project meeting.

What did you actually see? Presumably you saw her writing a lot. That is observable. But were you looking over her shoulder? Might she have been doodling, planning her day, or making a grocery list? If you didn't actually see what she was writing, you don't know that she was taking notes. You made that assumption because she was in a meeting and seemed diligent.

3. Peter is careless

What does 'careless' look like? Did you watch him make one mistake? Two? More?

No matter how many mistakes you have witnessed, how can you be sure he doesn't care—that he is careless?

Is his desk or appearance messier than you think it should be? Does that equate to carelessness in your mind? Might he just have different priorities, standards, or values than you? What are you actually seeing and what assumptions are you making based on those observations?

You can't see carelessness or thoughtlessness. All you can see are behaviors that you are interpretting through your own lens. And applying your label is narrow minded and hurtful.

4. Jamie acted pleased with his team.

What does 'pleased' look like? Did he smile? Nod? What might he have been smiling or nodding about? Might he have been laughing at his team? If he actually said he was pleased with his team, then what you know is that he said he was pleased with his team. And that's all you know for sure.

5. Taylor wasted a lot of time yesterday

What does 'wasting time' look like? If you think someone is wasting time, I'm guessing they don't seem to be doing what you think they should be doing. What do you actually see? And whether that is appropriate behavior are two different questions. But you can't see 'wasting time.'

6. Megan has poor judgment.

If you think this is observable, you should read the first example in Chapter 1 of my book, *The Power of Clarity*. When someone makes a different decision than we would or doesn't meet our expectations, we often question their judgment. What we ought to do instead is to ask some questions and listen! No, poor judgment is not visible.

7. Justin is smart.

If you think Justin is smart, I suspect he either arrived at the same conclusion you did or he taught you something new – helped you look at something in a new way. The latter often stems from differing perspectives and areas of expertise. Justin's accomplishments and his ideas may impress you, but you can't see 'smart.' Heck, the experts can't even agree on how to measure intelligence. Depending on whom you ask, there are up to twenty different scales: logic-mathematical, emotional, digital, linguistic, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, etc.

8. Melissa leaned forward in her chair, frowned and bit her lip while others spoke, and then spoke when it was her turn.

Finally! A statement limited to observable behavior! Notice that it is all actions. Totally objective. No adjectives. No interpretation, though I suppose we could disagree on what a frown looks like. Either way, this statement is judgment free. Kind of boring too.

9. Jim leaned back, put his feet on the desk, and chewed on his pencil while Greg was showing him how to use the app.

Also all action. No adjectives or labels or assumptions. Might not be worth saying out loud, but at least it's accurate and totally observable.

10. Linda yawned, rolled her eyes, and looked out the window while I was talking to her about a production problem

Observable? Yes. Totally.

Ignore the Invisible; Focus on the Visible
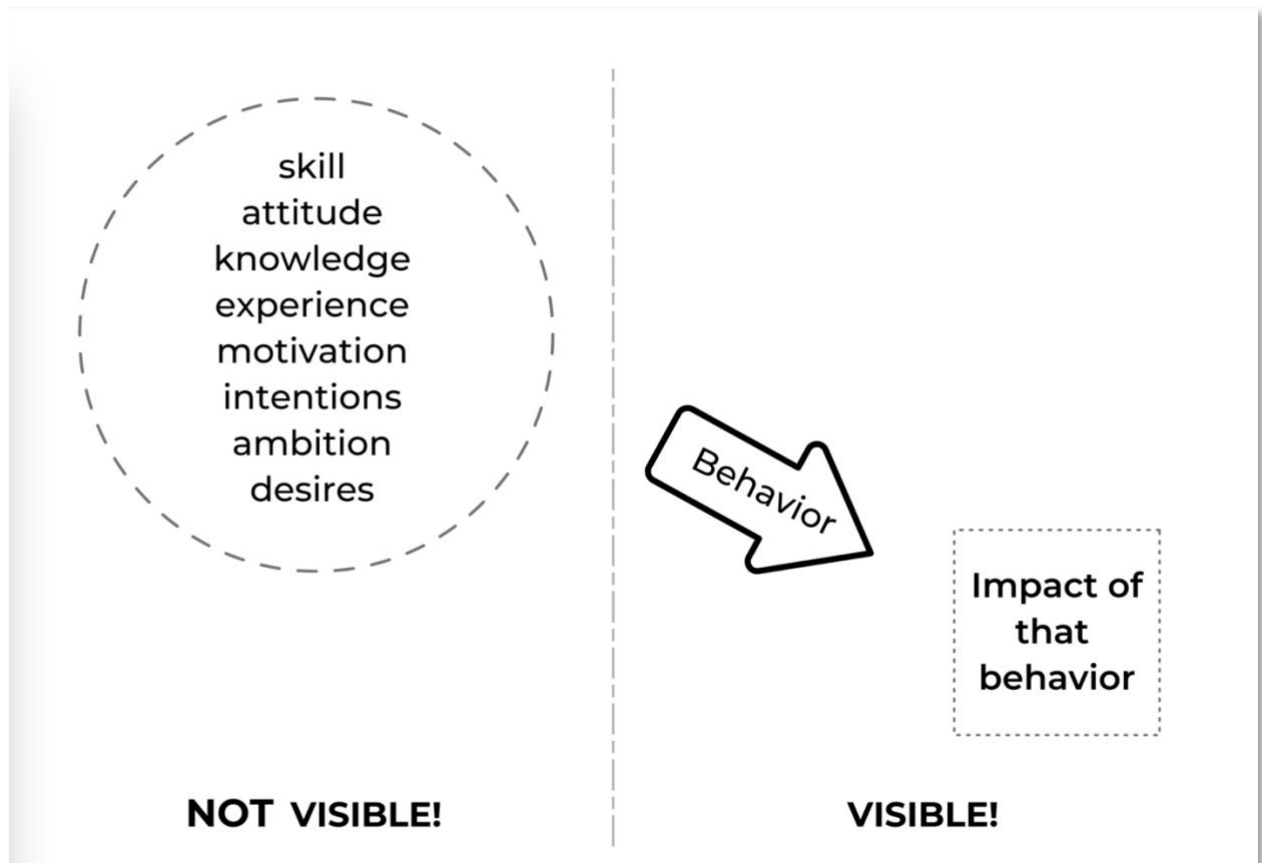
You can't see personal traits such as attitude, ambition, motivation, intelligence, or confidence. Nor carelessness, thoughtlessness, or rudeness. Whenever you make assumptions about these traits based on what you see or hear, you risk being wrong, insulting, and unkind.

Our personal traits, along with the context in which we are operating, drive our behavior. It is our behavior that matters.

Focus on **what you actually see** and the **impact of that behavior**. Be specific, which means don't generalize (e.g., always, never). Understanding what we do or don't do, and the impact of those actions, is how we learn, change, and grow. Labels and assumptions add no value to that objective. Generalizations dilute our focus and lead to defensiveness.

Ready to test your understanding of what is invisible and what is visible?

Test Your Understanding

Rewrite each situation below so that it describes specific observed behavior without judgment or interpretation. It might help if you first circle labels, assumptions, and generalizations (e.g., always, never). To complete each rewrite, make up any details that allow you to focus on specific, observable behavior and its impact.

Compare your thoughts with another person, preferably one situation at a time, starting with the words you circled. That is the best way to ensure you understand this material.

EXAMPLE:

Can you believe how rude John was during the meeting? These are some of our biggest customers and John looked like he could not have cared less! We'll probably lose this order, all because of his poor attitude!

REWRITE:

John was paging through and reading other customer files during our meeting with the customer representatives this morning. He didn't seem to be paying attention to their presentation at all. When his cell phone rang, he got up and left the room for 15 minutes. He didn't excuse himself or apologize when he came back into the meeting. I'm worried about the impact his behavior might have had on our getting this order. What can we do about that and how will we avoid a recurrence?

SITUATION 1:

I'm fed up with Ted's attitude. He always complains and criticizes everything we do. He gripes about overtime, even though he never turns it down, and then turns around and badmouths the organization to customers.

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SITUATION 2:

Who does Marty think he is? Half the time he comes in late. He always disappears when there are lots of heavy things to carry and he skips out at the end of the day more often than not.

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SITUATION 3:

George is irresponsible. He never cleans up his truck and today I found out he took equipment off Joe's truck and didn't put it back. He's making a bad impression on customers and making others late for their jobs too.

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SITUATION 4:

Beth is so devious and thinks she can get away with anything. Other people have told me that when I'm not in the office, she wastes time making personal phone calls or bends someone's ear to talk about her new boyfriend. I've even heard that she spends lots of time in the ladies room so she can be on Facebook undisturbed.

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SITUATION 5:

Amy is so insecure. Her lack of confidence prevents her from taking on new responsibilities. On top of that, she is so introverted she doesn't have any friends at work. If we could get her to come out of her shell, she would be happier and more productive.
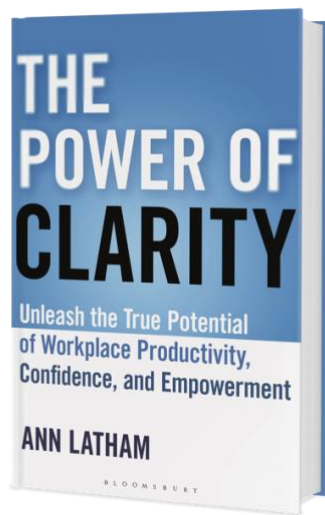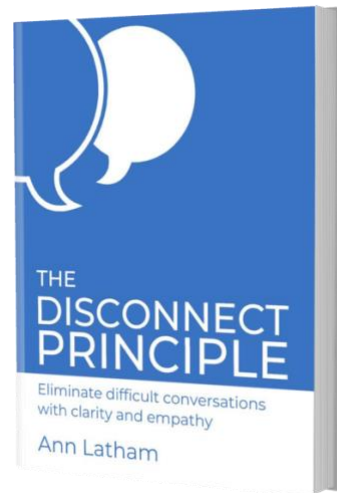
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> you will love *The Power of Clarity*!

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