

## Practicing Self-Awareness

### 1.) Quick Quote To Consider

"He who knows others is wise. He who knows himself is enlightened." Lao-Tzu

### 2.) Practicing Self-Awareness

In the May/June Leading Edge (visit [www.northwoodconsulting.com](http://www.northwoodconsulting.com) "Leading Edge Archive" to read), we discussed the power of self-awareness and how it can support you in changing your own behavior. Dee Gold, a certified yoga therapist and teacher, shares with you the power of practicing self-awareness.

#### The Choppy Seas of Change

Change. We believe in its power to improve our lives. Yet, change can be as elusive as the wind. It can continually throw us off track, or, if harnessed, can propel us forward toward our dearest goals. More often than not, though, it seems that the winds of change are beyond our grasp and we are totally at the mercy of fate. We get tossed about on the choppy seas of existence, pull in our sails, and hope for the best. This needn't be the case. As a long-time yoga therapist and teacher, I can confidently report that positive change is achievable by anyone who chooses to engage in the simple discipline of "noticing."

For this month's Leading Edge, I've been asked to share my "expertise" on the important topic of self-awareness as the missing link to effective change.

#### Practicing Self-Awareness: An Inner Dialogue

I'm aware that I feel flattered. I notice that my confidence soars. This energizes me and I enthusiastically accept the assignment, while expansive visions of professional and financial success dance joyfully on the inner screen of my mind. Meanwhile, checking in with my body, I notice an increase in my heart-rate, an impulse to move freely, and an irrepressible desire to grin. Laughter arises easily and all is right with the world. This would be an excellent time for one of my teenagers to approach me with any request, no matter how outrageous. They have radar, they can tell... I'm likely to respond, in this moment, with a hearty, gleeful YES!

But, wait... as I sit down to collect my thoughts on the subject, I suddenly feel a tight, heavy, downward pull in my chest, as though my heart were attached to a lead sinker. My mind fogs over, my breathing becomes shallow, and I'm aware of the tightness in my throat, whose job it is to choke back tears. This seems to signal one of my internal "demons," who is all too willing to spring to the fore, megaphone in hand, with a litany of self-abasement, "EXPERTISE? What expertise? Are you kidding? Who do you think you are... the Dalai Llama? Even worse... who did you lead them to believe you were? You don't have any expertise... on this or any other topic!" I drop into lethargy and writer's block.

*Heaven help the teenager who approaches me now.*



So, what's going on here, and how do I manage it so that I don't sell the farm to buy my son a new Mazarati, and I DO produce a helpful article on the importance of self-awareness? What's going on is the very human interaction between mind and body; thought and emotion influencing physicality and action, and vice-versa. And, oh yes, ego-involvement.

### **The Art of Balancing Mind and Body**

Fortunately for me, my yoga practice provides a time-tested framework for bringing mind and body into balanced union, shifting my focus away from ego demands. The happy outcome of all of this is a more balanced life and the ability to be at peace with my decisions, actions, and interactions with others. More germane to the moment, I am able to free myself from writer's block and offer some guidance on how and why to practice self-awareness.

Every person reading this article has had the experience of asking yourself, "How did I manage to get myself into this situation?" or "How did that happen?" or "Why didn't I handle that differently?" These questions are indicators of a lack of self-awareness at critical moments. Self-awareness in those crucial moments is the key to effective decision-making and productive "right action."

"Right action" in yoga, is that which promotes the best possible outcome for all concerned. In the example of my writer's block, without awareness of my internal process, I might have succumbed to it and you wouldn't be reading this article to learn more about practicing self-awareness. With self-awareness, I was able to recognize the trigger prior to it undermining my performance. Before it paralyzed me, I was able to treat myself kindly by engaging my sense of humor to counter my internal "demon," and alter my physical state by practicing a breathe meditation (see May/June issue) which lifted my mood and freed me up to write.

As with all developmental processes, the imprint for self-awareness is inborn. How skilled we become over the course of a lifetime is dependent upon our commitment to practice. Yes, you can learn the skills needed to effectively transform those aspects of your life or self that you want to change. And, YES, you will have to practice.

### **A Body Scan Practice**

One of the most effective self-awareness exercises available to us is called the Body Scan. It's easy to learn and simple to practice. I recommend practicing it at least once a day. Generally, it can be done in as little time as ten minutes.

After you become adept, it can be accomplished within seconds and you can practice several times a day. Alternatively, you can stretch it out for longer periods and deepen your awareness beyond your imagination. Each time you complete the Body Scan, remember to notice the benefits you feel. This will pave the way for more practice and possibly motivate you to learn other self-awareness techniques.

- Imagine that your breath is a vehicle for conscious awareness. Notice the movement of breath, in and out of nostrils. Shift awareness to the movement of breath in the ribcage, then in the belly. Now, imagine being able to send breath and awareness anywhere in the body. Allow conscious awareness to note sensation, or lack of sensation, in each body part



without judging, and without succumbing to the impulse to change anything. Simply notice, with deep awareness... what's happening now.

- Send your breath and conscious awareness into the soles of your feet. What sorts of sensations are you aware of in your feet?
- Do the same with your ankles.
- Bring breath and awareness into lower legs. What's happening right now, in lower legs?
- Breathe awareness into knees. What are you aware of in your knees in this very moment?
- Draw breath and awareness upward, into thighs. What sensations are present or absent in thighs right now?
- Breathe into hips and buttocks. What's happening right now in those areas?
- Lower belly and sacrum... send breath and awareness there. What sensations are present?
- What's happening now in the mid-section? Front, sides and back?
- Breathe into ribcage. What's your experience?
- Breathe awareness into shoulders and collar bone. What's happening here, right now?
- Allow breath and awareness to travel into arms, hands, and fingers. What are you sensing?
- Breathe into neck and throat. What is your experience of neck and throat?
- Bring breath and awareness into jaw... all the tiny muscles of the face... and brow.
- What's happening in eyes and eye sockets right now?
- What's your sensation at brow center? Scalp? Inside of skull?
- What's happening right now, in brain?
- Breathe awareness into the full body, all at once. What's stands out most prominently?
- Finish the body scan with a quick review of the whole body. Which sensations stand out most prominently in your awards? Why?
- Bring your awareness gently back into the natural movement of breath, especially at naval center. Feel the power of embodying your physicality. Simply notice.

You have completed a simple body scan. Notice the level of your internal awareness. Notice any shift in mood, attitude, levels of tension, or anything else that arises. You might choose to share this experience with a friend or associate. Discussion helps to concretize the benefits of performing a simple body scan. In any case, take it lightly, and enjoy the experience.

If you have questions for Dee or you want to learn more increasing your self-awareness by working with an executive coach, e-mail [info@northwoodconsulting.com](mailto:info@northwoodconsulting.com).