

## Building Awareness in Future Leaders

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A few weeks ago, I wrote a column entitled "Conscious Competent Leaders". I described a model that trainers use to illustrate four states of knowledge or skill.

I did not know the source of this model, so I asked some colleagues to whom I send a copy of my column each week. They suggested I check with the Wilson Learning Corporation. I looked this company up on the internet, learning they are a global leader in performance improvement. I sent an e-mail to their "contact us" link.

Within a few hours, I received a response from Dr. Michael Leimbach, their Vice-President for Global Research and Design. He confirmed that Wilson Learning has been using this model for over thirty years, and he attributed the earliest concepts to Confucius.

Dr. Leimbach provided a paraphrase from that ancient Chinese academician that corresponds to the four knowledge states I had cited in my column:

- unconscious incompetent: *"There are those who don't know, and don't know they don't know. Ignore them, for they are not worth your time."*
- conscious incompetent: *"There are those who don't know, but know they don't know. Teach them, for they are ready to learn."*
- unconscious competent: *"There are those who know, but don't know that they know. Lead them, for they are ready for direction."*
- conscious competent: *"Finally, there are those who know, and know they know. Follow them, for they know the way."*

"Follow them, for they know the way." Isn't that what leadership is supposed to be about? We want leaders who are both competent and know how to use their capabilities to serve their constituents.

Dr. Leimbach wrote: "Thus, for us, the highest order of knowledge is the conscious competent, the people who are knowledgeable and are aware of their knowledge."

In my column several weeks ago, I argued that conscious competent leaders make better mentors than unconscious competent leaders. Why? They are better able to explain to a protégé why they choose as they do and how to execute appropriate behaviors.

My expertise is leadership development. I've worked for years helping individuals build competencies in the many skills required of leaders. The dialogue with Dr. Leimbach, however, caused me to see in a new way how **expanding** a leader's **awareness** is different from **building competency**, yet very beneficial for the leader and his or her constituents.

Individuals in positions of authority usually provide both training and coaching to their direct reports. When they train, they build competency. When they coach, they build awareness.

Aha! What a great insight! Though the difference is subtle, the distinction is worth noting.

Training usually involves a trainer, a planned agenda, and the passage of time (sometimes hours, sometimes years of apprenticeship). Increased awareness, however, can occur in an instant. All that is needed is the right information at the right time. An experienced coach helps an individual see (that is, become aware of) behaviors and situations with new insight.

Good bosses are excellent coaches. They nurture their direct reports when they ask for help. See "Leaders Serving as Coaches" for three specific steps to learn how you can better serve your direct reports (your organization's future leaders), even before they ask!