Partha Kar: Understanding how others relate to you

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There are said to be four types of people when it comes to adopting change and technology: enthusiasts, who adopt innovations straight away; cautious ones, who wait for more data; followers, who adopt something when most others have done so; and Luddites, who simply won’t change the way they do things. In my experience, the people in our everyday interactions fall into similar groups.

One group of people love you to the max—I call them the Blinds. Their love for you is unconditional, their faith unshakeable. They could also be your closest friends or your parents or siblings, though I appreciate that not all families share such cosy relations. They can be fabulous constructive critics, but they’re your go-to people, your comfort zone.

Then we have a group who gravitate towards you over time because they respect you for who you are. They’re the Rationals. They’ve seen what you stand for, what you’ve achieved, and they gradually become closer. They’re generally solid and reliable, and they give a lot of friendly criticism designed to help you. There is mutual respect, and, depending on how close you get to them, it’s not uncommon for someone in this group to become one of the Blinds.

The next group can cause a lot of angst—the Shapeshifters. They want to be close to you because of your position and influence, but friends they are not. They may seem close, but they won’t hesitate to turn against you or drop unkind comments behind your back, and their volte-face can hurt a lot if you thought of them as Blinds or Rationals. Backstabbing, jealousy, and careerism can make them difficult to decipher, and they can be tricky to spot, but they eventually reveal themselves.

The last group is the Haters. They genuinely don’t like you, for whatever reason. It could be your style, looks, or approach to life. It could be a protected characteristic that they have an issue with. For most people that’s a tough one, as it’s simply not nice to be disliked. When it’s based on a particular characteristic of yours you may find it easy to shrug off, but generally it’s tough. As we get older, we learn ways to deal with all four groups. For what it’s worth, here are my tips:

- Blinds: just enjoy your time with them. They make you happy. The pressures of life can mean that we rarely make time for them, but it can leave you uplifted.
- Rationals: work with them, bounce ideas off them, let the relationship evolve, and see how many become Blinds. Even if they don’t, they can become a source of reflection, learning, and growth, from honest feedback. Enjoy their company, as they can be priceless allies.
- Shapeshifters: these are the trickiest. Sadly, there’s no magic trick to identify them. Life will teach you who they are—with enough time they reveal themselves. You need to walk past the disappointment and know how to shift them out of your life, allowing more time for peace, self-development, and progress. But I’d still encourage the basic principle of trust, as I believe that most people are a lot more good and a lot less Machiavellian.
- Haters: perhaps oddly, I have respect for this group. They put their cards down clearly, and that’s to be respected. No one is, can be, or even should be, universally popular. Give up that dream. No one is perfect, and whatever the other person’s reasons are, so be it. You don’t need to prove yourself or turn their views. We all have enough of our Blinds to cushion the Haters.

Have a think about which group you fit into with respect to others. And make time for the Blinds: they always leave you with a feeling of happiness, and that’s worth its weight in gold.

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