

## The Power of Self-Awareness

### 1.) Quick Quote To Consider

"You must create the space in your life to enable your inner guide to share her wisdom, her creativity, her vision, her courage. Unleashed, she is the single most potent resource you have." Marilyn O. Sifford

### 2. The Power Of Self-Awareness

A cornerstone of Emotional Intelligence is self-awareness. Without it, a person's chance of managing his or her emotions is less than 5%, according to research done by Burckle and Boyatzis. In addition, the person is more likely not to have any social awareness, which reduces his or her ability to be empathetic and to understand organizational culture and politics.

#### *Thar She Blows!*

Several years ago I worked with an executive who had problems managing her anger. Here's her description of how she reacted in a stressful situation: "I found myself screaming in his face. I wanted to rip out his jugular vein." Although she knew that her outbursts were not healthy and were making her unhappy, she believed that sharing her anger was justified and that it was an effective way of changing people's behavior. When I asked her what she had accomplished by blowing up, her response was, "He'll never make that mistake again!"

To help her become more aware of the impact of her anger on herself and on the company, I asked her to observe herself for several weeks and to keep a journal of her behavior. Specifically, she was to observe physical sensations and emotional states that arose. She made the following discoveries:

She was more vulnerable to outbursts at the end of the day when she was tired and cranky. Prior to important meetings requiring her to perform, she found herself becoming tense and losing sleep at night. Usually a gregarious person, she discovered that under pressure she withdrew, was humorless and her body would stiffen.

A major breakthrough came for her when she was sharing with me a recent incident where she "had freaked out." As she relived the incident, she started to laugh as she recalled how the other executive had started to soothe her to help her calm down. Then it hit her. At the end of the conversation, he was the person in control. By losing her temper, she had relinquished her power to him. Her outbursts were diminishing her effectiveness rather than keeping others from "never making that mistake again!"

With her new-found awareness, she now could recognize the conditions warning her that she was triggered for an outburst. Instead of losing control, she was now able to take control of her reactions. Here are some of the tools she used:

- Excuse self for several minutes to have time to regain composure.



- Take several deep breaths.
- Don't schedule important meetings at the end of the day.
- If an important topic arises in a meeting and she was triggered, she would schedule a second meeting for another day. It gave her time to prepare and gather her thoughts.

*Today, instead of avoiding her, people seek her out for coaching.*

### **The Missing Link: Self-Awareness**

Ripping out some one's jugular vein may not describe your behavior. But how aware are you of how your emotions affect your performance and impact others? Are you aware of your own feelings? Can you identify situations that arouse strong feelings in you? Do you understand how your emotions affect situations? Do you know why your emotions are aroused by certain stimuli?

Before you can change behavior, you must be aware of the behavior and its impact. How many books have you read to help you manage stress better or improve your effectiveness as a manager and leader? After reading the book or article, you resolve to change your behavior, but in several weeks (or days), you find yourself back in your old habits and behavior.

Why is it difficult to change behavior? You're committed to change. You know what you need to do. The missing link is self-awareness. And, a good place to begin is by listening to your own body.

Your body holds a lot of information. You just need to listen to it. A simple exercise to increase your self-awareness is to practice a Breath Awareness Meditation five minutes a day. When it was first suggested to me, the very thought made me tense. Just sit and breathe! Can't do it! Have to be doing something. Now I easily practice it for 30 minutes. It leaves me refreshed, calmer, and able to think more clearly. The days I skip it, I find myself more susceptible to stress. Try it for two weeks!

### **Breathe Awareness Meditation**

Sit comfortably where you won't be interrupted or distracted.

Close your eyes and observe the feeling of your inhale. What is it like?

Now observe your exhale. Simply notice. Do not change how you breathe. Just observe it.

(Hint: Initially I set a timer for myself for two minutes. As it became easier to do, I added minutes. Now I don't use a timer at all.)

This simple exercise will help you strengthen your self-awareness and become a better observer of yourself.

In the next issue of the Leading Edge, Dee Gold, a certified yoga therapist and teacher, will share more information about the physiological benefits of listening to your body and how it will increase your emotional self-awareness. Only with self-awareness can you increase your Emotional Intelligence to be better able to manage your own emotions and your relationships with others.

If you'd like to share your experience with the Breath Meditation, or learn more about increasing your self-awareness by working with an executive coach, just send an e-mail to [info@northwoodconsulting.com](mailto:info@northwoodconsulting.com) or call 301.990.6331.

### **3.) Karen Depew Named Professional Of The Year**

On May 6, the Direct Marketing Association of Washington (DMAW), named Karen Depew its 2004 Professional of the Year. The award is presented annually to recognize an individual in the metropolitan Washington DC area who has made significant contributions from which the members of the Association and others in direct marketing have benefited.

"Lives are not lived in vacuums. There are many people who are responsible for me receiving this honor... Since I first became a member of DMAW, so many relationships have grown from a simple introduction to a business relationship to a deep friendship," said Depew. She urged new members of the organization "to take advantage of being a member, because sitting in this room are future colleagues, mentors and friends. And, you don't want to miss out on knowing some very special people."

Depew works with many of her coaching clients on how to achieve success through strengthening key relationships.