



LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS: BECOMING SELF-AWARE

Self-awareness is an important foundation of effective leadership. Can self-awareness be learned? As an executive coach, I am optimistic that it can be learned.

What does it even mean to be self-aware? Self-awareness, according to Oxford Dictionaries, is having “conscious knowledge of one’s own character, feelings, motives, and desires.” Taken further, self-awareness is about understanding one’s impact on other people. Self-aware people tend to be mindful of how their actions and behaviors affect others around them.

Many leaders care about deepening their self-awareness, and they commit to doing the heavy lifting. And, why would they? People who are self-aware make better leaders, have more fulfilling relationships, and live happier lives.

There is no question that seeing ourselves as others see us is a significant factor in being successful in relationships. If this is an important success factor, then why is it that so many people’s self-awareness is poor or average at best? One reason is: it is not easy. One researcher estimates that only 10-15% of people are actually self-aware, although a much higher proportion believe that they are — from Harvard Business Review: [What Self-Awareness Really Is \(and How to Cultivate It\)](#).

We at EXCN believe that candid, constructive feedback in the form of a 360-degree assessment is so important in leadership development. It is an excellent step executives can take to improve their self-awareness. The process of receiving feedback from co-workers and subordinates makes what is apparent to others become obvious to the leader.

As an executive coach of about 25 years, it is a true privilege to help leaders who want to become more self-aware learn how to do so. The journey is not always easy and it takes an abundance of courage, humility, intentionality, energy, and practice. The good news is that, as soon as people put into action the practices of gaining self-awareness, the journey becomes easier and more fun. They begin to feel happier because they engage in less conflict, listen more, and do things to create a more positive environment for all. And generally speaking, others find them easier to deal with – which is a contributing factor to the positive environment.

Here are 5 tips on becoming more self-aware:

1. Consistently ask for feedback and listen so that you really understand what you are being told. Act on the feedback, and follow up with the individual who gave you the feedback to make sure your new behavior is having the intended impact.
2. Keep a journal and write down your feelings. This will help you articulate what is happening as you become more mindful of your emotional state.
3. Read books. Simply entering “self-awareness” into your favorite browser will provide an abundance of options related to achieving greater self-awareness.
4. Join (or start) a group of people who have a similar desire to become more self-aware and do it together.
5. Be mindful of alcohol and other substances that people sometimes use to dampen self-awareness.

What do you believe are the repercussions when a leader lacks self-awareness? Are there gaps in your self-awareness you should fix?

Further reading

From Harvard Business Review: [How to Move from Self-Awareness to Self-Improvement](#)