

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## Perception: I See What I Think I See

Every man feels that perception gives him an invincible belief of the existence of that which he perceives; and that this belief is not the effect of reasoning, but the immediate consequence of perception.

—*Thomas Reid (1710-1796)*  
*Scottish philosopher*

Social psychologists have concluded that when someone is trying to persuade us, we are especially influenced if we see that person as an expert, as trustworthy, and as having good intentions. They refer to such a person as a highly credible communicator.

They go on to say that if the very same message is presented in two situations—one in which the communicator is viewed as highly credible and the other in which the communicator is seen as having no credibility—only the highly credible communicator will be influential.

I've thought much about what this means.

To start with, I once again see the power of beliefs in action. If I believe someone is credible, I will be more influenced by that person.

But wait. Something important is happening in between my belief and being influenced.

If I believe someone is credible, then I will see that person as credible. I will look at that person with respect, maybe even admiration. My perception is affected by what I believe!

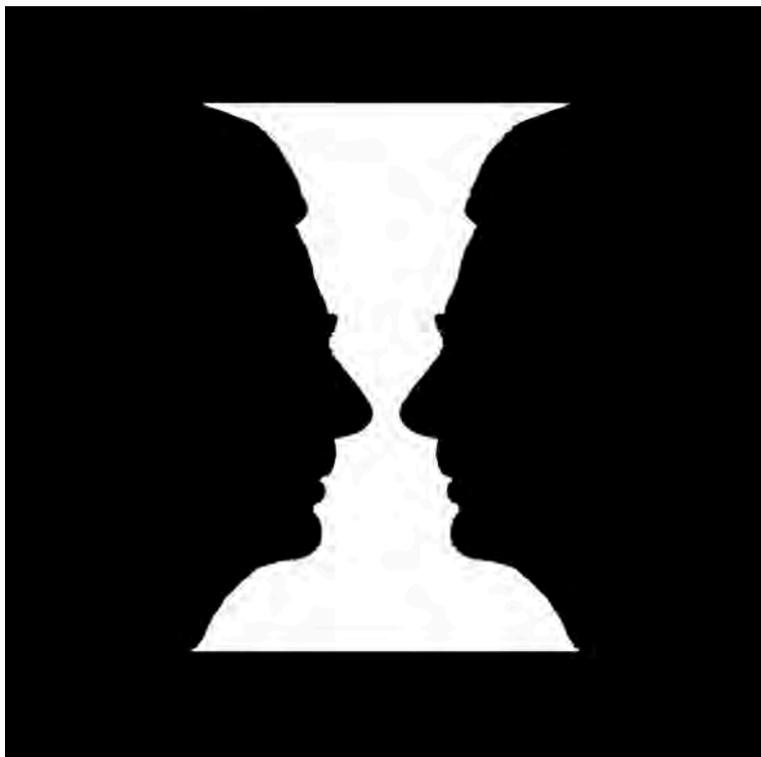
In another study conducted years ago, researchers studied the owners of Volkswagen cars. They found that those owners who were proud to own a Volkswagen saw it as smaller than those who were indifferent about their car.

In still another study, children who drew pictures of Santa Claus drew them larger before Christmas than they did when they drew them after Christmas.

## **Back to the Power of My Assumptions**

In the last chapter, I talked about the power of my assumptions in determining my behavior. Similarly, the assumptions I make influence what I see.

For example, consider this illustration.



If I assume the background of this drawing is white, I see two faces looking at each other. On the other hand, if I assume the background of this drawing is black, I see a white pedestal or vase in the center of the drawing.