

Rock Solid Self-Awareness

October 2011 – It was not my best moment. Far from it.

Back in the day when I still had some capacity to get off the hardwood a few inches, I joined a basketball league at the local gym. One night a week, guys from the community would lace up, stretch out, and team up for a weekly shot at fading glory! While I hate to admit it, during one of the games, in frustration, I slammed my fist against the wall behind the basket. To this day, it seems like I can still hear the embarrassing echo reverberate throughout the concrete box. (Not exactly a radiant witness to my teammates who knew I was the pastor at the church a few blocks away).

That less-than-shining-moment served as a wake-up call. I was forced to ask, “Where did THAT come from?!” And while the question was hard enough, the answer was even harder. Long story short, I was beginning the journey of understanding how my identity was so tied into how I performed—inside or outside the gym.

Welcome to SELF-AWARENESS 101.

For a moment, I'd like to look at the intersecting point of self-awareness and leadership. Behavioral scientist and author Daniel Goleman argues that a leader's effectiveness goes beyond raw intelligence or technical expertise. He contends (convincingly) that leading well is largely about one's emotional intelligence—the ability to assess and monitor your emotions and the emotions of those around you.

In this construct, one essential slice of emotional intelligence is self-awareness.

My own working definition goes like this: self-awareness is the capacity to have an accurate read on what is going on in my life internally and how that reality affects my world externally. It's like connecting dots. For me, it was becoming aware of how so much of my identity was wrapped up in my performance and how that inward struggle was compromising my ability to relate well with others (because who wants to spend time with someone who feels like he has something to prove by being overly competitive?).

The single most important body of information a leader possesses is self-awareness.

—Reggie McNeal

Get the picture?

As a leader, the greater our self-awareness, the greater our potential of creating a positive environment. Instead of repelling people, we attract them. Instead of offending people, we

bless them. And instead of acting impulsively or carelessly out of unresolved issues in our lives, confusing and compounding the matter at hand, we bring a whole, healthy, and present self to the table, creating a moment that is ripe with possibility and good outcomes.

Think about it. When you are working through a tough situation and doing so with a person who is self-aware, you know you are in a good place. And you know that good things are about to happen because all energies and resources are being channeled to the issue on the table and won't be derailed or sidetracked by someone's unseen (and unreconciled) personal agenda.

So let me put the ball in your court with two questions: First, on a 10-point scale, how would you rate your self-awareness? And second, how badly do you want to be better?

To the second question, I propose this thought: If you want to be better (and I truly hope you do), the inarguable starting block for deepening your self-awareness is a candid confession that you **DON'T** see yourself clearly.

We all have blindspots. We all need help to see what we cannot see.

If an academic degree was offered to deal with self-awareness, of the many courses offered, I think two would fall into the **REQUIRED FOR GRADUATION** category. Here's how the college catalog might read:

- **Course #1 = The Prayer Closet:** In this class you will be reminded that nothing compares to the soul-searching work that God can do in one's life. Scripture overflows with the deep and the loving and the exacting activity of the Holy Spirit. Any movement towards greater self-awareness must include extended times where we invite God to do His revealing work in our hearts.
- **Course #2 = The Buddy System:** In this class you will be reminded that nothing compares to having a wise and caring friend to whom you have given uncompromising access and permission to speak words of truth—boldly and clearly—into your life. We all need someone who will take the time to review the game film of our lives, pointing out the often-overlooked (and at times, the chosen-to-ignore) subtleties of life and leadership.

So for the sake of those you lead, never audit a class on self-awareness. Enroll in it. Sit in the front row.

And be sure to take good notes.

Lord, for the sake of those I serve in leadership, keep me ever attentive to the inner workings of my heart.