Beyond self-awareness

Much has been written recently about the importance of self-awareness in terms of Leadership Impact; “leaders need self-awareness to be effective”, “self-awareness is key to leadership excellence”, “great leadership starts with self-awareness”, …….

However, self-awareness, as important as it is, is only the starting point; as Gretchen Ruben said, “self-awareness is a key to self-mastery”, which is, in its turn, a steppingstone, to the ultimate goal of social mastery.

Self-awareness is your ability to perceive and understand the things that make you who you are as an individual, including your personality, behaviours, values, beliefs, emotions, thoughts, pulsions and, probably, a whole lot of other stuff.

Self-awareness is developed when “you” become the focus of “your” attention. You will probably not be one hundred percent focused on you at every instant of your day but, if you want to become truly self-aware you will need to take “time out” to reflect on what you are doing, feeling, thinking, saying ……..

However, it is great to be aware that, for example, what you are explaining to others is confused, that you feel uncomfortable, that you are badly positioned, that your voice lacks volume, etc., …….. but being self-aware is not enough!

You also need to pay attention and be aware of the way others are feeling, “they” become the focus of “your” attention; their body language, their facial expressions, the tonality of

their voice – are they fidgeting and looking out of the window while you are explaining, do they look uncomfortable sitting, or standing, etc, ……..

However, being aware that you have "lost them" with your explanations is still not enough.

Clearly, realising that it is all going "belly up" is important; however, even more important is being able, in "real time" to do something about. Having a range of behavioural responses is key; being comfortable changing your communication style from a style creating a feeling of urgency to one creating a feeling of inclusion or compassion, being comfortable varying the amount of information you are giving without losing your message, being comfortable changing your position within the group without dominating (or being dominated), being comfortable with other value systems, being comfortable with your emotions, …….

Moving from self-awareness to self-mastery is the key step in moving to social mastery; this takes time and practice; a bit like the "Are you talking to me scene" in Taxi Driver where DeNiro practices posturing and changing his voice in front of a mirror. With conscious practice you will become comfortable with a range of behaviours and develop your behavioural agility – in fact, this is what footballers, tennis players, basketball players and the like do when training; they practice throwing the ball from different positions or returning the ball from different positions until they are comfortable with a variety of situations.

However, and this is the final however, self-mastery is not enough. Being able to throw the basketball into the net from impossible positions in "splendid isolation" is not enough, you have to be able to it in the presence of others.

Social mastery is about adapting your interactions not only to take into account how & what you are feeling, thinking, saying

& doing, but also what others are feeling, thinking, saying & doing; It incorporates both self & social awareness and self-mastery, to improve how you interact with others and ensure that you are being perceived how you want to be perceived by others – it requires the ability to stay conscious and present, connected with both yourself and others, while adapting your behaviour to achieve your leadership goals.

Social mastery is less a destination and more a practice and it starts with "*Gnothi seauton*" – know thyself!