

Being More Aware Will Help You Lead!

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2008, published in the Houston Home Journal on Saturday, May 3, 2008

I was watching the television show “Jeopardy!” last week. Do you enjoy shouting out the right questions to the answers? I love showing off to my wife what I know!

Of course, there’s a lot I don’t know. Sometimes, I’ll look at my wife with this “Now how would anybody know that?” expression on my face.

What I really hate, though, is when I know the answer is in my brain somewhere, but I just can’t locate it! Ooh, that is so frustrating! I may have known that piece of information sometime in the past, but I’ve not used it in so long, it has passed out of my awareness.

The whole experience of watching “Jeopardy!” that night stimulated my thinking about work with leaders. What I experienced in front of the television applies in the real world, too.

Fortunately, most of your work deals with topics that are within your area of competence. You’re **aware of what you know**, and you skillfully handle the situations that arise.

You probably started your company (or your role in someone else’s company) because of a specialized skill in some functional expertise. You may not have known much about leadership, but you learned on the fly because of the success of your operation.

Periodically, some unplanned situation presented you with a gap in your capabilities, and you became acutely **aware of what you don’t know**. You likely took appropriate steps to overcome your ignorance. You found a book, searched for a skilled instructor, or hired a specialist.

Today, you may be facing a new situation, and like in the “Jeopardy!” example above, you have this sense that you know what you need to do, but you’re not quite sure how to approach it.

Not aware of what you know, you’d like to talk through your options with a trusted friend—someone who shares your values and supports your organizational direction. But that may not be possible with someone in your organization without causing undesirable side effects.

Providing just such a safe place for exploring options is why coaching has become such a beneficial professional service. A coach helps you become more aware, both of what you know and of what you don’t know. You determine the desired outcome, and the coach facilitates your progress.

Last week’s article dealt with three ways you can expand your awareness: just noticing, feedback, and paradigm shifts. (If you missed that article, contact me and I’ll provide a copy.)

A coach will help you notice things you’re overlooking. For example, could you systematize a process that your organization is currently doing “by the seat of your pants”?

A coach will provide you honest, constructive feedback. Are you expecting your direct reports to read your mind when you delegate responsibilities? Should you be more explicit in setting expectations and more clearly assign accountability on the front end of a project?

A coach will help you recognize and appreciate the value of paradigm shifts, celebrating with you each expanded awareness! Even as you describe your new insights, fresh perspectives present themselves. You were never able to articulate your intentions and strategy so clearly!

Expanding your awareness gives you renewed confidence in setting direction, gaining alignment, and modeling appropriate behaviors. Oh, why doesn’t “Jeopardy!” have a “leadership” category?

Dennis Hooper helps organizational leaders seek greater awareness, especially in building the skills of future leaders. Contact Dennis at dhooper2@juno.com or by calling (478)-988-0237.