

Can Increasing Awareness Make You More Effective?

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2010, published in the *Houston Home Journal* on Saturday, July 3, 2010

My article last week introduced the relationship among awareness, confidence, and competency. If you'd like to see that article, go to my website (address below) and click on "Dennis' blog."

In the next three weeks, I'll address each of these characteristics in greater detail. I suggest that as honestly as possible, you evaluate the degree to which you seek improvements in each of the three. (If you think you don't need improvement, would you consider being my mentor?)

Increases in awareness may occur intentionally or haphazardly. For example, you might purchase a specific book because you are purposefully looking for guidance in how to be a better delegator. Or someone at lunch might say something that causes you to ponder, "Hmm, I never thought that Sam might view my directions to be unclear. I should check with him on what I might do differently."

Awareness increases may be large or small, revolutionary or seemingly inconsequential. Interestingly, you cannot accurately predict on the front end the impact a given new insight might have. For example, what may seem like a very small change in perspective might lead to a sizable increase in your level of confidence over the next few months.

There are multiple levels of awareness on virtually any issue or subject. The levels of awareness are progressive. As you increase your level of awareness, your understanding grows from a rudimentary level to increasingly more profound levels. When you operate at any particular level of awareness, that level seems "true" to you, and you will typically defend your perspective.

Until you become aware that no one "sees" the world quite like you do (we all have our own history, beliefs, and hopes), you presume that everyone sees the world just like you do. You may even be confused if someone defends a different perspective. (It's a rather common human experience.)

As you move to higher levels of awareness, you may feel bewildered or guilty that you were wrong in your previous thinking. In reality, you may not have been "wrong," but you were certainly incomplete in your understanding. You probably feel more perceptive now with your greater awareness! Celebrate!

It's hard to agree with or understand someone whose level of awareness is far beyond yours. Their point of view baffles you. Yet these individuals can help you expand your awareness if you will genuinely seek to learn from them and allow them time to explain their perspective.

It's difficult, if not impossible, to return to lower levels of awareness after attaining higher ones. Though you can relate to and sympathize with individuals at lower levels of awareness, you can't force the paradigm shift you experienced. They must discover appreciation for new insights themselves.

As you increase in level of awareness, you tend to be more gracious and patient with others' understanding. You remember the levels you passed through and imagine there will be new levels of understanding for you, even if you don't yet know what they may be.

It is difficult to accurately judge your own level of awareness. Those quite ignorant, for example, may be deceived, believing they understand far more than they do. That can be a perplexing dilemma for those at higher levels of awareness. Pushing those less aware to confront their ignorance may backfire, stimulating resistance and offense, potentially slowing their growth. As a role model and mentor, you should look for opportunities to invite and encourage those who want to learn.

People at the highest levels of understanding--experts in a given subject--are often quite alone in their outlook. The further you move up the levels of awareness, the more people you leave behind. Seeking additional awareness requires increasingly intentional efforts, as random new insights become rare.

Ironically, experts are quick to tell you how little they know. They realize that much more exploration and study is required to expand understanding in their particular subject matter!

Only if you comprehend this concept of differing levels of awareness can you expect to communicate effectively with others (who are likely at either higher or lower levels of understanding). As you share this "levels of awareness" concept with others, you increase the probability of better communication through more compassionate listening.

Some individuals claim that increasing your awareness is the key to improving both your competence and your confidence. I'm not yet comfortable generalizing a cause-and-effect relationship. I've seen that when my clients work on any one of the three, the other two seem to benefit! What are your experiences?