

Increasing Your Sensitivity to “Awareness”—Three Ways

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Before writing this article, I spent some time on the phone with a friend. He wants to understand how he can be more effective. As I provided some observations, he became aware of the effects of his behaviors. He had not realized how some of his actions were hurting his relationship with others.

In pondering our conversation, I realized once again just 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 pretty typical response.

Raise your awareness, and your energy to make effective change is heightened! You’ll research to determine what actions are likely to yield better outcomes. And then you’ll start experimenting with some of the alternatives you’ve discovered.

“Awareness” is important. Each of us “sees” the world uniquely. We are all influenced by our history, our values, our prejudices, and our anticipation of the future. None of us sees “the truth,” because what we “see” is never quite complete.

What we think is “the truth” can change instantaneously just by paying attention. Let me share a few examples.

Look at a FedEx mailing envelope. 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, take a look 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 half of a smiley face. Look closely. Do you see anything else in the half-smiley face? Some people recognize the small letter “g,” identical to the first letter of the word “goodwill” below it.

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

A second major source of awareness is when new information significantly changes your perspective. This **is commonly called a “paradigm shift,”** and they occur frequently. From now on, be more sensitive to when paradigm shifts occur, since they make your perspective more complete.

A third major source of awareness is feedback, the act of receiving from someone an awareness of 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. If, however, the recipient chooses to share that information with you, you may be surprised that the effect was quite different from what you had intended.

After you become more sensitive to “awareness,” start examining your decision-making process. Since the health of all your relationships is based on the behaviors you choose, it’s wise to be aware of your decisions and how you make them.

What could an independent observer learn about what’s important to you by watching you make choices? Would the observer see consistency between what you claim is important 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 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.