

Can Increasing Awareness Make You More Effective?

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For many years, I've asked the leaders I coach to come to our sessions prepared to share insights that they've gained since our previous meeting. They will often share a paradigm shift that has already caused them to enhance their behaviors with their colleagues, teams, or customers. (Look at my website--address below--for the article entitled "Paradigm Shifts--An Explanation for Fresh Success.")

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 become a better delegator. Or someone at lunch might casually 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 when I delegate to him." Or someone volunteers a piece of feedback to you that is hugely enlightening.

Awareness increases may be large or small, revolutionary or seemingly inconsequential.

Interestingly, you cannot accurately predict on the front end the impact that 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 or even your skill over the next few months.

There are multiple levels of awareness on virtually any topic. 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 given level of awareness, that level seems "true" to you, and you will typically defend your perspective.

No one "sees" the world quite like you. We all have our unique history, beliefs, preferences, prejudices, and hopes. Until you realize this difference in perspective between you and others, you presume that everyone sees the world just as you do. (Psychologists call this characteristically seductive human trait "the false consensus effect.") You may even be confused if someone defends a perspective different from yours, wondering how he or she could "see" the situation so differently from you.

As you move to higher levels of awareness, you may feel bewildered or guilty that you were wrong in your previous thinking. 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 those whose levels of awareness are 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 perspectives.

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 an appreciation for new insights themselves.

As you increase in your 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 current level of awareness. Those quite ignorant, for example, are likely 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 quite alone in their outlook. The more you increase your level of awareness, the more people you leave behind. Seeking additional awareness requires increasingly intentional efforts; random new insights become rare the more aware you become.

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

Only if you comprehend this concept of different 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 have seen that when my clients work on any one of the three, the other two seem to correspondingly benefit! What are your experiences?

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