Leadership Impact – the importance of Self-awareness



"Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate"
Carl Jung

Leadership, as defined by the GLOBE study, is "*one's capacity to influence and motivate others to contribute to the success of the organisation they are part of*" and one of the key leadership impact enablers is Leadership Self-Awareness.

I am always surprised just how little self-awareness most people have and how unwilling they are to accept that others may perceive them differently; I've had numerous exchanges that go something like this:

Person: but that's not me

Me: it's their perception of you

Person: but I am not like that

Me: maybe not, but that's how they perceive you

Person: they are wrong

Me: it's their perception of you, that's how they perceive you

Person: they have got it all wrong

Etc.

I define Leadership Awareness as, “Ensuring you are perceived in the way you want to be perceived”.

Clearly, if you want to influence others, you need to be aware of how they perceive you; you may well feel that you are being determined, disciplined and focussed on the issue in hand, but if they perceive you as stubborn, dogmatic and blinkered, then they will react to you as they “see you” – i.e., they will most likely resist your attempts to influence them.

As much as most of would not like to admit, we all have a behavioural “package”, we all have behaviours we are at ease with and we all have behaviours we are less at ease with

We are much less “agile” behaviourally speaking than we would like to imagine

I have lost count of the number of people I hear say something like, “I’m really adaptable, I change my behaviour depending on the situation and depending on the people involved”; only to see them behave almost identically in different situations.

We are all much more predictable than we like to believe – you only have to ask those around you.

I remember vividly a participant on one of my programmes after completing a behavioural inventory being really surprised by his results – the rest of the group were not. The following day, when he came in, he said, “I showed the results to my wife and she wasn’t surprised”. He even completed another inventory between modules and got very similar results, at which point he had to acquiesce that “maybe I have something to work on”.

No one likes to be told that their structured approach to problem solving can be seen as being rigid, no one likes to be told that their enthusiasm can be seen by some people as being

impulsive and no one likes to be told that their assertiveness can come across as arrogance.

There are two sides of the coin to virtually all behaviours and the key to awareness, is being able to ensure that you are being seen as you want to be seen; your caution is seen as caution and not as suspicion, your patience is seen as patience and not as passivity, your calmness is seen as calmness and not as someone cold and distant, etc.

I often hear, or read, "don't worry about what others think of you" and I am certainly not advocating that you shouldn't be authentic or bend to the desires of others; however, if you want to have a positive impact on others (which I imagine is the case), you will need to check occasionally that what you are "transmitting" corresponds to what is being "received" and, if necessary, try to close the gap.

People's perception of us comes from what they see and hear, the visible 20% of the personality iceberg; they do not see the invisible 80% – our values, our beliefs, our cognitive preferences, our injunctions, our culture, our needs, our pulsion's, our …….. in fact, everything that drives our words and deeds.

"Know Thyself and you will know the Universe and the Gods"
The Delphi Oracle

So, how can you become more self-aware?

The starting point is by paying attention to the way you think, feel, and behave; it's about being a "neutral" observer of yourself in action – not judging what you do and think as good or bad, but trying to understand the "why" beneath the "what".

This neutral observation is also called, Meta-cognition and is the conscious practice of observing or noticing your thoughts, emotions and behaviours as they arise within you in your

different interactions.

Some questions you could try to answer are:

What are your thought patterns? How do you tend to think about things? Do you rely heavily on facts & ignore emotions? Are you more emotionally driven? Are you intuitive? What are your core beliefs that influence your thinking?

What are your emotional patterns? Do you understand your own moods and emotions? Do you view emotions as something to be avoided or as a form of information?

What are your behavioural patterns? Do you understand why you tend to act in similar ways in certain situations? Are you aware of what triggers certain of your behaviours?

I am a great believer in personality and behavioural profiles; during my almost 40 years in the world of personal development I have used Transactional Analysis, Belbin, MBTI, Insights, Social Styles, DiSC and many others. They all have their limits and none are “perfect”; however, they can help you in understanding how you “typically” function.

I always recommend using a variety of inventories and then making a summary. There are invariably some “common themes” – when you discover that you are an MBTI “INPT”, an Insights “Blue”, a Social Styles “Analytical”, a DiSC “C” and a Belbin “Perfectionist” and they all say that you are, motivated by opportunities to gain knowledge, show your expertise, and produce quality work, that you are often described as careful, analytical, systematic, diplomatic, accurate & tactful, that you fear criticism and do not like strong displays of emotion, that you depend on logic, objectivity and facts to influence others – then, there is probably some truth in there.

Getting feedback (not judgement) from others, maybe via a 360°, is also useful in clarifying how you are perceived by those around you.

Leadership Awareness is about, “ensuring you are perceived in the way you want to be perceived”, it’s one thing to be self-aware and understand how you think & behave but that is not enough; you need to ensure that others perceive you as you want to be perceived. You cannot simply rely on your good intentions – as the saying goes, “the road to hell is paved with good intentions”.

You may sometimes need to make “explicit” for others what is “implicit” for you; you may need to say things like, “*I’m not being stubborn about this, it is something that is very important for me and I am determined to see it through*” or, “*I am not blind to the fact that the issue is complex but I want to concentrate on this particular aspect at the moment*” or even, “*I tend to feel uncomfortable when there are a lot of emotions in the air*”.

No matter what you do, there will always be those who, for their reasons, do not want to be influenced by you; you will never be able to influence all the people all of the time, but with heightened self-awareness, you will be able to influence more people, more often.

“*He who knows others is wise; he who knows himself is enlightened*”
Lao Tzu

I have been helping future, first-time and experienced leaders to discover, develop and deploy their full leadership potential for over 35 years now; if you think I could help you, your team or your organisation do not hesitate to contact me: boblarcher@boblarcher.com