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Leadership And Self-Awareness

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Leader Beware – ignorant bliss, no matter how enjoyable, is still ignorant. If you're in a position of leadership and don't feel you have any blind spots, you're either very naïve or very arrogant. All leaders have blind spots – the question is what are they doing about them? The reality is most leaders invest so much time assessing the cultural and functional dynamics of their organizations they often forget the importance of critically assessing themselves – big mistake.


I've never understood leaders who make heavy investments in personal and professional development early in their careers, who then go on to make only minimal investments in learning once they have reached the C-suite. Learning and development are lifelong endeavors. The learning journey doesn't come to an end just because you reach a certain station in life – or at least it shouldn't. It has consistently been my experience that leaders who are not growing simply cannot lead growing organizations. Moreover, leaders who fail to continue developing will always be replaced by those who do. A leader who fails to understand the value of self-awareness fails to understand their own true potential as a leader.

It's at the C-suite level an executive must be on top of his/her game as they have the broadest sphere of influence, the largest ability to impact a business, and they also now have the most at risk. It is at this place the leader should make the heaviest investment in refining their game, because increased performance will pay the biggest dividends. Let me be as clear as I can – the more responsibility a leader has, the bigger their obligation to be on the forward edge of learning, growth and development.

The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates had a few guiding principles that today's leaders would do well to adopt: Socrates said, "Know Thyself" and "An unexamined life is not worth living." Those leaders who actively pursue gaining a better understanding of themselves will not only reduce their number of blind spots, but they'll also find developing a sense of awareness is the key to increasing emotional intelligence. The better you know yourself the more effective you'll be, and the better you'll relate to others.

Following are 5 things all leaders should embrace if they desire to be more self-aware:

1. **Never Stop Learning**: I read an article last week in [Chief Executive Magazine](#) profiling 6 leadership lessons from Mark Zuckerberg. Lesson #1 was: "**Make your own development a priority** – Zuckerberg knew he needed to be a leader (and not just a tech guy) if Facebook was going to go anywhere, so he hired an executive coach to learn management and leadership skills." If top CEOs, Billionaires, leading scholars, and others who have reached the pinnacle of their profession can continue to invest in themselves, then so should you.
2. **Context Matters**: Just as life is not static, neither is the environment you work in. Leadership isn't a one-size-fits-all endeavor. The best leaders apply their craft contextually based upon the needs of those whom they serve. If you don't know how to nuance your leadership skills you will simply miss opportunities others won't.
3. **Be Kind**: People go out of their way to help those whom they like. Likewise most people won't lift a finger to help those they don't care for. Smart leaders are purposed to build into those they lead. They understand leadership success is found by ensuring those whom they lead are better off for being led by them. Mean, arrogant, or belittling behavior may feed your ego, but it doesn't serve your best interests as a leader.
4. **Surrender**: A leader simply operates at their best when they understand their ability to influence is much more fruitful than their ability to control. Here's the thing – the purpose of leadership is not to shine the spotlight on yourself, but to unlock the potential of others so they can in turn shine the spotlight on countless more. Control is about power – not leadership. Surrender allows a leader to get out of their own way and focus on adding value to those whom they serve. Forget span of control and think span of influence.
5. **Beg in the Process of Unlearning**: Just as important as learning, so is shedding the emotional and intellectual baggage trapping you in the past. Human nature causes most of us to hold onto wrong, unhealthy, or outdated ideas, concepts, thoughts, feelings or practices. The fastest way to become more self-aware is to challenge your own logic. If you're really serious about finding the flaws in your thinking, ask others to help you identify gaps or faults, and then listen very carefully to what they share with you.



Becoming self-aware isn't difficult, but it will be hard in the beginning. Becoming self-aware requires you to place humility above hubris, and to place a higher value on truth than you do on your ability to rationalize and justify your thinking. I'd encourage you to stay the course as few things of value come easily. Thoughts?