The Illusion of Self-Awareness: We are more Unaware than Aware

Michael received his 360 degree feedback and looked at the summary page. What quickly jumped out to him on almost every competency his scores for his leadership were higher than everyone else's scores for him. He embarrassingly laughed and said, "I guess they don't see all the good things I am doing." As his coach I said, "Or possibly you are not doing the things to extent you think you are?"

In a new study of 4322 participants from 283 global clients, the Hay Group reported that, "participants with high Emotional Awareness display more of all the ESCI competencies at a strength or top 10% level. These findings led to the assertion that "Self-Awareness lies at the heart of Emotional Intelligence."

What is Self-Awareness: In the Goleman, Boyatzis, Hay Group EI model Emotional Self-Awareness is defined as a leader who recognizes feelings and how they affect them and their job performance. So it is identification of the emotions, implication of that emotion on your performance, which then gives the ability to manage or alter your actions. It is people know you know yourself.

In Gestalt therapy the old adage is "awareness equals responsibility." If you are aware of the emotion then now you are "able to respond or be responsible." Often we say in leadership trainings you have to "name it to tame it."

Why is it so hard to be Self-Aware?

Our Self-Awareness has to be developed and practiced. David Rock reports that almost 50% of the time we are operating on automatic or not consciously aware of what we are doing. Also when our mind is just wandering we report not being as happy as when we are engaged in some outside activity versus inside mind wandering.

How can we be so mistaken on how we are coming off to others?

1. Intention and execution gap: We may have 100% intentions and only 50% effectiveness in carrying out our intentions.
2. Introspection illusion: Introspection feels as if we have uncovered our true intentions, when in reality we are making educated guesses about our intentions, many of which are unconscious.
3. Our thoughts are facts fallacy: Believing because you think something therefore it is true and don't check your assumptions with others and worse act only on limited or skewed data.
4. Lack of feedback: In organizations there is a paucity of meaningful feedback that is candid, accurate and actionable.
5. Leaders don't ask for feedback: It is uncomfortable for leaders to ask for feedback about their performance from others, thus miss knowing more about themselves.

6. Superiority illusion: We overestimate our strengths. We think we are more successful, interesting, attractive, and friendly than the average person. Tali Sharot reports 70% of leaders rank themselves in the top 50%.

7. Underestimation of negative impact on others: Leaders minimize their influence on others and usually don't hear about the times when people are upset with their actions or behaviors.

8. Our memory distorts reality: We create false attributions and stories about the facts of a situation.

**Self-Awareness actions:** "Micro-initiatives create macro impacts." Doing just few things differently can create a major change. As a result of his 360 degree feedback, Michael designed daily reminders or "awareness boosts" for himself. When he turned on his computer in the morning a reminder to stay positive and be aware of the impact of his words and actions. Then at 3 PM another reminder came up asking him if acknowledged anyone yet. If not he'd get up and find someone doing something good or right and emphasize that was what he wanted to see and reinforce to repeat those actions. These micro-initiatives took about 5 minutes to but helped raise his awareness to do the actions which would him to be a top performer.

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