11.7: Stasis

Stasis means "at rest." Think of when oil and water mix. After a while the oil and water settle and there is a layer of oil and a layer of water. The combination is at rest. You mix it up but it returns to its stasis position where the oil and water separate.

Like the oil and water, people like to find their stasis, or comfortable "at rest" position. Once we have found a personal

11.7.1: "Water and oil" (CC BY-SA 4.0; Victor Blacus via Wikimedia Commons)
stasis, we desire to maintain it. Think about your habits for a moment. From where you like to park your car for school or work, the pattern you follow when you get up in the morning, where you like to sit in a movie theater and so on. We strive for comfort so we find habits and keep them as they provide us with a degree of comfort.

Reality testing can take seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, or years to do. We create a reality that makes us comfortable. That reality becomes our stasis on the subject. Stasis is the absence of change in one or more of our realities for some extended period of time. Stasis refers to the existing state of things; leaving things as they are without modification or alteration.

Because we naturally want to maintain our stasis of an environment, a strong bias occurs in the perception process. We use the perception process to interpret the environment in such a way as to maintain our stasis, even if it is an incorrect interpretation. As we take in more information about ourselves and life around us, we do our best to view things as conforming to our reality which allows us to maintain our stasis. Non-critical thinkers would rather be comfortably wrong, than uncomfortably correct. And a perception process that naturally strives to maintain our stasis, helps us stay in our comfort zone.

One of my favorite definitions of a critical thinker is someone who is willing to challenge his or her deepest held beliefs. Thus, the critical thinker is not afraid of being uncomfortable as he challenges his stasis. The critical thinker would rather be uncomfortably right than comfortably wrong.

Let us imagine in the 2016 Presidential election you supported Hillary Clinton. This would be your stasis. You heard a news story where more emails were found on her server that could have contained secret information. As a Clinton supporter, you would have been more likely to excuse those emails as being careless and not change your stasis on Secretary of State Clinton. That would be more comfortable than thinking that Clinton actually broke the law.

Stasis is a person’s personal comfort zone. You may have had a relationship with someone, or you may be having this relationship now, that is just continuing because you have been together for a long time. In the back of your mind you have this feeling that it is over, but you continue it anyway. The “stasis” of this relationship is so powerful that as long as you have no significant reason to change, you just hang on.

You may actually look for things to get angry about with the other person that eventually leads to the big argument and eventual breakup. Later you look back and think, “I should have broken up earlier. I was in the relationship too long.” Why didn’t you just break up and start fresh? You didn’t because that would be a serious change in our stasis. So, we end up staying with someone longer than we should.

We all strive for a comfortable feeling, physical and/or emotional contentment. We want to be in a spot where we can feel at ease. Stasis is that spot. While experiencing stasis, we feel physically and emotionally content. Once we are on stasis, we strive to stay there. As Communication Theorist Paul Watzlawick again looks at the realities we not only create, but also fight to keep them from changing. In this quote he argues that “We use the perception process to ‘shore-up’ our reality.”

“Our everyday, traditional ideas of reality are delusions which we spend substantial parts of our daily lives shoring up, even at the considerable risk of trying to force facts to fit our definition of reality instead of vice versa. And the most dangerous delusion of all is that there is only one reality. What there are, in fact, are many different versions of reality, some of which are contradictory, but all of which are the results of communication and not reflections of
Stasis does not mean just feeling good or happy. Stasis means feeling comfortable. People can have a positive or negative outlook concerning the world around them. So, a person can actually feel comfortable being miserable.

Negative people generally have a depressed view of their environment. That depressed view is their stasis. When something good happens to them, it actually makes them uncomfortable. I had a student like this once who won a car at a supermarket give away. Instead of being excited about winning the car, she complained that now she had to pay taxes on it. Having a downside to winning a car allowed her to maintain her negative stasis.

Upbeat people tend to view their environment optimistically. Bad things happening to them make them uncomfortable, so they will look for the “good” side of the experience. I recently had to spend six days in the hospital. To keep the experience in line with my generally positive stasis, I remember the nutritional information I received, which is helping me eat healthier and I could see a benefit from my hospital stay. We attempt to perceive the world in a manner which conforms to our stasis, because being knocked off our stasis makes us uncomfortable.

Remember when you finally broke up with that special someone? Originally your stasis was to think of that person as someone special and important. You only saw those things which reinforced that stasis. Now you begin to perceive that person without the necessity of confirming your stasis. You begin to notice other aspects of his or her personality. All of a sudden you notice faults that you hadn’t noticed before. Suddenly you wonder, “What was I thinking when I was going with that person?”

Our realities of people, events and things in our environment are individually created by the same selection, sorting, and interpreting process as others use to also uniquely create their perceptions of people, events, and things in their environment.

As humans, we are motivated to try, both psychologically and physiologically, to keep our perceptions consistent. We strive to maintain this consistency in thought and action. We will then do the best we can to defend our reality as being the most accurate as compared to someone else’s. To the extent that individual perceptions about the environment differ, we will have difficulty in reaching a common understanding of what is happening in the environment.

Professors of Communication, James McCroskey and Lawrence Wheeless write,

“We perceive or misperceive according to learned habits of recognizing and interpreting the nature of stimulus against some background or setting.” This makes it more difficult and demanding to establish communication with each other. Only when we understand that there may be more than one valid reality of the environment, can we begin to realize the importance of communicating with others.

One theory of communication claims that we only communicate to stay on stasis. While comfortably watching a movie on television, we become thirsty. We are no longer feeling physically content. Our thirst has knocked us off our stasis. We ask someone in the kitchen to please bring us something to drink. Once we have something to drink, we are again comfortable and back in our stasis.
Reference
