



## Becoming Self-aware

*By Lyn Carman*

Part 1 of 4 core leadership skills fundamental for building your leadership muscle.

## **Leadership begins with self-awareness or self knowledge.**

We generally see our own identity through our friends and family, our position in society, our work and the needs and desires we gather externally. When asked we may say things like "I am an Oral Health Professional" "I am a Mum/Dad" "I live in Darwin and have 2 sisters and a brother and a dog" this tells us little of who we are as an individual.

We rarely stop to ask, "Who am I?" And let's face it we take ourselves with us wherever we go. When we leave a job, we come too. When we leave a relationship, we come to. When we leave a state, we come too. Is it any wonder sometimes it's like Groundhog Day – the same stuff over and over? Understanding ourselves is paramount.

When we try to describe ourselves to another person without talking about the external things that are in our life, our friends, work and family, many of us struggle. To try to describe who you are, be conscious of only yourself, how you feel and behave, consider your strengths and challenges.

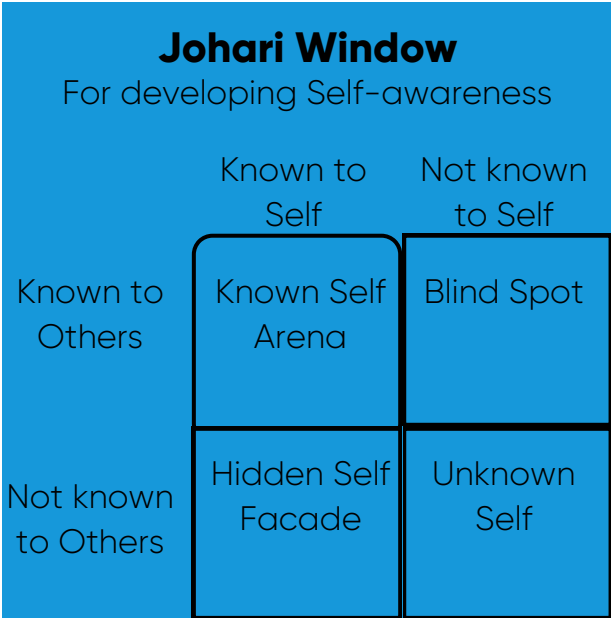
Give it go and challenge yourself to describe who you are without describing things outside of you, the first step towards becoming self-aware.

Self-awareness is the ability to see yourself clearly and objectively through reflection and introspection. The Merriam-Webster definition of self-awareness is an awareness of one's own personality or individuality. In other words, conscious knowledge of your own character, feelings, motives and desires. Self-awareness is one of the key elements of emotional intelligence (EI), a term coined by psychologist Michael Beldoch and widely popularised by Daniel Goleman that refers to a person's ability to identify and manage their emotions and identify and influence others' emotions.

Being self-aware can be the foundation for enhancing the other 3 leadership skills; Communication, Influence and Learning Agility, and is said to be the most challenging to master. It is all about knowing your emotions, your personal strengths and weaknesses, and having a strong sense of your own worth – having the ability to be honest with yourself and about yourself.

Having a clear understanding of our strengths and weaknesses, our thoughts and behaviours helps us to understand others and therefore facilitating better personal and professional relationships.

Before you can begin increasing your self-awareness, it's helpful to understand the differences in how you see yourself vs. how others see you. The Johari window is a framework for understanding conscious and unconscious bias that can help increase self-awareness and our understanding of others.



The Johari Window was created in 1955 by psychologists Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham and is designed to help us understand our relationship with self. The model is named from the combination of both their names.

- The top left is the part of ourselves that we and others see.
- Top right contains aspects that others see but we are unaware of.
- Bottom left is the private space we know but hide from others.
- Bottom right is the unconscious part of us that neither ourselves nor others see.

Self-awareness is sometime described as the difference between how we see ourselves and how others see us.

To cultivate self-awareness, its important to understand the categories of internal and external self-awareness.

**Internal awareness** is how clearly we know and understand, what makes us tick, our values, passions, goals, and our reactions (thoughts, feelings, behaviours and strengths and weaknesses) and the impact this has on others.

**External awareness** is how others view us in terms of the above factors. Research has shown people who have greater understanding how they are seen by others, are better at seeing other perspectives and showing empathy.

Being highly self-aware requires us to have balance in both categories, seeing ourselves clearly and getting feedback to understand how others see us.

The Four Self-Awareness Archetypes

This 2x2 maps internal self-awareness (how well you know yourself) against external self-awareness (how well you understand how others see you).

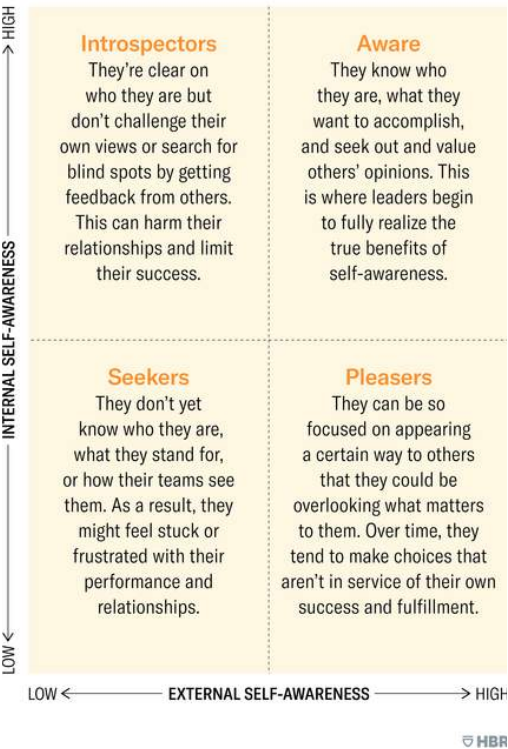


Fig – Harvard Business Review

Harvard Business Review suggest 5 ways to cultivate self-awareness for leadership

- Meditate – bring awareness into the moment, connect with yourself daily. Being present in your body, present with the environment and people around you, carve out some time for solitude.
- Write down your plans and priorities – write your intentions, your directions, your hopes and dreams and track the progress. Process your thoughts by journaling
- Complete some psychometric tests – all tests are aimed to help you consider a set of traits or characteristics that most accurately describe you relative to others. They can be fun and insightful without needing to box us in. DISC, Myers Briggs, Leadership Quotient,

- Ask trusted friends – gain a different perspective from peers, friends, and mentors as an honest mirror. Inform them you are seeking candid, critical, objective perspectives and make it a safe environment for them to do so. You can also actively seek support in helping you to stop a behaviour you want to change.
- Get regular feedback at work – a good system of formal feedback, done well, allows us to better see our own strengths and weaknesses. If this is difficult in your workspace, engage a coach.

Thank fully become self-aware is a lifelong effort, a journey to better knowing and understanding who we are. Having consistency in what we say, think and feel brings us closer to a state of being in ‘flow’ a feeling of congruence in. Using the Johari Window and these 5 practices will support us to bring together how we see and understand ourselves and how others see and understand us. It’s a job that is never “done” – be curious and courageous.

**You take you wherever you go, and you are worth it.**

