

Creating Awareness

Self-awareness is the foundation of personal growth and success. Daniel Goleman, author of the internationally best-selling book, [*Emotional Intelligence*](#) calls it the 'keystone' of emotional intelligence.

Our notion of awareness is likely to mean being aware of others and how they are affecting us. We sometimes consider ourselves to be very aware beings because we notice everything that people are doing around us. We notice the achievements of others, we notice the gains of others, and we notice what others have.

However, awareness is having an inward focus, not an outward focus. Awareness is knowing the patterns in our everyday life, understanding our beliefs, our mind, our spirit, our body. Maslow's hierarchy of needs was about understanding levels of awareness that we need to have as a person. He saw total awareness as self-actualization, the highest level in the hierarchy.

Self-awareness offers many benefits to help you live a happier, more fulfilling and genuine life:

- Able to act consciously instead of reacting to people and events.
- Able to genuinely appreciate yourself.
- Greater depth of experience and enjoyment of life.
- Able to redirect your negative thoughts and emphasize positive ones.
- Behaving positively instead of creating additional obstacles.
- Enjoying positive interpersonal relationships.
- Living courageously and without limits.
- The ability to make your dreams come true.

Self-awareness is a powerful tool to help you live the life you've always wanted rather than settling for whatever comes your way.

First Step to Creating Awareness

The first step to creating awareness is recognizing that you want to. Having awareness could be described as having a learning pathway for your life. Learning more about yourself is part of growing as a person. If we choose not to gain self-awareness then we stagnate and don't grow. This may sound very harsh but how many times have we looked at others and wondered why they have never moved on in life or grown.

Creating awareness also supports us in identifying the areas of our life that work for us and the ones that don't. Think back to the time when you wanted to change something in your life, and you kept trying to do this but it just never happened. Eventually you gave up, possibly feeling unsuccessful and defeated. We often take on new things to change our life, adding more things to what we do rather than unpacking or looking at what we already do to understand this more.

Consider Anita's in her quest to be a better leader.

Anita reads a book and decides that the path to becoming a great leader is to be just like the leader that she read all about in the book. She outlines the behaviors and tasks the leader took and decides that the next day she will take on all of these new behaviors.

Each day Anita puts all her energy into taking on these new behaviors. What people notice however is not a new leader emerging but rather a person who is unfocused and scattered, and acting out of character. People around her become unsure of how to respond as what they are observing is nothing like the person they knew.

After two weeks of struggling to take on these new behaviors Anita gives up. No one at work is listening to her, she doesn't feel like a great leader and, if anything, work has become more stressful and chaotic.

Anita decides that she is not a great leader and her self-esteem is plummeting. She begins to wonder if she's chosen the right career and she has lost sight of her strengths and positive qualities.

We can see what is wrong with this picture (perhaps because we have done this as well). It is an understandable human desire to want to be like someone who we see as successful. However, imagine this story opening with Anita deciding she wants to learn more about herself to determine how best to move forward in life. She begins to read books on leadership and finds she had some of the qualities those leaders speak about. Next she takes time to understand what her qualities and strengths are. To do this, she employs a coach, completes several assessments to understand herself more and begins looking at all of her strengths.

She also begins to work out what her vision is for herself. All of these actions make her feel more focused. She now believes that leadership is her strength and realizes that being a great leader means knowing more about oneself. Her confidence increases and she relies on her supportive actions to stay focused. She continues to look more and more at who she is and commits to a practice of self-discovery. She heads to work and explains her own awareness to her team. She asks them for their support by helping her know more about their strengths so she can manage everyone more effectively.

This outcome is quite different from the first one. Anita's pathway to knowing more about herself opens up the pathway for others to know more about themselves. What an amazing shift in focus.

Self Application

Being self aware is a key leadership skill whether we are leading others or ourselves. A true leader leads their life from strength to strength. The great leaders we know are great because they follow their own pathway, they know who they are, they have planned out their pathway for learning and they are on the journey of greater self-awareness. They recognize that self-awareness is valuable and is part of their journey.

Ways to Develop Self awareness

- Write in a journal everyday so you can see patterns that emerge in your life.
- List your strengths and think about how you would like to develop them further.
- Employ a coach who will support you on your journey of self-awareness and tell them this is the goal of your coaching.

- Ask your friends and family to support you as you learn more about yourself. Ask them to share what they see are your strengths, your qualities, etc.
- Attend a workshop or read books on self-awareness to find the approach you want to support you on your journey.
- List your goals for self-awareness, and how what you need to achieve them.

Self-awareness Exercise

Observe Your Self

This exercise comes from dream work and enhances self-awareness from within. Practice this during meditation or try it while falling asleep.

When you are fully relaxed, lying down and with your eyes closed, focus your awareness within and ask yourself: *what does it feel like to be me right now?*

Start with very basic awareness, such as the physical sensation of lying in bed. Is the mattress soft or firm? Are the sheets cold or warm? Rough or smooth? Does your body ache or are you completely comfortable? Do you feel heavy or light?

Then take some deep breaths and focus

Do you feel calm or stressed? Why is that?

Can you remember a time when you were MORE calm or MORE stressed? What did that calm/stress feel like?

How would you describe the feeling if you were talking to an alien who had never experienced it before? Are there different layers to this feeling? Is it tangible? Can you move it around, build it up, or sweep it away? What might it look like if you could see it?

Direct your focus to whatever emotion or state of mind is strongest and probe it in every way you can think. Like manipulating clay in your hands, try to manipulate any feeling

(happiness, peace, amusement, boredom, even pain) to get a better understanding of how it affects your experience of reality.

To be self aware is to recognize your feelings as they occur, to understand the impact they have, and put them to an effective use.

When dreaming, this improvement of your self-awareness will help you to recognize unusual or extreme feelings and thereby trigger lucidity.

For instance, the feeling of intense fear from being chased or attacked (or whatever your nightmare is) can provoke the realization: *"I must be dreaming!"*

Application

1. Do you value self-awareness and what does this mean to you?
2. Do you believe you are on a pathway of self-awareness and if yes, how do you know this?
3. How comfortable do you feel about talking about yourself to others and how do you think these feelings reflect on your self-awareness?

Coaching Application

As a coach you support others to become aware of their behaviour. One of the reasons people work with a coach is to encourage more positive things in their lives and rid themselves of unhelpful behaviours that lead to negative effects. To do this they might need some help to actually see such behaviours in action and to begin to articulate this awareness.

Our inner self-talk can be quite critical and can go round and round in circles never moving us forward. Its aim is to question our good intentions. Talking aloud to a coach can begin to change your inner self-talk. It also requires a person to speak their intent, to out their thoughts into words and this can be the first step to committing to a new way of doing something.

Using Powerful Questions

Powerful questions support your client in stopping in their particular pathway of thought and looking at a situation from a different perspective. This creates distance and allows the client to see a situation much easier. Powerful questions also support opportunities for growth and creativity. Asking questions will support your client in knowing more about themselves and what they need to do.

Effective Feedback or Outlining Observations

Another way coaches can create awareness with a client is through the use of feedback. Feedback is an observation. It is information that we have noticed, discerned, or are picking up from what they are saying. The difference between feedback and advice is that feedback is nonjudgmental. It is not based on opinion nor beliefs but rather on the moment of observation. Feedback never includes the words “you should”. Feedback helps the client to realise that your listening is complete and real.

Effective feedback creates a kind of awareness that makes a difference in how one sees things. It is neither positive nor negative. It is simply feedback. By stating what is or what is not from another perspective, may just help your client get insight they can use.

We are often unaware of the language we use. When we notice and share particular language used by the client it can help them gain greater understanding of themselves. For example, a client may make the same statement about themselves over and over again but may be unaware that they are doing this. As the coach, you can share what you heard and what he or she has been saying about themselves and repeat back to them their words. This is a very awareness-creating exercise.

To give feedback is to simply mirror back to the client the way we see it. For example, a coach may say to a client, “I hear you are really angry about that, do you want to talk more about it?” There is no judgment here about the emotion being conveyed by the client. It is simply being noticed for the client to evaluate the feeling and move forward.

Role-play and Feed Forward Role-play is a very effective technique to create awareness with your clients. It is particularly helpful when a client is unsure how to have a conversation with someone; or has some fear around what to say and how to proceed. In this case, role-play becomes essentially a practice conversation. This is done so the client can find some powerful and clear ways to communicate to resolve the situation. As a coach, you can provide them with effective feedback on what you observed.

Reflection

1. What is the purpose of feedback in a coaching situation?
2. What are three situations you might encounter as a coach in which role-play could be useful?
3. How do you maintain your self-awareness as a coach?

Resources

[Eastern Body, Western Mind](#) by Judith, Anodea

[Emotional Intelligence](#) by Goleman, Daniel

[Lucid Dreaming and Self-Realization](#)

An interview with dream expert Beverly D'Urso