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From the desk of **Richard Metheny**

The subject of gratitude is becoming an important part of my wife's and my life. We have a book project called The Gratitude Project and are compiling a book of letters from friends, colleagues and family expressing in words their gratitude to people that have blessed their respective lives, [Thank You Letters I Never Sent](#). Although I recognize that gratitude appears frequently in literature, prayers, and spiritual lessons, its application in the organizational setting has not been extensively documented. But it should.



Gratitude can benefit in many ways. When an employee believes his or her supervisor is grateful for his or her work, the employee will benefit by having an improved sense of worth and belonging to the organization. This improved sense of worth can lead to performance improvement, thereby benefiting the organization. Further,

the person expressing gratitude benefits from that expression, which also may positively impact the organization. Gratitude can generate momentum.

Martin Seligman, one of the founders of positive psychology, has research that seems to indicate that gratitude is a key component of personal happiness. People who are grateful about specific things in their past, who can easily recall positive moments in the past rather than evoking disappointments and betrayals, tend to be more satisfied about the present.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- How intensely do I show my gratitude?
- How frequently do I express my gratitude?
- For how many circumstances in my life do I feel grateful?
- Toward how many different people do I feel grateful for a specific positive circumstance in my life?

Reflect on the responses.

Leaders oriented toward practicing value-centered leadership will find that gratitude results in many benefits to themselves and to their organizations, including the opportunity to increase goodwill and citizenship behavior. Experiment with some new strategies: 1) *Reflect at the End of Each Day on Three Good Things*; 2) *Want What You Have*; and 3) *Communicate Gratitude*.

You are invited to participate in our project.

Go to: <http://www.theawareleader.com/aboutus/thegratitudeproject.html>

Focus Area Of The Month: *Consciousness of Self Part III*

Sometimes we refuse to fulfill our potential. This was Freud's definition of psychoneurosis: we limit how we live so that we can limit the amount of anxiety that we experience. We end up sedating many of life's functions; we accept mediocrity. We halt progress and growth. Wading through anxiety, uncertainty, and guilt is a prerequisite for significant decisions. In a recent conversation with an executive we reviewed her feedback from a battery of assessments. Charlene was a bright, talented individual that was considered a high potential in her company. One area of her assessment results was not new information for her or me; in fact the assessment reinforced feedback she had received from others over the past year. The results reinforced an area of her style that was considered a potential derail. When our conversation turned to this topic her defense mechanisms kicked into high gear moving from anger to quiet dismissal. I challenged her not ignore this déjà vu experiences and examine why she resists exploring this more deeply. Her quiet response was the answer; it hurt too much. Charlene had chosen to limit her potential.

Argyris and Schon describe each of us as governed by two basic theories-of-action: our theory-of-choice, which governs the way we talk about our thoughts, feelings and actions, and our theory-in-use, which determines what we actually think, feel, say, and do¹. These theories can be inconsistent and often contradictory within each of us. In the book, [Why Good Leaders Can't Use Good Advice](#)² the authors identify five common values resulting from this conflict of "choice" and "use." They believe that all of us possess these five values based on discoveries in their research with more than 5000 executives:

- **To have unilateral control:** we meticulously guard against mistakes; the best way to be sure to avoid mistakes is to keep doing the same thing again and again with perfection as the goal. For example, we delegate responsibilities to the members of our team then we go out and make decisions that usurp their authority; thus avoiding their potential mistakes.
- **To avoid emotional discomfort:** we focus on the external. We devote special attention to the things that seem frustrating, out of your control, and impossible to address: politics, corporations, and economics. The external must remain in focus as broad categories in order to feel distanced and disaffected;
- **To act and appear rational:** we find some cause and effect relationship to explain things otherwise not understandable. Irrationality must be avoided because it could undermine us. Emotions are in this category and we suppress them because of their perceived undermining effect;
- **To promote and pursue our own interests:** we manipulate communications and events to benefit our interest. And at the same time admit we need better communication, coordination, and cooperation.
- **To be right, instead of wrong:** we must win, not lose. The research stated that 90% of 5000 executives acknowledged that winning and avoiding losing were primary drivers in critical situations. Win-lose dynamics undermine teamwork and morale.

Gail grew up like all of us learning to cope as best as possible with less than perfect formative environments - provided through parents, teachers, significant others etc. And these coping mechanisms, some good, some not so good, got her through to adulthood one way or another. But as for most people these mechanisms then moved with her into adulthood and pushed her around in much the same way as when she was a were child. ...continued

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► *continued from page 2 ...* So the 'good little girl' who grew up believing that the only way to elicit loving responses from her father was by succeeding at whatever she did, became a highly trained achiever - she could successfully run many different projects, departments, or businesses; acquiring much material wealth through her material successes, projecting an image of success & achievement, to the point of not really knowing why she was doing this - simply to gain his positive strokes; to feel worthwhile. She lived by the inner rule which says that the task must be accomplished, at any cost - she had to win, losing was not an option.

"But what's wrong with that?" you might ask, "many organizations are run like that." On face value, not much I suppose. But now let's consider the fact that her burning drive for success led her to multiple divorces and the signing of the 'deal of all deals' which ended up breaking the business; let alone broken business relationships along the way. Now you may start to ask "why did she do it? Why didn't she stop at the third multi-million dollar venture?"

The truth is that she probably was not aware of what she was doing. And so, she couldn't stop. She had no choice. Like many of the things we do, we simply don't know why we do them; we just carry on doing them.

The story of Gail may sound all too familiar. The authors of *Why Good Leaders Can't Use Good Advice* state that in over thirty years of consulting, training and research they have not found an executive who did not act based on the five values. Our internal maps are formed as a sort of collective representations of who we are and the map (internal programming) is hard to resist. Our internal maps keep us from being recognizing or questioning the way we think. In fact we are usually unaware that we are unaware. [How self-aware are you?](#)

Recommended Self Awareness Activities: *Focus*

In the first two editions of *The Aware Leader* we considered the self-awareness activities of awareness and curiosity. Awareness and curiosity expand your options, but once you move toward a solution, you need to focus-to go beneath the surface and give full attention to what you're doing. You are always focusing on something, whether you are aware of it or not. If I spent some time with you, and heard your history, I could tell you what you are focusing on. How? By looking at the results you are getting in your life. The results you get are always the result of your focus. A clear intentional focus moves us towards our dreams quickly and effectively. When you have too much on the go at the same time, you will often end up dabbling in many different things. As a result you don't produce the results you desire. You may feel overwhelmed, frustrated and fed up. The friction and stress of being pulled in many directions eats up your time and energy, leaving you less able to be focused and move forward.



To improve your **focus**:

- Know what can distract you;
- Fine-tune its intensity. Focus gently and guard against obsession. Allow time for ideas to simmer while you do other things;
- Consciously directing your focus to the outcomes you want.
- Set goals that require initiative. Understand the old maxim, "If you aim at nothing, you'll hit it every time." Use goals not only to accomplish what is necessary but to go above and beyond what is required.
- Really listen to others with focus. So often, we go through the motions and miss opportunities to learn. What are the person's eyes telling you? Body language? Is it consistent with the words you're hearing?

"I think the one lesson I have learned is that there is no substitute for paying attention."

— Diane Sawyer

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Consciousness of Self, Part III

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