



**The Academies**  
**Executive & Leadership Development**  
**Coaching Resource**

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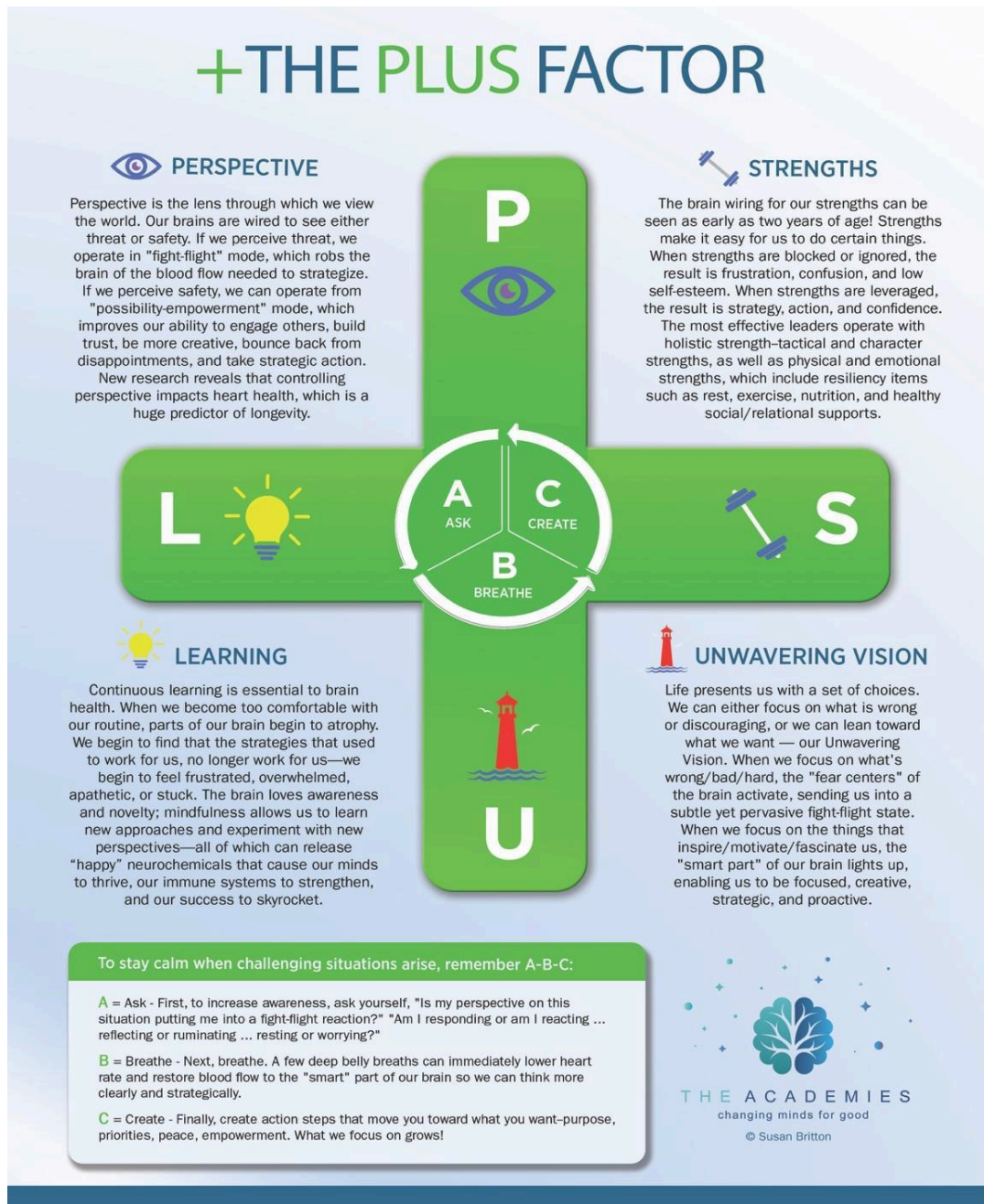


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# THE P.L.U.S. FACTOR

Coaching focuses on maximizing the leader's capacity. To accomplish this, we "coach the person, not the problem." This means we focus on the leader's expanding and deepening "who"—their identity, strengths, values, beliefs, emotions, context, and more that will grow their capacity.



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A brain-friendly framework to support this focus is The P.L.U.S. Factor:

The P.L.U.S. Factor reminds us to coach around:

- **Perspective:** Where is the client's perspective? Does it lean toward the Red Zone or Blue Zone? What can your clients do to perceive a sense of safety and empowerment in circumstances vs. a sense of threat and disempowerment?
- **Learning:** What can clients learn amid their current circumstances? What would promote a perpetual state of openness and growth vs. a fixed and closed mindset?
- **Unwavering Vision:** What are the clients' wants/desires/hopes? What do they want to create? How do they focus towards a meaningful and motivating vision?
- **Strengths:** How do clients employ their innate strengths—and the strengths of the team—to accomplish goals? What enables clients to perceive and leverage the resources available for their most challenging tasks?

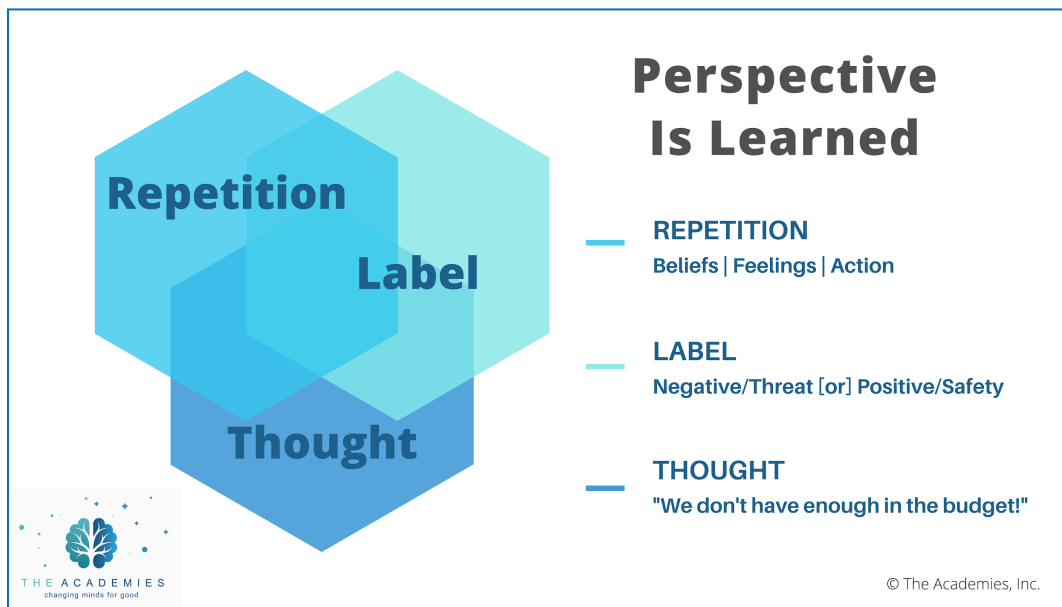


# "P" IN PLUS = PERSPECTIVE

*The obstacle is the way.*

~Marcus Aurelius

Perspective is the lens through which we view the world. We condition ourselves to look through different lenses, and this conditioning over the years causes us to believe, feel, and act a particular way. Here's how it works.



We think a thought, we then label the thought as positive or negative, we repeatedly associate the positive or negative label, and, voila, we have created a well-ingrained belief and feeling (aka, "habit") that causes us to operate in the Red Zone or the Blue Zone.

The brain loves to categorize information, often in duality-based boxes: good-bad, right-wrong, helpful-unhelpful, safe-threatening, fair-unfair, etc. These labels are part of our language and culture. And, they also influence perspective.

We can listen with compassion and curiosity for the labels that a leader is using. For example, depending on the leader's tone of voice, all of these statements hint at a threat state:

- "What else is new. Same story, different players."



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- “We’ll survive.”
- “There just isn’t enough time in the day.”
- “He’ll never change.”
- “That’s just the way it is.”
- “My manager could care less what I’m going through.”
- “If you only knew what it’s really like.”

If the “good-bad” labels create a sense of sustained worry, frustration, or sadness, they will diminish cognitive capacity and relational skills, aka Red Zone perspective. This happens not just in the leader, but in the people around the leader. Emotional contagion—the leader inadvertently influencing others’ mood—is well-documented in psychological research.<sup>1 2 3</sup>

## Neuroscience of Perspective

In neuroscience terms, “Neuroception” (a concept put forward by psychologist Stephen Porges) refers to the body’s unconscious detection system that interprets whether our circumstances are threatening or safe. If threatening, the brain focuses on the threat and the body operates from fight-flight; If safe, the brain is capable of seeing the bigger picture and the body can be relaxed yet alert to engage in possibility-empowerment.

Porges describes that our physical body **involuntarily** responds to various stimuli with a hierarchy of separate vagal circuits, each of which supports different categories of behavior.<sup>4</sup>

The word “involuntarily” is important to remember as a coach. It means that clients cannot control their body’s initial reactions to these perceptions of safety or threat. And when it comes to a client perceiving a threat, we can extend extra grace and compassion as we recognize how **unconscious and unintentional** this automatic stress response is.

<sup>1</sup> [The Impact of Emotional Leadership on Subordinates' Job Performance: Mediation of Positive Emotions and Moderation of Susceptibility to Positive Emotions](#)

<sup>2</sup> [The emotional link: Leadership and the role of implicit and explicit emotional contagion processes across multiple organizational levels](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Catching emotions: the moderating role of emotional contagion between leader-member exchange, psychological capital and employee well-being](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Stephen Porges - Polyvagal Theory: how your body makes the decision](#)



## Social Engagement

When the body detects safety, the parasympathetic nervous system allows the Social Engagement circuit to come online. This is the highest and newest evolutionary circuit. At a biological level, this circuit involves nerves within the vagus nerve that connect with muscles in the face and head, as well as the heart. When this circuit is engaged, it allows the body to lower heart rate and increase heart rate variability to control our emotions.

The Social Engagement circuit is the Blue Zone—the **“tend and befriend” system**, where our full cognitive and relational faculties are engaged. In this state, the body has full access to higher cortical functions and positive emotions are predominant. We think more broadly, flexibly, and strategically,<sup>5</sup> and we can relate more authentically and vulnerably. We feel psychologically and physically safe.

## Mobilization

When the body subconsciously detects risk or danger, the Mobilization circuit is predominant. This is an older vagal circuit in the evolutionary hierarchy, characterized by defense.

Mobilization triggers the sympathetic nervous system, which is the familiar **“fight or flight” stress response**, fueled by a rush of adrenaline and cortisol.

These neurochemicals give us the energy to act in ways that make us feel safe again. Our actions during Mobilization might be adaptive or maladaptive.

- **Adaptive:** Adaptive actions help shift us back to Social Engagement. Adaptive skills require mindful awareness and emotional agility to calm the body and regulate heart rate and respiration.
- **Maladaptive:** Maladaptive actions perpetuate a stress response. We stay longer in the Red Zone, with actions and emotions that reflect defensiveness, agitation, anxiousness, anger, withdrawal, inadequacy, pessimism, and the like.

## Immobilization

The third circuit in the Polyvagal hierarchy is Immobilization. This is evolutionarily the oldest circuit. It is a separate circuit in the brainstem that involves a shut down of our system, such as fainting or going into a dissociative state. It’s unlikely we’d see the Immobilization reaction in a coaching conversation, but it is helpful to understand how the body reacts in the face of extreme threat.

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<sup>5</sup> [The value of positive emotions](#)

