

Attention Creates Reality

The Art of Paying Attention Series – Episode 2

Look around the space you are in and find everything blue. Perhaps you notice a book cover, a cushion, someone's clothing, a picture on the wall or a glimpse of sky through the window. Take a few seconds and really look.

Now, without looking again, how many red things did you see?

Chances are there were red objects within your field of vision, yet because you weren't looking for them, many never entered your conscious awareness. They didn't suddenly appear or disappear. The environment remained the same, but your experience of it was shaped by where you placed your attention.

It is such a simple experiment, yet it opens an intriguing doorway into one of the most powerful capacities we possess. We cannot consciously process every sound, sensation, movement, object, conversation and piece of information surrounding us at once, so our systems continually filter an extraordinary amount of information. We select, prioritise and notice some things while overlooking others. This raises a fascinating question: **if attention shapes perception, how much of our experienced reality is being shaped by where we repeatedly place our attention?**

The lens through which we see

We often assume we are simply seeing reality as it is, yet two people can experience the same conversation, event or environment and leave with remarkably different stories about what happened. Previous experiences influence us, as do expectations, beliefs, emotional states and the meanings we have already attached to similar situations. Attention is another part of that lens.

If I continually ask, *What's wrong?*, my attention becomes highly skilled at locating problems. If I enter the same situation asking, *What's possible here?*, I begin searching for openings, resources and alternatives that may previously have escaped my awareness. Neither question necessarily changes the external circumstances in that moment, but each directs my perception along a different pathway.

This does not mean we should ignore difficulty, pain or injustice in favour of endlessly searching for something positive. Some things need our full attention precisely because they are uncomfortable. A struggling relationship needs to be seen, a body in pain deserves to be listened to and injustice requires awareness before meaningful change can occur. The deeper invitation is to notice whether our attention is helping us see clearly enough to choose our next response, or whether it has become trapped inside a familiar story. Sometimes the world hasn't changed at all. **Our lens has.**

Language directs attention

Language adds another fascinating layer because words do more than describe what we have already noticed; they can influence what we look for next.

Consider the difference between asking, *Why does this always happen to me?* and *What is this situation showing me?* One question searches for evidence of repetition and perhaps powerlessness, while the other directs attention towards information and possibility. Similarly, *What's wrong with this child?* sends us looking in a very different direction from *What might this child be communicating?*

This becomes especially powerful in learning. A child who repeatedly hears, *You're not good at math*, may begin noticing every mistake as evidence that the statement is true, while overlooking persistence, improvement or the possibility that they simply haven't encountered an approach that makes sense to them yet. Change the language and attention begins searching somewhere else.

Our questions are, in many ways, **search engines for attention**. Ask a different question and an entirely different set of results may enter awareness.

This means the stories we tell ourselves matter too. If I repeatedly identify as someone who is terrible with names, unlucky in relationships, hopeless with technology or incapable of learning something new, I may unconsciously collect evidence that reinforces that identity. The story becomes familiar, the familiar becomes easier to notice and the cycle continues.

What might change if, rather than immediately believing every familiar story, we became curious about what else might be present?

The body follows attention

Attention is not confined to thought. Our bodies participate in whatever we attend to.

Try a simple experiment. Think briefly about something unresolved that has been worrying you and notice what happens in your breathing, jaw, shoulders, chest and belly. There is nothing to change; simply observe.

Now bring your attention to something genuinely nourishing. It might be someone you love, an animal, the ocean, a favourite place, a memory that makes you smile or something for which you feel deeply grateful. Again, notice your body.

The purpose is not to label one response as good and the other as bad. It is simply to recognise that changing the focus of attention can change our internal experience. Our bodies are participating in the conversation, offering another layer of information about what we are giving our energy and awareness to.

What are you watering?

Nature gives us a beautifully simple metaphor. Imagine two garden beds. Every day you water one carefully while giving almost nothing to the other. Over time, it would hardly surprise you that one flourishes while the other struggles.

Attention can work in a similar way, not because ignoring something magically makes it disappear, but because repeated attention gives something time, energy and relationship. We can water skills, relationships, curiosity, gratitude and possibility, just as we can continually water fear, resentment or stories about who we think we are.

This brings us to a deceptively powerful question:

What am I watering without even realising it?

There is also a practical creative pathway here. What we attend to influences perception; perception influences the meaning we make; meaning influences choices; repeated choices become actions and patterns; and those patterns can eventually shape relationships, skills, environments and lived experience.

In this very grounded sense, attention participates in creation but what if we take the conversation further?



A quantum curiosity

One experiment that profoundly expanded my own thinking about possibility is the double-slit experiment.

At the quantum scale, the behaviour we observe can depend upon how an experiment is measured. When information about which path a quantum object takes becomes available, the resulting pattern changes. This has inspired enormous scientific and philosophical discussion about measurement, observation and the nature of physical reality.

It is important not to leap from this fascinating physics to a claim it does not establish. The double-slit experiment does not demonstrate that human consciousness simply thinks physical reality into existence, nor does it prove that directing our attention towards something will magically make it happen.

For me, however, its value extends beyond what it proves. It opens a doorway to a much bigger question.

What if there is more possibility available than we are currently perceiving?

Quantum physics describes possibility in very particular scientific ways, while wisdom traditions, philosophy and metaphysical perspectives have used different language to explore ideas such as consciousness, interconnectedness, universal intelligence and the field. These concepts are not interchangeable, and we do not need to collapse them into one explanation in order to remain curious.

Perhaps the more interesting invitation is to stand at the edge of what we know and ask: **Are we merely passive observers of reality, or are we participants in our experience of it?**

Imagine someone entering a situation carrying the belief, *There is nothing for me here*. Their attention may naturally gather evidence that supports that conclusion. Another person enters the same environment asking, *What possibilities haven't I noticed yet?* They speak to someone different, notice an invitation, investigate an idea or follow a thread of curiosity. One apparently insignificant moment leads to another and, months later, their experience of life may look very different.

Did their attention somehow collapse a quantum timeline? We cannot scientifically claim that. Did their attention influence which possibilities they perceived, explored and ultimately experienced? Very likely.

Perhaps attention does not give us complete control over reality, but it may offer us far more **participation** in our experience than we commonly recognise.

Attention as a superpower

This is where attention begins to feel almost like a forgotten superpower, not because looking at something magically makes it appear, but because attention creates relationship.

When we attend deeply to another person, relationship can deepen. When we attend to a skill, it develops. When we attend to the body, its subtler signals may become easier to recognise. When we attend to an idea, we give it somewhere to grow. When we attend to possibility, we may begin seeing pathways that were previously outside our awareness.

Attention therefore does more than select information. It brings us into relationship with whatever receives it and humans possess another extraordinary capacity that takes this even further. We can give our attention to something that does not yet exist.

We call it **imagination**.

Before a garden is planted, someone can imagine it. Before music is played, it may already be heard inwardly. Before a building stands, someone has pictured a form that isn't yet there. Communities, inventions, stories, works of art and entirely new approaches to learning have all existed as possibilities before becoming tangible experiences.

Imagination allows us to explore what **could be**, rather than limiting our attention to what already is. **What if imagination is one of the ways we explore possibility before possibility becomes experience?**

We do not need to know the answer in order to explore the question.

Throughout history, humanity has repeatedly mistaken the boundary of current comprehension for the boundary of reality. Things once unimaginable became ordinary, ideas once confidently accepted were revised and our models of the universe continue to expand. There is every reason to believe that some things we confidently assume today will also be reconsidered by generations to come. Perhaps the invitation is to remain curious enough to question what we know, discerning enough not to believe everything, and imaginative enough to explore what we don't.

This week's experiment: Change the question

For the next seven days, notice one question you habitually ask yourself. It might be *Why am I so tired? Why does nobody listen? Why is everything so difficult?* or another question that has become so familiar you barely notice yourself asking it.

There is no need to judge or suppress the question. Simply become aware of it and then experiment with directing your attention somewhere new.

You might ask:

- What would support me today?
- What haven't I noticed yet?
- What is within my influence?
- What is working?
- What can I learn here?
- Where is the opportunity?
- What possibility might I normally overlook?

Then observe what happens. Does changing the question change what you notice? Do different conversations, ideas or possibilities enter your awareness?

This is not an exercise in forced positivity, nor is it about pretending everything is wonderful. It is an experiment in attention.

At the end of each day, you might record what you noticed: a conversation, an idea, a book, an invitation, something in nature, a synchronicity, a new thought, something your body responded to or perhaps nothing unusual at all. The purpose is not to prove a theory or force meaning onto coincidence. You are simply becoming the researcher of your own experience.

What are you choosing to nourish?

Attention also becomes powerful when we turn it towards other people. Notice someone's kindness, effort, creativity or growth and then tell them. A simple acknowledgement such as, *I noticed how patiently you listened*, or *I saw how much care you put into that*, can change the quality of a relationship because our attention communicates what we value.

This is another way attention participates in creation. What we notice influences what we acknowledge, what we acknowledge can influence what is nurtured and what we repeatedly nurture has a way of growing.

So, as you move through the coming week, notice the questions you ask, the stories you water, the possibilities you overlook and the responses of your body. Occasionally pause and ask yourself:

Is this where I choose to place my attention?

Attention notices possibility and imagination allows us to explore possibility. Choice allows us to participate and intention, which we will explore in another conversation,

asks an entirely new question. **Knowing what I now notice, what do I choose to nurture?**

Reality is far more mysterious than we currently comprehend and perhaps our role within it is too. We don't need to have all the answers before we begin exploring. Sometimes a new reality begins with something much simpler; a willingness to look again.



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In-joy and gratitude!
Teresa
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