

Taking Action E•Book

Become a More Self Aware Leader

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Excerpted from Women as Leaders: Strategies for empowerment & communication

Introduction

Leadership is multi-dimensional. There are six dimensions to successful leadership. The six dimensions include:

- Self-Awareness
- Visioning
- Interpersonal Communication
- Technical Competence
- Team Effectiveness
- Authenticity

Self-awareness is a key predictor of leadership success. How well we understand ourselves in terms of strengths and weaknesses, how we communicate and interact with others, how we manage this level of understanding in our relationships are all aspects of a self aware leader. This e-book just begins to scratch the surface of increasing your self awareness. I encourage you to complete the exercises in this book so that you have a starting point to begin your journey of becoming a more self-aware leader.

Even though the content of this e-book is largely excerpted from a book I co-authored, *Women as Leaders: Strategies for Empowerment & Communication* neither the content nor the subject of becoming a more self aware leader is gender specific.

Becoming a more self aware leader means understanding yourself from the inside out. I often refer to this critical dimension of successful leadership as your intra-personal competencies. Where does self awareness come from? In large part it comes from your experiences, relationships, environment, belief system and values. This creates our view of life, or our “life’s filters”. In other words, it’s 100% who you are so the greater the understanding you have of yourself, the more successful you will be at understanding others and influencing others effectively. Your intra-personal compass represents how you feel and think in situations and helps you make effective decisions about yourself and others particularly during challenging or difficult situations. In other words, this helps you stay in tune with your emotions and how you tend to respond to specific situations and people.

Self awareness can be defined as your ability to accurately assess your strengths and weaknesses, and have a deep understanding of your emotions in different situations. This includes recognizing your talents, and what you may need to develop or compensate for, and how you may need to adapt to different situations and people. Identifying the gap becomes a starting point for change. The value of being a more self aware leader is that it enables you to make positive changes towards personal growth and development, and in turn have a positive impact on others.

Developing your self awareness requires a desire to understand your strengths and recognize how you react and feel in situations and interactions with others. With a heightened sense of self awareness you begin understanding how your behaviors and how you communicate influences others. Utilizing your heightened sense of awareness enables you to make more

thoughtful decisions and leverage your talents to experience greater opportunity for success. In addition, being a more self aware leaders also enables you to be more mindful of other's thoughts, ideas, and feelings and stretches you to detach from your "life's filters" (perceptions/feelings/bias') while listening to others so that you can remain objective and non-judgmental.

Understanding your limitations and where you may need to compensate or develop yourself is equally important to developing your self awareness. Just as you will leverage your strengths, knowing how to compensate for your weakness is very empowering. This recognition alone will propel you to examine the strengths in others and begin maximizing their strengths to lead more effectively. Other times it will be in your best interest and the interest of others to develop a particular skill, change a behavior or attitude. For example, if you receive feedback that you do not demonstrate effective interpersonal communication skills or team building skills, obviously you would want to focus on developing these skills as opposed to relying on someone else to do this for you. On the other hand, if you find your analytical abilities specifically with numbers (ex. generating statistical reports, analyzing trends) is not a strength and that talent exists in another person this is when compensating for your weakness may be a smart use of leveraging the other person's abilities. You may want to delegate that particular task.

Key Indicators

There are several key indicators that demonstrate being a more self aware leader they include:

- Self-alignment: know who you are and what you believe in
- Self-knowledge: recognizes and openly acknowledges one's own leadership strengths and weaknesses

- Self motivated: takes action to leverage strengths and develop or compensate for weaknesses to achieve desired results
- Confidently expresses own values, beliefs and vision
- Recognition of one’s leadership style, behavioral and communication preferences
- Recognizes that people have different styles and preferences and is willing to flex or adapt her style as required
- Appreciation for diversity, and the ideas, opinions, and beliefs of others
- Actively elicits feedback and is adaptable and open to new ideas
- Takes time to reflect on self-knowledge and elicited feedback to build on strengths and develop or compensate for weaknesses
- Never stops learning about self and others

Increasing Self Awareness

Inquiry and reflection are two of the most effective techniques to develop and increase self awareness. There are different “tools” designed to help people increase their self awareness using inquiry and reflection. I will share a few with you; before I do I believe a critical first step to increasing self awareness is willingness. A willingness to examine ourselves and the perception of others, to embrace and receive feedback, followed by leveraging that increased self awareness to make the desired changes. An increase in self awareness is a beautiful thing, it allows you to discover what you want to continue doing, stop doing and start doing. This enables you to grow and change to experience greater success.

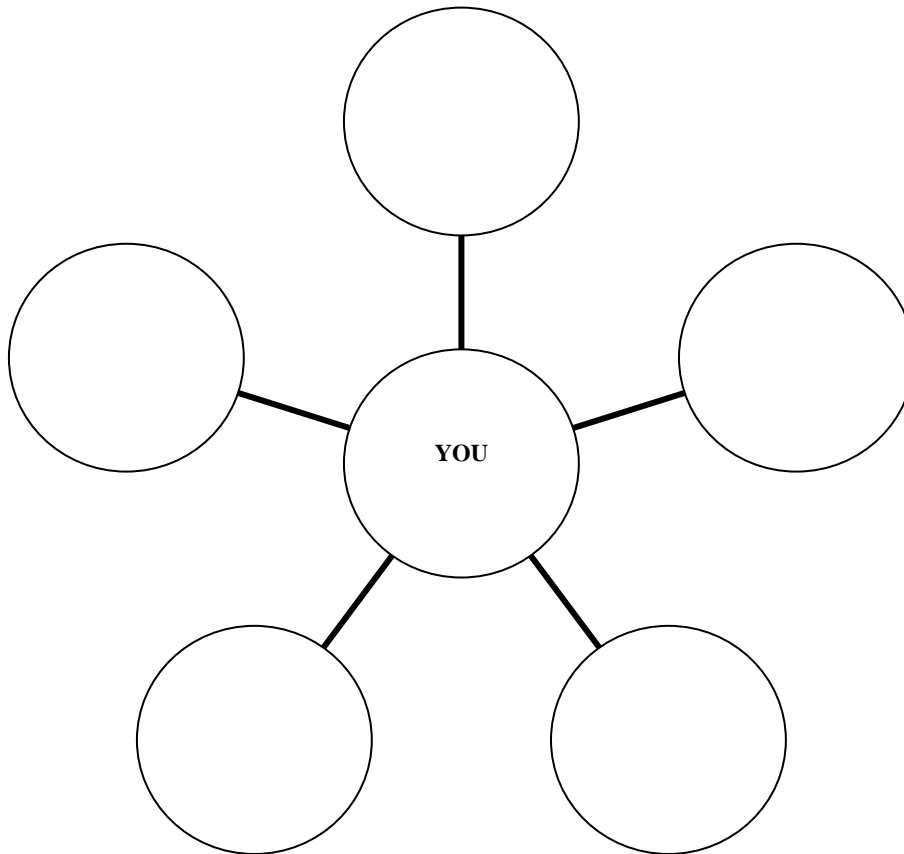
Here is one exercise (tool) that can help you examine your “life’s filters”. I call it “Your Life’s Influences” using inquiry and reflection. This is designed to begin the process of examining where your beliefs, values, and perceptions come from. These are rooted in your

most influential life experiences (family, education, religion, occupation, volunteerism, etc.).

The circle in the center of the diagram represents “You”. The surrounding circles represent the most influential life experiences that have shaped who you are. Take the time to reflect on who and/or what these experiences are and why they were so influential. As you think about these experiences begin to fill in the outer circles with names, places, etc., use a piece of paper to write down all the thoughts and feelings that come to you for each one. Once you have captured your thoughts and feelings ask yourself these questions:

- What insight have I gained about myself?
- How do these influences impact or affect my role as leader?
- Who would I be willing to share this with and why?
- When will I share it?

Action Exercise: Your Life's Influences



Another “tool” to increase self awareness is an assessment instrument. Assessing your strengths and weaknesses is truly an empowering experience that will increase your self awareness exponentially. There are two types of assessments. One is a self assessment and the other is what’s called a multi-rater assessment or 360 Degree Feedback. A self assessment tool is designed for you to assess yourself openly and honestly. A multi-rater assessment is designed for you to elicit feedback from others to evaluate your leadership competencies anonymously. With a multi-rater assessment you are typically eliciting feedback from your peers, boss, and direct reports (clients or customers can also be included), and the feedback and results are administered by a certified professional with the chosen 360 Degree instrument. The greatest

value with a multi-rater assessment is that you are getting the perception of those you interact and communicate with. Both are valuable tools to increase your self awareness and both require open, honest feedback. An important aspect of maximizing the value of multi-rater assessments is having the willingness and openness to receive the feedback and leveraging that information to maximize strengths, identify developmental opportunities, and make desired changes.

One type of self assessment tool is referred to as a “SWOT” Analysis. This can be a starting point to begin the self assessment process. A “SWOT” assesses your **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats**. This process helps you recognize and take advantage of your talents and abilities, and uncover opportunities to leverage those talents. As well as identifying your developmental areas and any threats that may exist that would catch you unaware. In other words, this will help you uncover potential challenges or obstacles to increasing your self awareness. The value of this process is that it enables you to pre-empt obstacles and uncover “blind spots”. To perform a mini Personal “SWOT” assessment to enhance your self awareness, write down answers to the questions below. It is important to be open and honest with yourself as you answer these questions.

Action Exercise: Personal SWOT Assessment

Strengths

What do you consider your leadership strengths?

How do you leverage those strengths?

What do others see as your strengths?

What technical knowledge/skills do you possess/leverage?

What functional expertise/experience do you possess/leverage?

Weaknesses

What skills, behaviors, or knowledge would you like to develop?

What would you like to stop doing?

What would you like to do better?

Opportunities (Positive external conditions/factors that you don't necessarily control but you can leverage)

What opportunities do you have to elicit feedback on your leadership competencies?

What opportunities do you have to leverage other people's strengths?

What are the opportunities to create value for the ideas and opinions of others?

Threats (Negative external conditions/factors that you don't necessarily control but you may be able to overcome)

What obstacles or challenges would you face to elicit feedback?

What might prevent you from leveraging other people's strengths?

What might prevent you from leveraging your leadership strengths?

Once you have answered the questions, spend some time reflecting on the answers and how you will take action on your new insights. Think about who you might want to share the insights with and what you want to begin focusing on. It is important to focus on one aspect of your "SWOT" assessment at a time. In the absence of a formally administered 360 degree instrument you can elicit feedback on area's you would like to gain further insight using the "SWOT" questions or other questions specific to what you would like further insight on. For example, you could ask people: What do you consider to be my leadership strengths? Another question might be: In my leadership role what do you want me to do more of? And, what do you want me to stop doing? These are powerful, insightful questions. The other aspect of doing this type of exercise is that you are demonstrating that you value people's feedback. This

requires courage and trust, and a certain amount of risk and vulnerability. The reward is gaining insight on what I call our “blind spots”, if you are unaware of how your behaviors, perceptions, attitudes, leadership and communication styles affect how you influence others then you don’t know how to adapt or change what you do to be a more effective leader.

Another powerful method to increase self awareness that uses the technique of inquiry and reflection is professional development coaching. The essence of coaching is raising awareness and increasing responsibility for the desired outcome or change. The process of coaching is facilitating change with individuals who are open to learning, introspection, self reflection, and receiving feedback. From this process you can experience a deeper understanding of your personal bias’ and perceptions, identify what particular habit or behavior you want or need to change, build greater trust and belief in yourself and others to name a few. Developing self awareness through coaching is invaluable from two perspectives. First is that you will increase your own self awareness and that will serve you well with the second perspective which is you will coach and help develop others more effectively.

In addition to willingness, there are two other critical aspects of developing your self awareness. They are taking action and not operating in a vacuum. You can look at developing self awareness as a process, and taking action becomes step two in the process. The willingness to gather feedback and be introspective and reflective is all vital, but is not as useful if you don’t take action on what you learn (Step 1). The real growth or deeper understanding comes from what you do with what you have learned (Step 2). Think about the last time you discovered something about yourself whether through self discovery or the result of feedback from others and how you felt during that “Ah, ha” moment, very valuable yes. Then think about what you did with that discovery, how you changed a behavior, an attitude, a viewpoint or handled a

situation differently as a result of acting on your increased awareness, very powerful and sometimes life altering. None of that happened in a vacuum. The undeniable value of deepening your own level of self awareness leads to better self management and increased effectiveness in interacting and communicating with others-essentially your relationship with people.

Action Exercise: Eliciting Feedback

Ask these simple, yet powerful questions from your direct reports, peers, and boss:

1. What do you want me to continue doing?
2. What do you want me to do more of?
3. What do you want me to start doing?
4. What do you want me to stop doing?

If there is any level of concern that people will fear being honest, ask them to answer these questions in writing anonymously. Once you have gathered your feedback, begin your analysis and action planning. Look for consistent similar feedback from each group (language)-this will indicate a particular pattern which will help guide you on what to focus on. Start with three actions you are willing to take over a three to six month period. To evaluate your progress elicit feedback on how you are doing.

Your intra-personal compass is your guide to understanding yourself from the inside out. As you deepen your level of understanding from an internal perspective it will help you make more informed decisions and choices. This is an ongoing process that requires intention and constant attention and comes with huge rewards for you and those you lead. Some of those rewards include:

- Increased self confidence
- Empowers you to make better decisions for yourself and others

- Empowers you to make better choices for yourself
- Empowers you to make changes to be more effective personally and professionally
- Increased flexibility with different individuals' behavioral preferences and styles
- Greater adaptability in different situations
- Experience greater success at achieving desired outcomes
- Increased trust and confidence in relationships
- Enhances your ability to influence and inspire others
- The ability to leverage personal strengths and the talents of others to achieve greater success

Whether you are in a leadership role or preparing for one, I hope what I have shared will serve you well personally and professionally.

Become a More Self Aware Leader

Resources

Books and Articles

The Platinum Rule, by Dr. Tony Alessandra

Emotional Intelligence and Job Function, by Dr. Travis Bradberry and Lac D. Su

Primal Leadership: realizing the power of emotional intelligence, by Daniel Goleman

In Search of the Perfect Leader, by Libby McCready, Certified Business Coach

Leadership Skills and Emotional Intelligence, by The Center for Creative Leadership

Increasing EQ Through Coaching, by D. Paul Warner, M.S.

Professional Development Programs Offered by Carol Heady

Women and Leadership: What's Your Strategy for Success?

Coaching Programs Offered by Carol Heady

Becoming a More Self Aware Leader

Leveraging Strategic Alliances: A Blueprint for Business Success

Strategizing for Success: Taking Goal Setting to a New Level

Assessment Tools

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