

Increasing Your Sensitivity to “Awareness”—Three Ways

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A close friend contacted me with a request. I've observed him engage with others, and he wanted my suggestions on how he could become more effective. Testing to be sure he wanted my feedback, I provided some observations. He became newly aware of some of the effects of his behaviors. He had not realized how his actions were hurting his relationships with others.

After pondering our conversation, I realized again how important “awareness” is to improving leadership skills. Now that my friend is more aware of the impact of his behaviors, he is very interested in working to improve. That seems to be a very typical response.

Raise your awareness, and your energy to make effective changes is heightened! You'll seek more feedback, then research to determine what actions are likely to yield better outcomes. And then you'll start experimenting with some of the more attractive options you've discovered.

“Awareness” is important. Each of us “sees” the world uniquely. We are all influenced by what we learned as a child, our history growing up, our values, our prejudices, and our anticipation of the future. None of us sees “the truth” because what we “see” is blurred by our inherent biases. We are never truly “objective”—though we often presume that we are!

What we think is “the truth” can change instantaneously. Let me share a couple of examples.

Look at a FedEx mailing envelope or truck. What do you see? Most people see three letters in blue, and two letters in orange. Do you see the white arrow pointing to the right between the orange letters “E” and “x”? If you've noticed it, you'll know exactly what I mean. If not, look for it next time you see a FedEx truck.

Notice the Goodwill Industries logo next time you pass a store or billboard. What do you see? Most people see an awkward, hard-to-describe half of a smiley face. Look closely. Do you see anything familiar in the smiling half-face? Some people recognize the small letter “g,” identical to the first letter of the word “goodwill” above or below it.

I invite leaders to become more sensitive to the concept of “awareness.” **The easiest way to enhance awareness is to “just notice.” Simply observe** the white arrow of FedEx and the “g” in that curious Goodwill logo that has always been there. Some people notice them; maybe you just now have become aware of their existence.

A second major source of awareness is when new information significantly changes your perspective. This is commonly called a “**paradigm shift**,” and these insights occur frequently. They tend to evoke an energetic “Aha!” or a “How did I not know that before?” shaking of the head response. From now on, be more sensitive to when paradigm shifts occur. They usually make your point of view—your perspective or outlook—more complete.

A third major source of awareness is feedback, the act of receiving from someone a new insight into the effect of your behavior. You may know what you intend by your action, but rarely do you know the impact it has on the recipient. When that person chooses to share that impact with you, you may be surprised that the effect was quite different from what you had intended. Your desired outcome wasn't manifested. Unfortunately, it happens to all of us far too often!

After you become more sensitive to “awareness,” start examining your decision-making process. Since the health of all your relationships is based on your habits and other behaviors, it’s wise to be aware of your unconscious and conscious responses to situations.

What would an independent observer learn about what’s important to you by watching your behaviors? Would the observer see consistency between what you say and what you do?

The people in your organization are constantly watching for that consistency between your words and your behaviors. People will **trust you more** and **model their behaviors** after yours if they value what’s important to you and they see that uniformity.

Consider establishing an “awareness” partnership with a colleague. Ask him or her to share new insights with you and allow you to do the same in return. Agree to provide frequent feedback to each other. Then hold each other accountable for the commitments you make to each other for improving your influence based on what you are learning.

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