

The Aware Leader



From the desk of Richard Metheny

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During my long tenure of corporate life I found one consistent reality. When I walked out of my office and when I walk into other businesses they all are comprised of PEOPLE, and people are complex.

Groups of people are really complex. Leading people is a challenging proposition compounded by our own complexities. One other observation is, that despite this reality, leaders spend more time mastering functional skills and technical skills than they do mastering people skills.




People skill mastery begins with self awareness. Knowing your own strengths and limitations and understanding your own emotions and the impact of your behavior on others in

diverse situations is critical to being a great leader. A high level of self-awareness helps the effective leader to sustain their energy and to be resilient, especially in difficult times. It enables them to learn from mistakes or misjudgments.

A leader's recognition of their own strengths and limitations means that they are more likely to empower others, giving them the opportunity to develop and to support organizational improvement goals.

Successful, collaborative work requires leaders who are well aware of, and sensitive to, the impact they have on others in a range of work situations.

To perfect your management skills, the best place to start is self-awareness. 

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"We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark. The real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light."

Plato



Focus Area of the Month: *Consciousness of Self, Part II*

Developing a more aware self requires that we create an evolving understanding of ourselves in many areas. Key areas of self-awareness include our personality traits, values, habits, emotions, and the psychological needs that drive our behaviors.


Personality is a description of consistent emotional, thought, and behavior patterns in a person. One approach to understanding personality is type and the a widely used type instrument as the Myers Briggs (MBTI). The MBTI measures four pairs of preferences: extraversion or introversion; sensing or intuition; thinking or feeling; judging or perceiving. For example if you are an extravert you have a preference for drawing your energy from the outside world of people, activities and things. If you are an introvert you draw energy from your internal world of ideas, emotions, and impressions. As leaders we may be placed in situations where we need to be an extravert but we are an introvert. Awareness of our preference allows us to avoid pitfalls and suggest ways for us to develop skills to help us succeed when extraversion is required. Awareness of your personality helps you analyze such a situation.

Values are important to know and upon which to focus. Personal values are implicitly related to choice; they guide decisions by allowing for an individual's

choices to be compared to each choice's associated values. During the workday, so many problems and opportunities arise that its easy to lose sight of what is most important. Since few (if any) of those things pertain to what we value, it's easy to spend time on lower priority activities. When we focus on our values, we are more likely to accomplish what we consider important.

Habits are the behaviors that we repeat routinely and automatically. We can all identify habits that help us be effective and those that decrease our effectiveness. For example, if you are a manager that directs versus coaches your team, that habit may interfere with your ability to develop your team.

Needs are indicated by our feelings that are met or unmet. Developing an awareness of what needs are arising within us and others moment by moment can make us more effective and help us compassionately find strategies to meet our own needs (as well as contribute to meeting the needs of others). For instance you may have a strong need for recognition. In absence of recognition you may not perform at your best. Upon receipt of recognition you give more discretionary effort, better ideas. Needs cause motivation and when they are not satisfied, they can cause frustration, conflict and stress.

Emotions are an intense mental state that arises automatically in the nervous system rather than through conscious effort, and evokes either a positive or negative psychological response. Simplistically emotions can be categorized into three areas: sadness, gladness, and fear. Understanding your own feelings, what causes them, and how they impact your thoughts and actions is emotional awareness. For example, have you noticed, *or have others noticed*, that some topics in meetings consistently rile you. What is triggering your emotional response? A person with high emotional awareness understands the internal process associated with emotional experiences and, therefore, have greater control over them. 



Recommended Self Awareness Activities: *Curiosity*

Curiosity may have killed the cat, but it makes for a great leader. Though humans are sometimes considered particularly very curious, they sometimes seem to miss the obvious when compared to other animals. What seems to happen is that human curiosity combined with the ability to think in an abstract way, leads to imitation; fantasy and imagination - eventually leading to an especially human way of thinking ("human reason"), which is abstract and self aware; or conscious. This in turn allows most adult humans to rely heavily upon beliefs which they have learned long before, but which might only be imagined to be correct. It is important to open yourself to the nuances of life, it's hard not to find things that fascinate you and to begin wondering why. To be curious, you must give yourself the freedom to risk and make mistakes. Interestingly, curiosity requires trust - trust that everyone and every situation have something to teach you. Even when there's no immediate practical application of the things you learn, you're training your self-awareness muscles to stay well toned.



Curiosity jump-starts the habit of awareness by taking you to deeper levels of knowing and helping you to relate to others.

To Develop Curiosity (Fast Company, 2005):

Start by examining all the possibilities. Brainstorm them on paper. When you can see the bigger picture more clearly, start experimenting with being focused.

Routinely **seek** opinions from people who have no experience with the subject and can be refreshing sources of new information, since they are not entrenched in assumptions and mindsets.


Look beyond the obvious. The obvious can mask information that may be vital to learning the truth of a situation. The next time you catch yourself thinking, writing, or saying, "Obviously..." make a note of your assumption. Then invest a few hours in looking beyond what appears to be true. Keep searching until you find at least three pieces of information or sources that conflict with what you classified as "obvious."

Try new things. Even if they don't work out, you'll learn lessons to apply elsewhere.

When you have a **problem**, work like a detective. Ask questions. Look at everything. Seek out experts for their views. Do your own research.

Notice and eliminate assumptions. They're usually wrong, yet we accept them as "fact."

Fire your inner critic. Remember that someone had every great idea in history. Why not you? We can be so critical of ourselves. Fire that inner critic. Give your ideas time to develop. Respect your intuition. Let ideas percolate for a time prior to applying a critical eye.

Ask questions of those you encounter-find out what they do and what else they do. Find out how their activities fit into the world and how their interest began. 

"Curiosity is the very basis of education and if you tell me that curiosity killed the cat, I say only the cat died nobly."

- Arnold Edinborough,
Writer and Broadcaster



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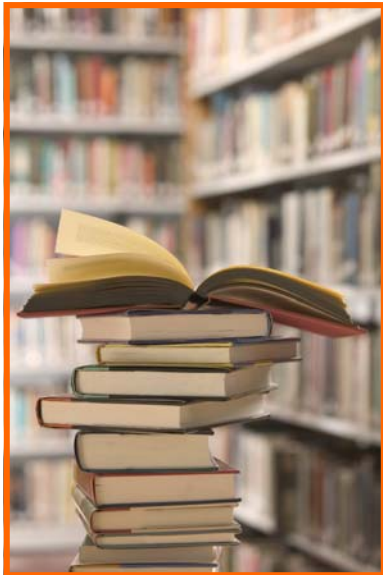
Executive *coaching*
Team *coaching*
Organizational *coaching*

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Our business goal is to assist
individuals and organizations in becoming
more aware about how they lead
so that they may achieve greater results.

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Recommended Reading:

Self Awareness

Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence
>Daniel Goldman, Richard E. Boyatzis, Annie McKee

The Secrets of Jesuit Leadership
>Chris Lowney

Curiosity

Curious George's Big Book Of Curiosity
>H.A. and Margret Rey

The Ant and the Elephant: Leadership for the Self
>Vince Poscente