

Chapter 2

Getting Off The Line

Count Otto von Bismarck was remarkably astute when he realized the two attributes of *intelligence* and *propensity for action* were independent of each other. He understood that varying the level of intelligence did not automatically make a change in a person's inclination to take action. He correctly realized that lazy/active, and smart/stupid are independent variables. This approach helped me realize that there were more options to disputes and problems than was possible under my preconceived straight-line thinking.

If one dimension of character was not enough to predict how a soldier would respond during attack, it stood to reason that one dimension also would not work when trying to solve most problems and conflicts. My pondering led me to experiment by observing people's behavior during arguments and solving problems. I could see that assumptions and stereotypes colored most interactions. When arguments were not readily resolved, I saw that most people were, in fact, not talking *to* each other. At best, they spoke *at* each other. In many cases where conflicts escalated, I observed that people talked *past* the other person. They might be using the same words, but those words implied conflicting concepts to the two arguing sides. I began experimenting using von Bismarck's theory and came to the conclusion that his method of crossing relevant attributes almost always led to insights which provided a better perspective of that problem or situation. The original straight line of possible solutions to what seemed a straight-line problem expanded into at least a two-dimensional area. I named that terrain the Area of Enlightenment.

Very often, when people argue they find themselves examining facts and logic and, in spite of their assumed correctness, the other person is still arguing and seems to think his position is correct and that the opposite position is wrong! This leads to one party suspecting the other party must be irrational. Rather than continue the headstrong impasse, if both sides

take advantage of von Bismarck's example, they can multiply their options by looking at the disagreement with a broader perspective. What becomes clear is that biases concerning stereotypes and ingrained belief systems generally interfere with rational thinking. This also applies to discussions of problems of a physical nature, such as a bridge design. There could be severe disagreement over whether the bridge should be designed to have great beauty in form, or if the bridge should be designed to have great functionality.

As an example of a dispute with an underlying stereotyped belief, suppose an enemy has agreed to terms that a duel be fought in order to avoid a big battle. All that is needed is to select the correct soldier for the duel. A strong and handsome soldier approaches and Adjutant 1 quickly decides that the man is perfect for this competition because the soldier is a good swordsman and because Adjutant 1 believes strong, handsome men are brave. He also assumes a handsome soldier will be courageous and that an ugly soldier will display ignoble fear in the face of danger or pain. But suppose Adjutant 2 argues for another man, an ugly soldier also known to be a good swordsman. A heated argument ensues, with the discussion centering on which man is the better choice as duelist. I agree ahead of time that this is a highly contrived example, but it makes the point.

But what is the argument really about? The argument appeared to be about swordsmanship, but the unsaid factor really concerned ethics. The attribute of *swordsmanship* (good to poor) was the original discussion point, but the soldiers were both good swordsmen. The real point of contention was that the attribute of *courage* (brave to cowardly) was laid directly on top of the attribute of *appearance* (handsome to ugly) by Adjutant 1, who believed that the ugly soldier would not have the nerve to fight effectively.

Adjutant 2 assumed the ugly guy was unprincipled and thus would fight far more effectively than would the allegedly high-principled, good-looking duelist. He mistakenly overlaid the attribute of *ethics* (proper acting to devious) on top of the attribute of *appearance*, assuming that the handsome, proper soldier would lose to the devious enemy, whereas the ugly, devious soldier would likely win. The point is that the two sides were arguing monodimensionally—they were superimposing different attributes *on top of each other*. The attributes of appearance, bravery and ethics were *disguised* as swordsmanship.

This example of a duel is far-fetched but it can help visualize how unconscious

assumptions and stereotypes creep into discussions and cloud issues. The original goal was to select a good swordsman, but the argument was really about ethics and courage, not swordsmanship. Not seen, because the argument was played out in a co-linear fashion, was that no agreement lies along the line between the two adjutant's original positions. The best choice of swordsman can only be determined by getting off that line and placing the correct attributes ninety degrees to each other.

An Area of Enlightenment graphic representation of this situation is illustrated in the following figure. The attribute of **ethics** lies on the vertical axis, with **PROPER ACTING** at the top, and **DEVIOUS** at the bottom. **Courageousness** of the soldiers lies on the horizontal axis, with **BRAVE** on the right, and **COWARDLY** on the left. It is not necessary to plot **swordsmanship**, since it is assumed only good swordsmen should represent us. Attractiveness has nothing to do with dueling skill.

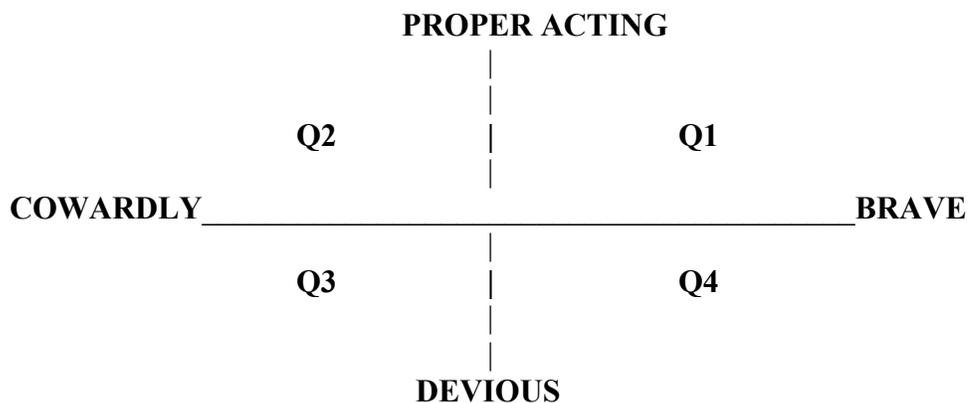


Figure 2.1

The soldiers in quadrant Q1 are **Proper Acting** and **Brave**. Since they know the drill and are good swordsmen, they will have a good chance to prevail. The attribute of handsome or ugly evens out, in the sense that the enemy will fear a strong, handsome soldier due to the stereotype that such men are destined to succeed. Similarly, the enemy will fear a strong, ugly soldier, since they are stereotyped to be fierce.

In quadrant Q2 are the soldiers most likely to lose a duel. **Proper Acting** and **Cowardly** men will avoid risk. They will be most vulnerable to a devious and/or opportunistic opponent.

The quadrant Q3 soldiers, **Cowardly** and **Devious** men, have a fair chance of winning. Even though they tend to be hesitant, these men will try to win by trickery, which often prevails against a not-so-bright opponent.

The best chance of a dueling win would be with the **Brave** and **Devious** soldiers from quadrant Q4. These soldiers will unhesitatingly use trickery to prevail.

Note that the outcome of this example had little to do with the straight line between good to poor swordsmanship, which was the original topic. The discovery of the actual underlying attributes provided a whole *area* to explore. Once the appropriate attributes needed for winning a duel were identified by the two adjutants, it was possible to reach agreement, and to select the swordsman most likely to succeed. By using this Area of Enlightenment something was learned... Adjutant 2 was right!

Agreement with this conclusion is not the issue here. The point is the problem was clarified when the adjutants *got off the line*.

A third dimension, **Population**, would show how people are distributed in the Area of Enlightenment. Human character varies greatly, but most of the population will fall closest to where the axes meet in the center and the smallest percentage of our population at the axes' extremes. It is likely that in a population of soldiers, the "cowardly" side would be a bit less populated than the "brave" side, and the "proper-acting" section would contain a larger population than the "devious" section. Thus, the population would be skewed slightly towards quadrant Q1.

Hopefully this highly contrived example helps demonstrate how to take an apparently non-resolvable co-linear argument into the broader terrain of an Area of Enlightenment.

