

Self-Aware Leadership

It leads to sustainable effectiveness.



by David Peck

TODAY'S TUMULTUOUS conditions require leaders to

master speed, turbulence, and complexity. In order for leaders to upgrade from "coping" to *thriving*, they must invest in building greater self-awareness.

Yet *self-awareness* is not a common theme in leadership literature, and the practices that lead to it aren't easy to find. Confronting blind spots, reassessing one's standards, managing negative self-talk, and catching disconnects between one's values and behavior aren't typical leadership seminar fare.

Absent self-awareness, leaders deal with speed and complexity by reacting to events—and that becomes a recurring pattern—one that, over time, takes a hefty toll on the leader and organization. With some focus on self-awareness, this cycle can be broken.

Self-Aware Leaders

Leaders who make it a practice to gain insight into their own values, thinking, and actions tend to detect and correct problems with their own effectiveness. Such self-aware leaders learn from and take corrective action on dysfunctional situations, resulting in a tangible payoff for greater consciousness.

Here are six qualities of self-aware

leadership: 1) being aware of and editing the beliefs that drive behaviors, actions, and results; 2) remaining curious and open-minded: asking, listening, getting help, learning, and changing; 3) being imaginative and valuing imagination in others; 4) being responsible for the impact on others, the organization, community, and society; 5) leading with great authenticity of heart and mind; and 6) being humble by monitoring and addressing the periodic pitfalls of egoic behavior.

Most leaders fall into the category of achiever-leaders—they rise to leadership based *not* on their evolving consciousness, but on their ability to get things done and deliver the goods. Achievers tend to be more reactive than creative and to use some combination of people-pleasing, self-protection, or control to get results. This "operating system," as Bob Anderson likes to put it, works for a time, but lacks sustainability.

At some point, certain leaders realize they need new strategies. Perhaps they are ambitious to learn, had the pain of a professional failure, or are unhappy and seeking something more meaningful. Such pain or disharmony with their operating system is the catalyst for *waking up*. Leaders who arrive at that point *without* major stress are rare.

Being doers rather than reflectors by nature, achievers don't focus on self-awareness.

They exist in a self-perpetuating action-result loop of day-to-day work. Others are riding the rapids of short-term deliverables or results. For these men and women, quiet self-reflection/deeper development of their "operating systems" is *not* job one.

If leaders need greater self-awareness to be highly effective, whose job is that? After all, a leader's consciousness can't be put on a balance sheet. And it costs money to help achievers gain self-awareness. The "optics" of these costs and their custom nature give the CFO a headache. Should organizations develop leaders in this way? Certainly.

Consultant Mark Sobol says: "Just because human assets aren't booked on a financial statement doesn't mean they're not important. It's the duty of every organization to be good stewards—good developers of their leadership assets."

When you direct your LD efforts toward sustainability, fostering self-aware leaders comes naturally, along with a positive ROI. If, through directed development activities and one-on-one efforts, a leader becomes 10 percent more effective, that can be multiplied not only by their total compensation cost, but also by the returns of their positive impact on the organization over several years. In the face of increasing speed, turbulence, and complexity, leaders must embrace self-awareness for their own fulfillment, and the greater good. Sustainable organizations and societies are the gifts that flow from self-aware leaders. **LE**

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