NCLGBA

SEEING YOURSELF IN THE DRAMA TRIANGLE

KNOW THYSELF - CHANGE STARTS FROM WITHIN

LEAD CONCEPT: THE DRAMA TRIANGLE

SKILL SET: *1) Check Inferences*

>   *"THERE IS A CRACK IN EVERYTHING.... THAT'S HOW THE LIGHT GETS IN"*
>   *- Leonard Cohen*

>   *"THE EXTENT TO WHICH WE EXERCISE AND DEVELOP (OUR HUMAN ENDOWMENTS) EMPOWERS US TO FULFILL OUR UNIQUELY HUMAN POTENTIAL. BETWEEN STIMULUS AND RESPONSE IS OUR GREATEST POWER - THE FREEDOM TO CHOOSE."*

>   *- Stephen R. Covey, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*

>   *"IF THE FRONT-LINE PEOPLE ARE TREATED LIKE HEROES, THEY WILL ACT HEROICALLY."*

>   **- Tom Peters**

PROBLEM SOLVING 1

MODEL: THE DRAMA TRIANGLE

Foundations of the Drama Triangle

 A. People carry out roles that have become necessary to affirm how they feel about themselves and others.

B. When the feelings toward self and others are based on discounts, that person must assume a consistent view to make the outcomes of his/her relationship predictable.

The Roles in the Drama Triangle

A. Persecutor
1) Criticizes others without understanding the reasons behind the others actions, or assumes   a negative intent when it did not exist.
2) Usually gives judgmental and non-specific criticism.

Examples of Persecutor Behavior:
- ➢ A manager does not ask staff for their input because "they never have anything useful to say".
- ➢ Personalizing criticism: i.e., using terms like "bad attitude", "unprofessional", or "paranoid".
- ➢ Over-generalizing criticism: i.e., "you never" or "you always".

B. Victim

1) Role assumed when a person discounts his/her ability and relies on someone else to "take care of them" or criticize them.
2) The role is assumed when one places the responsibility for their success of failure on someone else rather than solving their own problems (when they have the ability to solve those problems themselves).

Examples of Victim Behavior:
- ➢ Failing to confront another person whose behavior is creating problems.
- ➢ Blindly blaming one's self when things do not work out as expected.
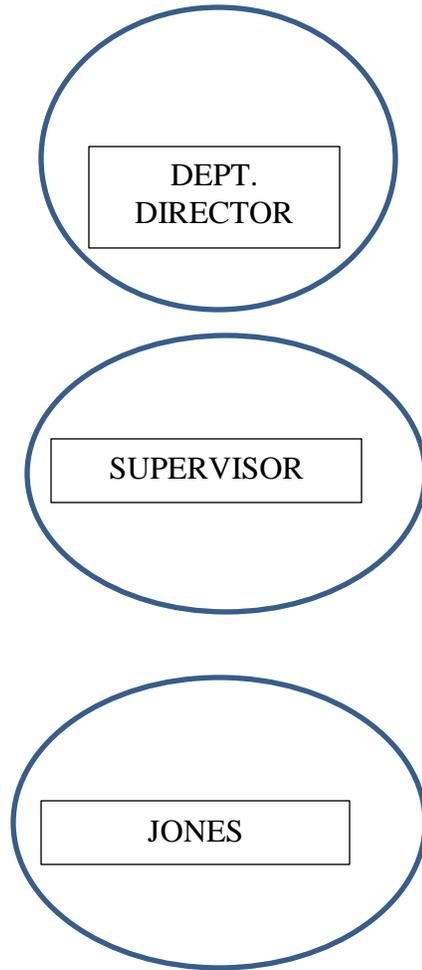- ➢ Discounting one's own ability to succeed.

C. Rescuer

1) Assumed when one discounts another's ability to handle their own problems, or when one takes responsibility for doing for the other person what they could do for themselves
2) Triggered by the persecutor/victim interactions
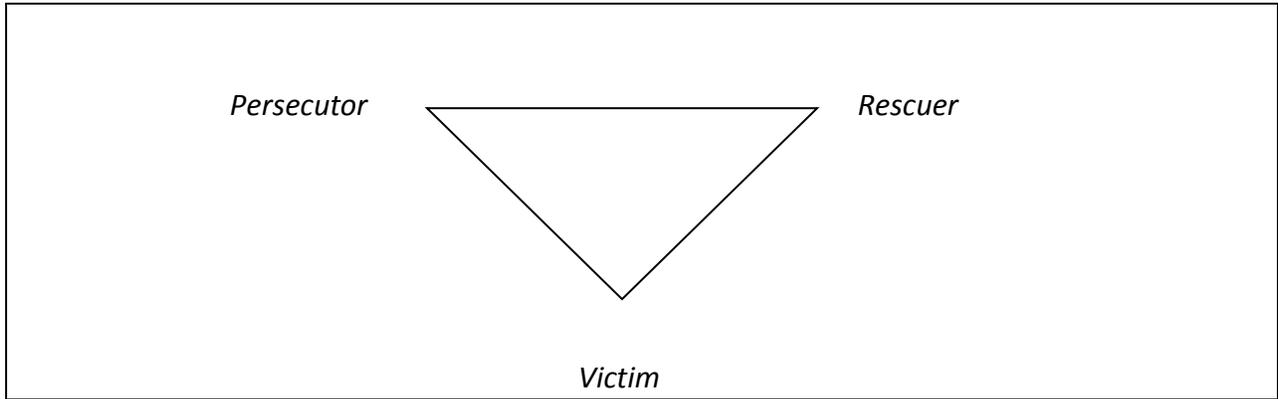
Examples of Rescuer Behavior:
- ➢ Giving suggestions without inquiring about other's ideas.
- ➢ Negotiating compromises between Persecutors and Victims.

A PROBLEM SOLVING INTERACTION

DEPT.
DIRECTOR

SUPERVISOR

JONES

THE DRAMA TRIANGLE

Persecutor   *Rescuer*

                              Victim

GETTING OUT OF THE DRAMA TRIANGLE

Persecutor   *Rescuer*

                                        Becoming
                                        Functional

                              Victim
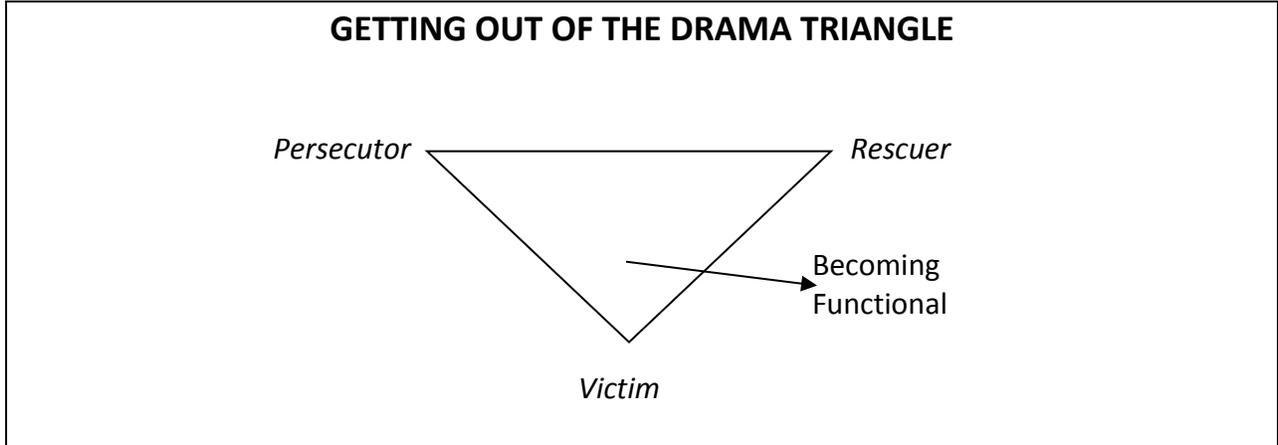
PROBLEM SOLVING 1

Implications of the Drama Triangle

A)   The Drama Triangle acts like a magnet; when one person enters the Triangle, others tend to join in dysfunctional behavior. For example, if a colleague complains about all the work she has to do (Victim behavior), we tend to agree by comparing how busy we are (Victim behavior), or giving her suggestions on how to deal with her work load.

B)   In top-down authority structures, supervisors and managers are often expected to take on dysfunctional roles: particularly Persecutor and Rescuer.

C)   People work most effectively together when they take responsibility for their own behavior and problems.

D)   Our expectations of others are usually met. Playing the Drama Triangle is self-sealing and self-fulfilling.

E)   Every Victim plays a part in his/her own victimization.

F)   Every Rescuer/Victim transaction ultimately turns into a Persecutor/Victim transaction.

G)   Playing the Triangle can have the following effects:

   * Causes miscommunication
   * Deters effective problem solving
   * Impedes commitment and performance
   * Lessens accountability
   * Creates organizational defensive routines
   * Discourages responsibility-taking

H)   Keys to staying out of the Triangle
>   1) See oneself in the Triangle – Self Reflection
>   * Recognize that problems usually stem from multiple people playing roles in the Triangle.
>   * Realize that one's governing values precipitate the Triangle.
>   2) Take the risk to step out – we all make choices whether to play roles in the Triangle
>   3) Use appropriate problem solving skills that:
>>   ➢ *Provide valid information*
>>   ➢ *Enable all parties to make informed choices*
>>   ➢ *Commit to the choice and constant monitoring of its implementation*

PROBLEM SOLVING 1

SKILL DEVELOPMENT EXERCISE (PART A)

LEAD CONCEPT I: THE DRAMA TRIANGLE

Directions: **Identify the roles played by the characters in the following situations.**

(1) Milton (the supervisor - speaking roughly), "Bill, can't you do anything right? This report is a mess!"

(2) Bill (contritely), "I did my best. I guess I'm just not very good with figures."

(3) George (a friend of Bill's and a co-worker of Milton), "Milton, I know for a fact that Bill put in a lot of time on that report and has been trying real hard. I think you are being too tough on him."

(1) Milton (loudly), "Bug off George! I know what I'm doing."

(5) Bill (with a worried look), " Don't blame George sir, he was only trying to help me out. I know you have every right to be mad at me."

(6) George (angrily), "Bill, you shouldn't take all that crap. You let people step all over you."

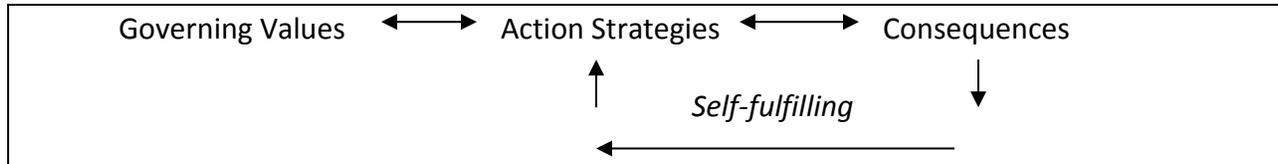(7) Bill (softly), "I'm sorry George, I didn't mean to upset you."

(8) Milton (exasperated), "Both of you shut up and get back to work. Bill, you go back to work on that report and get it right this time. If you don't, I'm going to have to talk to the department head about you...."

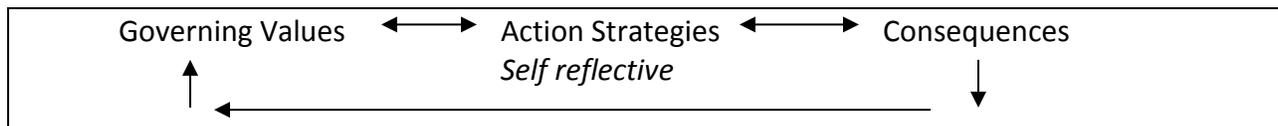(9) Bill (contritely), "Yes sir, I'll do my best."

(10) George (aside to Bill), "Let me know if you need help."

PROBLEM SOLVING 1

SINGLE-LOOP LEARNING

Governing Values ←→ Action Strategies ←→ Consequences

Self-fulfilling

DOUBLE-LOOP LEARNING

Governing Values ←→ Action Strategies ←→ Consequences

Self reflective

PSYCHOLOGICAL BLINDERS
THAT KEEP US FROM SEEING OURSELVES IN THE TRIANGLE

1. The Self-Fulfilling Prophesy – we get what we think we will get
2. Self-Justification – we always want to right; even if that means we are ineffective
3. Self-Deception – it's never my fault; it is someone else's

Take the Risk to Step Out of the Triangle

"The extent to which we exercise and develop (our human endowments) empowers us to fulfill our uniquely human potential. Between stimulus and response is our greatest power – the freedom to choose."
    - Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People (1989)*

PROBLEM SOLVING 1

THE SELF-FULFILLING ROLE OF PERSECUTOR IN THE DRAMA TRIANGLE

GOVERNING VALUES	ACTION STRATEGIES	CONSEQUENCES
Others are not as competent, as trustworthy, or as motivated as I am. The actions of most people are driven by negative intent.	▪ Giving judgmental and non-specific criticism. ▪ Not asking stakeholders for their input because, "They never have anything useful to contribute". ▪ Personalizing criticism, i.e., using terms like "bad attitude", "unprofessional", or "paranoid". ▪ Over-generalizing criticism; i.e., "You never" or or "You always". ▪ Warning or threatening others (often in anger) without first giving them an opportunity to discuss the problem. ▪ Giving directives and orders in non-emergencies. ▪ Micro-managing and usurping the chain of command. ▪ Focusing on failures and violations rather than successes. ▪ Setting up problem solving as "win-lose" struggles that must be won.	➢ Others become submissive and defensive ➢ Others avoid dealing with the Persecutor ➢ Others defer decisions to the Persecutor ➢ Others feel demoralized, lack self esteem, and confidence ➢ Limits discussable options ➢ Others avoid taking responsibility for fear of being blamed and demeaned

PROBLEM SOLVING 1

THE SELF-FULFILLING ROLE OF RESCUER IN THE DRAMA TRIANGLE

| GOVERNING VALUES	ACTION STRATEGIES	CONSEQUENCES
Others cannot solve problems without my help; it is my duty to solve problems for others. I can make you better and happier because I can solve your problems better than you.	▪ Solving problems for others. ▪ Giving suggestions without inquiring about the other person's reasoning ▪ Negotiating compromises between Persecutors and Victims. ▪ Giving advice without being asked for help. ▪ Failing to delegate	➢ Others become dependent on the Rescuer (play the Victim role) ➢ Others avoid taking responsibility, deferring instead to the Rescuer ➢ The Victim blames (Persecutes) the Rescuer when the solution does not work effectively ➢ The Rescuer feels resentful and unappreciated

PROBLEM SOLVING 1

THE SELF-FULFILLING ROLE OF VICTIM IN THE DRAMA TRIANGLE

GOVERNING VALUES	ACTION STRATEGIES	CONSEQUENCES
Others are responsible for my situation. Due to factors such as risk, lack of authority, or inability, I cannot solve problems.	▪ Failing to confront another person whose behavior is creating problems. ▪ Blindly blaming one self when things do not work out as expected. ▪ Blaming others for one's own failures. ▪ Not trying to accomplish things on the assumption that the effort will result in failure. ▪ Abdicating responsibility, for example, telling a staff member to "handle a problem" without discussing how he or she proposes to deal with the problem. ▪ Acting helpless, for example, whining or complaining about "what they are doing to me" or responds to suggestions by saying "Yes, but…"	➢ Others observe that you act incompetent and inadequate ➢ You avoiding risks ➢ Others observe that you defer to them rather than taking responsibility ➢ Others observe that you refuse to take responsibility or that you hold yourself totally responsible when others share in that responsibility

PROBLEM SOLVING 1

APPLICATION EXERCISE
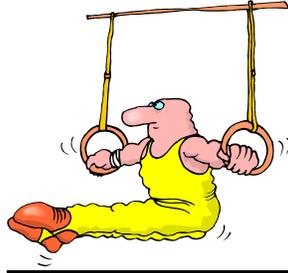
LEAD CONCEPT II: THE DRAMA TRIANGLE

Directions: **Answer the following questions about your tendencies regarding the Drama Triangle.   Discuss your answers with other participants in groups.**

A)   What role(s) do you think you tend to play in the Triangle?

Points to Consider
*   All of us have played all three roles but we may display those roles in different patterns. One pattern, called a *life stance*, occurs when one tends to play the same role repeatedly.

*   Another pattern occurs when we play two roles that relate to one another logically. This tendency is called a ***connected pattern.*** For example, many people who tend to play Persecutor also slip into the Rescuer role. For example, a supervisor directly questions a staff member's ability because she made errors on a report and then corrects the report for her.

*   A final pattern occurs when we play all three roles depending on the situation. This response is termed **situational.**

B)   What are the behavioral cues that indicate you are playing a particular role?

  * Refer back to the definitions (the previous three pages) for cues applicable to each role.

C) **What are the "triggers" that induce you to play a particular role?**

Points to Consider:
  The Victim Role may be "triggered" by
        * being late   * miscalculating figures
        * being around a certain person

  The Rescuer Role may be "triggered" by
        * another person's tears   * dealing with one's children
        * buffering employees from an angry manager

  The Persecutor Role may be "triggered" by
        * methodical work   * grammatical errors
        * tight deadlines

PROBLEM SOLVING 1

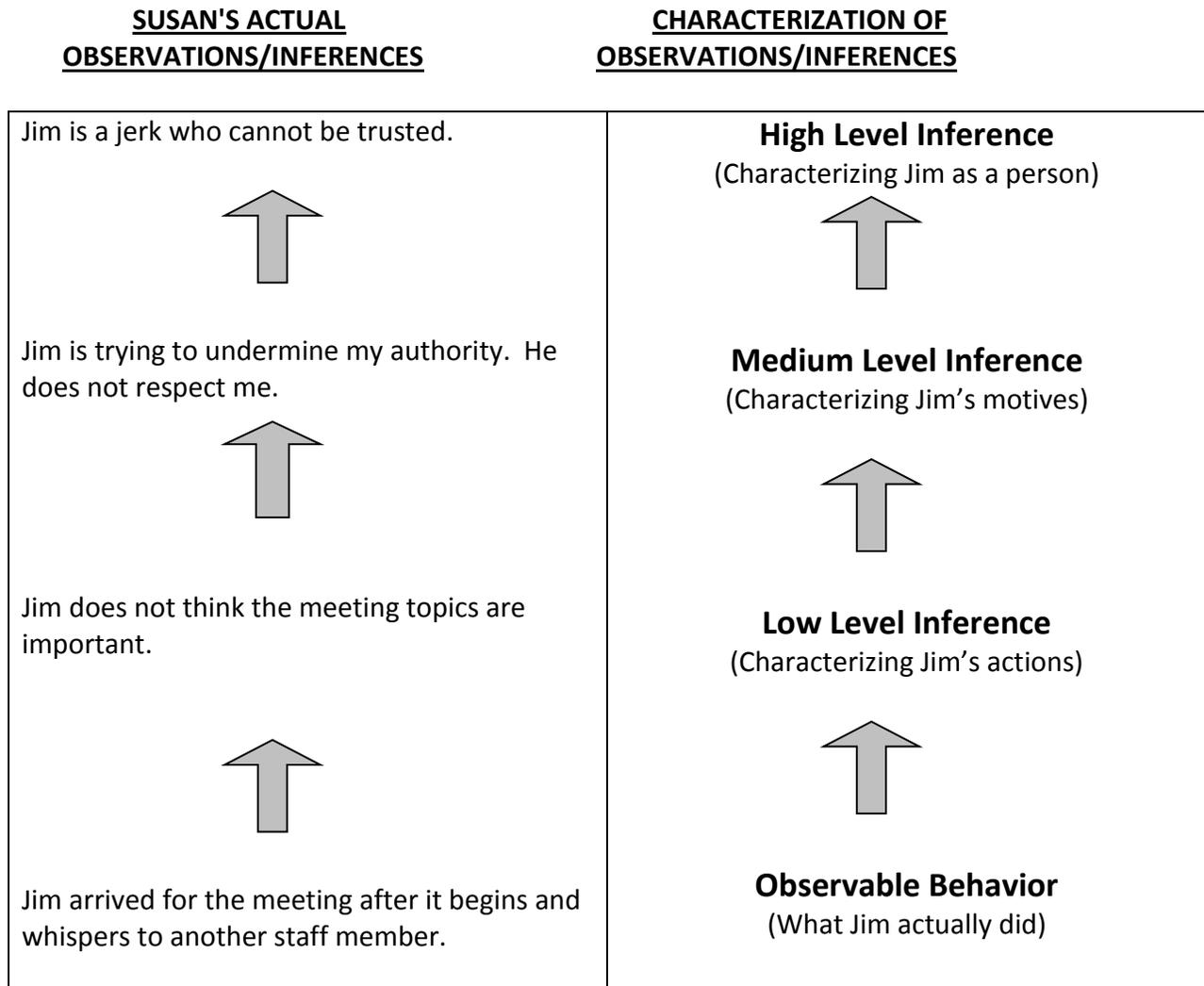## SKILL #1: CHECK INFERENCES

The Ladder of Inferences:

Inferences are the meaning we attribute to observable data; they are conclusions we reach based on known information. Sometimes inferences are helpful, particularly when they are correct. For instance, a police employee correctly infers that a suspect is acting suspiciously and, therefore, the police employee takes extra safety precautions. Other times inferences are destructive, particularly when they are wrong; for example, a a manager assumes that she cannot discuss *any* problems with her boss, because the last time she did her boss got upset.

Accurate or inaccurate, everyone makes inferences; as human beings we make them as naturally as we breath. Nevertheless, managers can learn to be effective by being aware of how they make inferences and by learning to check them out.

The following example demonstrates how we make inferences. Suppose that Susan is a manager who is conducting a meeting with her staff. One of the staff members, Jim, enters the meeting after it begins. When he arrives he turns to the person next to him and begins whispering for the next ten minutes of the meeting. Susan observes the behavior - Jim arrives after the meeting begins and whispers to another staff member. She then begins making negative inferences as described on the next page

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HOW WE MAKE INFERENCES

SUSAN'S ACTUAL OBSERVATIONS/INFERENCES	CHARACTERIZATION OF OBSERVATIONS/INFERENCES
Jim is a jerk who cannot be trusted.	**High Level Inference** (Characterizing Jim as a person)
Jim is trying to undermine my authority. He does not respect me.	**Medium Level Inference** (Characterizing Jim's motives)
Jim does not think the meeting topics are important.	**Low Level Inference** (Characterizing Jim's actions)
Jim arrived for the meeting after it begins and whispers to another staff member.	**Observable Behavior** (What Jim actually did)

Notice that the negative inferences that Susan makes place her into the Drama Triangle. **It is critical to recognize that people act on the basis of their inferences; a negative inference represents a discount.** Therefore, if Susan leaves the meeting without checking out her inferences with Jim, she will act on them. For example, she will probably avoid Jim except when she has to deal with him. She may also complain about Jim behind his back. Too, she may fail to share critical information with Jim that she does share with other staff.

Quite likely Jim will observe Susan's behavior toward him. **Assuming he fails to check out his inferences with her, he will probably begin to make inferences about her behavior!** As a result, he may infer that she cannot be trusted as well. As a result, his actions reflect his negative perceptions. He begins to avoid her, talks behind her back, and fails to share critical information with her.

Pretty soon, Susan finds herself in a self-fulfilling prophecy. At the conclusion of the meeting, she assumed she could not trust Jim, and now, her assumption is being confirmed - he acts mistrustfully toward her. **As a result, she assumes her original inference was accurate!** (Note also that Jim is doing the same thing; he is climbing the ladder of inferences without checking them out. If either party checks out their inferences they can break the cycle of this self-fulfilling prophesy.)

How to Check Inferences

The skill of checking inferences involves three steps.

Step #1: Describe the behavior that has led you to make the inference. This shares valid information with the other person so they can understand what behavior has led you to make the inference(s).

Step #2: ***Share the inference at the lowest level.*** *By sharing* lower level inferences (inferences about the behavior) the manager or supervisor stays out of the Persecutor role, is less likely to contribute to a defensive climate, and minimizes potential inaccuracies that can occur by jumping several levels of inferences. By sharing inferences at the highest level ("you are a jerk who cannot be trusted"), the manager will likely precipitate an angry defensive reaction.

Step #3: ***Ask for the other person's perspective.*** This allows you to go right to the source and validate, or invalidate the inference.

Illustration:
Step #1: Susan says, "Jim, I observed that you arrived after the meeting had begun and began whispering to another staff member",
Step #2: When you did I felt that you did not think what we were working on was important.
Step #3: Would you share your views regarding my impressions?

Perhaps in response, Jim would agree he was being rude because he feels the meetings are a waste of time. Susan should then employ a problem solving skill we will learn later, *Skill #3: When the Other Owns the Problem - Facilitate Problem Solving.* In such an event, Susan would have clarified the nature of the problem so that she could begin resolving it - as we shall see later.

Alternatively, Susan may discover that there is no problem - that her inference was incorrect. Jim may say, "I am sorry, I was trying **not** to be rude. I am sorry that I was late, I wanted to catch up on what I had missed, and I thought I could do so discreetly by asking another staff member to catch me up." Obviously, such a response probably indicates Susan has made an inaccurate inference.

The term "probably" was used in the last sentence because there is no guarantee that Jim is being truthful. It is our experience that people will tend to be truthful when the skill of *Checking Inferences* is used.   If Jim is not being truthful, Susan will likely observe other behaviors, such as a pattern of arriving late, of criticism behind her back, or of withholding information that would cause her to infer that Jim is not truthful. Once again, she can refer to those behaviors to check out her inferences further.

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