

Self-Aware Leader

I'm often amused, and annoyed, when I encounter people who are not self-aware. They barge into the middle of a meeting loudly moving their chair or walking around the room visibly interrupting. Others talk loudly on their cell phone in the middle of a meeting. These unaware (or in some cases aware but uncaring) individuals signal that they are indifferent to the comfort, focus or feelings of others. In short, they are inconsiderate and disrespectful.

Self-aware leaders are different. As they interact with people, they immediately sense how their message is being received and they make real-time, almost imperceptible, adjustments in their vocabulary, body language and messaging. The self-aware leader is highly sensitive to the eco-system we call organization as well as the part they play in the unfolding journey toward organizational purpose. These leaders effectively navigate the sea of human emotions, expectations and connections.

A self-aware leader deeply understands the universal desire of all people for a caring environment that affords them the opportunity to make a difference. They understand the strength of building trust among those they lead. These special leaders see individual conversations as their most valuable leadership tool. By being careful not to expect preferential treatment, self-aware leaders avoid a prideful sense of being better than others.

There are many forces preventing a leader from becoming an effective, self-aware person. These forces stem from the tendency of leaders to be consumed by prideful behavior. This pride is not based upon an individual or group accomplishment; rather it is the pride that tempts every person to think of themselves as better than others. It is the opposite of humility. It is the enemy of a successful organization.

Humility is a virtue often misunderstood in our American culture of bravado and accomplishment. We perceive humility incorrectly as a sign of weakness; a sense that we must give in to the demands of others at the expense of our own desires. These definitions are incorrect. It has been accurately said that humility does not mean that we think less of ourselves; it simply means we think of ourselves less. A self-aware leader thinks less about what he desires and more about the desires of others. It is in that focus on others that genuine leaders thrive and pursue purpose.

American business practices and corporate folklore have deepened this notion of special prominence for leaders. We are led to believe that an organization is highly dependent upon the rock star leader who is deemed worthy of status and fame. Set apart from the organization as beacons of intelligence and inspiration, these leaders are lauded on the cover of business magazines. However, in the opinion of the organization's employees, that self-consumed leader is far from inspirational. In fact, such a prideful placeholder of a leadership position is not a leader at all. Leaders attract others who naturally desire to follow

them in pursuit of something important.

Pride convinces a leader that he or she deserves the trappings of power afforded by position. Special privileges, reserved parking, executive dining rooms, personal drivers, all of these communicate to the organization that the leader is set above the team. These differentiating perks make it difficult, if not impossible, for a leader to genuinely connect with team members in any meaningful way.

As a self-aware leader it is your responsibility to enter each individual conversation with a sense that everyone on the team is valuable and has something to add to the organization's success. You must be (not merely act) genuine, compassionate and trusted. By seeking ways to communicate your care for others and by searching out ways for every person to make a difference, you naturally become a self-aware leader. Individuals in your organization naturally follow. In the end, you endear others to your leadership.

Excerpt from *Four Conversations: Aligning People and Purpose* by Rod Brace

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