

Are You Deceiving Yourself?

By Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2016, distributed December 7, 2016

Make no mistake. You ARE deceived. And YOU are the major contributor, because you make meaning of all input that comes to you! As a human being, you simply can't avoid being deceived. Your emotional makeup leads you perpetually on a "feel good" quest, not on a "truth" quest.

You move in the direction of that which satisfies and pleases you, and you unwittingly and automatically move away from anything that generates anguish or pain, emotional or otherwise.

As a leader, you either undershoot or overshoot the truth about the effect you have on the people around you. What you think about your performance is often quite different from what people say about your behaviors to each other. I'm not suggesting others are more accurate--only that you probably don't comprehend how the many people you influence perceive you.

You'd expect competent leaders to have corresponding confidence. However, self-deception influences confidence, sometimes artificially raising it, sometimes dramatically lowering it.

Are you a leader whose confidence exceeds your capabilities? People may experience you as prideful, condescending, or judgmental. Humility is a trait you may neither understand nor value.

Conversely, are you a skilled leader who lacks appropriate confidence? Do you intentionally bypass or otherwise fail to pursue opportunities to productively serve? Failure to contribute your unique capabilities hurts your team and your team's customers.

As we humans engage the world, we do what we think is right and/or what we believe will work to accomplish our objectives. The experience of others as they engage with us, however, is often quite different. When we are a third-party observer, we see that obvious discrepancy. However, it's almost impossible to recognize when I am (or you are) the action figure.

Still not convinced that you are deceived and contributing to your own deception? On youtube.com, find Cortney Warren's TEDx presentation entitled "Honest Liar--The Psychology of Self-Deception." Within ten minutes, you'll shake your head and wonder if you EVER tell yourself the truth!

If self-deception is so prevalent and "normal," you may wonder why you should even be concerned. Here's why. Your failure to aggressively seek the truth hurts you and everyone around you!

Is it even possible to become a more honest acknowledger of what is? YES! And many leadership development experts advocate that "self-awareness" is the single most important trait for a leader!

So, the logical question is, "How do I become more self-aware?" I suggest three things.

First, pay more attention to how you feel, think, and behave, and notice how people respond to you. Expand your efforts to learn about the art and science of leadership. Read, seek out experts, experiment with new approaches. Cortney Warren suggests psychotherapy. A more accepted approach for many leaders is to seek the services of an experienced executive coach.

Second, aggressively seek honest feedback. If your organizational culture is one where feedback is not actively sought and courageously volunteered, you will have to work hard to convince people you want the truth. Be an assertive role model in moving your organization's culture in that direction!

Finally, look for "Aha!" opportunities. When you open yourself to the truth, all kinds of paradigms and beliefs will be challenged. The more openly you collaborate with your colleagues, the more willing they are to offer feedback, and the more enthusiastically you consider new possibilities.

To be more effective as a leader, become more self-aware. Grab a trusted colleague, talk together about this article, and commit to help each other overcome the tendency toward self-deception!