

Horn Effect

Idea In Short

The Horn Effect is one of the most powerful models in psychology. It is a tendency to allow your opinion of another person to be influenced by either an unfavourable (horn) first impression.

An effect opposite to the Halo Effect is the equally insidious Horn Effect, also known as a blind spot. It is a cognitive bias that unduly affects one's perception of an individual based on a single negative trait. For example, an observer might view a physically unattractive person as morally inferior to an attractive person. If a person lacks a key trait, others might generalize this person as lacking in other traits as well.

One simple example: If one is frequently late for work (even though there may be important extenuating circumstances known to the company), the word around the office is that (s)he is "not committed" or even "negligent" regarding work tasks.

Case for US car manufacturing industry

For years, American car manufacturers have battled the mistaken public perception that cars made by Japanese companies are of significantly better quality. This misconception remains even when American car manufacturers use identical components from the same suppliers and assemble their cars using identical manufacturing processes. Even today, Japanese-brand cars resell for much higher prices than American-brand cars.

Insight

My advice to leaders is to address the main behavior problem head-on. Determine which triggers tend to cause the bad behavior and make a plan to act differently. Then, inform others that you recognize the problem and the effect it has on others. Commit yourselves to

do better. Simply acknowledging the problem goes a long way in changing peoples' perceptions. Understand that perception is reality and be conscious of the image you are projecting. People judge the proverbial book by its cover. Your social circle might have a certain perception of your personality and abilities that vary from the reality. Understand that your identity and prospects are based on others' perceptions of you. Endeavor to connect people's perception to the reality. Look and play your role. Begin by reading the seminal article on the topic of personal branding, 'The Brand Called You', written by renowned management author, Tom Peters.

Summary

Perception shapes opportunity. Regularly audit how others see you versus how you see yourself. Closing that gap through consistent behavior and clear communication is a practical leadership skill worth developing.