

Are You an Oblivious Leader?



That's right, ON the Rose Bowl field—known to those of us who faithfully follow the college football post-season bowl games as “The Granddaddy of Them All” (can't you hear Keith Jackson in your head?!). For over 100 years, it has served as center stage for millions of eyes fixed on their high-def TV on New Year's Day.

The occasion was a wedding rehearsal dinner for the daughter of some dear friends who had access to this world-class venue.

After a fabulous meal, the stadium lights began to power up and before you knew it a few footballs appeared (someone came prepared!). Within minutes, every weekend warrior within sight was transported back to their former days of athletic glory! Kids. Teenagers. Parents. Grandparents. It was quite a sight. And a ton of fun.

After a few warm-up tosses, I signaled to my friend to hit me on a post pattern. As I turned to catch the ball, I saw that he had thrown the ball as if I were a Hall of Fame wide-out! I had to downshift a gear or two to catch up with it. Bad idea. As I accelerated (which is pretty much an overstatement), I came to a sudden (and painful) awareness that there was a gap—make that a BIG gap—between my high-school-football-days MIND and my middle-age BODY. Long story short, I pulled a hamstring and was put on the DL for a few weeks!

While awareness of your physical capacity is important, as a leader, awareness of how you come across in your leadership role is of the highest importance. Reggie McNeal in his excellent book [*Practicing Greatness*](#) states: *The single most important piece of information a leader possesses is self-awareness.*

When it is all said and done, to be effective in life and leadership requires a sizeable chunk of self-awareness—the capacity to know who you are and to understand the impact you have on those around you. And to do so in real time.

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While the topic of self-awareness contains a wide range of implications and applications, for a moment I want to drill down on the ability to self-audit your impact in leadership settings.

To chase this down a bit, let's look at a common occurrence: the weekly staff meeting. Have you ever been in a team meeting where the leader has no idea? No idea about how aloof he is? No idea about the personal crisis you are facing? No idea about how she is coming across? No idea about how self-promoting his comments are? No idea that her account of recognizing the efforts of her team is significantly past due? No idea that he treats you as simply a hired hand?

Sadly, the key here is “no idea”. No clue. Limited self-awareness. Blind spots—big ones.

But the reality is that every leader has blind spots. We are all works in progress. None of us perform perfectly day in and day out. The issue, then, is whether or not we are engaged in the ongoing process of addressing our blind spots.

So how do you go about ramping up your self-awareness? How do you make those moments of “no idea” the rare exception?

I've got a couple thoughts for your consideration.

First, through the years of leading team meetings, I have found it very helpful from time to time to take the last ten minutes to do a ‘meeting post-mortem’. At the front-end of the meeting, I will set the stage by letting everyone know that we will devote the last few minutes to an appraisal of the effectiveness of our meeting, calling out what went well and what could be improved. In doing this, I have found that you quickly open the door to some very candid comments if you, as the leader, trigger the discussion by acknowledging your misses—things you would do differently next time.

And second, ask a trusted colleague to give you some unvarnished feedback. This could be from someone who sits in the team meeting as a regular participant or it could be from someone you

have invited in for this purpose. Recently, I was asked to participate in a team meeting for someone whom I worked with in a formal coaching relationship. I got a front-row seat to see him in action. Later that day in our time of debrief, I was able to affirm a number of things that he did well, as well as call out a subtle, undermining tone that he projected, along with some choices of words that were defeating for the team.

But I was also able to address some blind spots, particularly about a counterproductive, albeit unintended, 'tone' that he was setting and some choice of words that was defeating for the team.

So what's your strategy for enhancing your self-awareness? What's your gameplan for embracing the blind spots of your leadership?

I hope you have one.

And so do those who look to you for leadership.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chuck" followed by a long, horizontal, slightly wavy line.

Chuck Olson

Founder | Lead With Your Life