



SELF-ASSESSMENT— HOW GREAT LEADERS CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVE

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As the complexity of our organizations continues to increase, technical knowledge becomes less important for leaders, and emotional intelligence becomes the critical factor for success in a leadership role. Emotional intelligence is defined as the ability to identify emotions and regulate behaviors accordingly. In 2004, psychologist and author Daniel Goleman published his research on this concept in a much-cited *Harvard Business Review* article titled “What Makes a Leader.” Today, he continues to lecture on the subject, proclaiming that the first tenet of emotional intelligence is self-awareness. And the first step to self-awareness is honest self-assessment. This article focuses on self-assessment, its importance to leaders, and some practical ways for leaders to assess and use their self-knowledge to enhance performance.

WHY IT MATTERS

Self-assessment can enhance the effectiveness of a leader in several ways:

1. **It reduces stress.** As a leader, self-assessment will help you com-

municate better with your team. As you learn to evaluate yourself, you can better understand your team’s personality and communication styles. This improved communication reduces confusion and provides clarity to staff members, helping them to function at a higher level, and allowing them to take on more responsibilities.

2. **It enhances job satisfaction.** Knowing your strengths and weaknesses will help you be more effective, allowing you to leverage your strengths and select training opportunities to improve weaknesses.
3. **It stimulates growth.** As weaknesses are improved, you can grow professionally and personally.
4. **It creates career opportunities.** Knowing your areas of strength will help you understand where to focus your efforts and perhaps direct your long-term career path.

AN HONEST ASSESSMENT

Many people naturally know their personal strengths and weaknesses to some degree. However, everyone has

blind spots. Also, we do not necessarily understand how others perceive our strengths and weaknesses. As British preacher Charles Spurgeon reminds us, “The eye cannot see itself.”

Below are several resources and tips to help you in the assessment process:

1. **Complete a professional personality profile.** There are many types of personality tests, ranging from “fun-loving” (comparing you to an animal or color) to more in-depth versions. Myers-Briggs (MBTI®) and DiSC® are most often used in organizational behavior studies and are the basis for most personality tests. There are many free online versions, but during your career, we highly recommend paying for an assessment and review by a behavioral psychologist who can help interpret the results and provide tips on how to use the information to enhance your performance. Even if you choose to use one of the simple online versions, don’t stop at the results. Read the information that accompanies the test to gain knowledge about all the personality types. Your primary goal is to learn

how to best communicate with differing personalities.

2. Set aside personal reflection time.

Quiet time spent with your thoughts is a good way to begin achieving intellectual honesty. To make this a constructive habit, many experts recommend taking 15 minutes at the end of each day to write in a journal and answer the following questions:

- What three things went well today?
- What three things didn't go so well today?
- What was the most important conversation I had today?

Then, during your weekly reflection time, try to discover what behaviors contributed to those events. Identify one behavior that you want to repeat or further enhance the following week, or identify behaviors you want to stop and identify how you intend to do so. Many of us are overachievers and try to change too much at once. You will have more success if you keep it simple and focus on one item at a time.

- ## 3. Conduct a 360-review.
- Several online resources or consulting firms can help perform a workplace 360-review. A third-party administrator should request completed review surveys from your immediate supervisor, three to five peers, and six to 10 people who report to you. Insight into others' perceptions of you will be invaluable in making decisions about priority areas for self-improvement.

PUTTING THE INFORMATION TO USE

Science shows that we have innate traits, a personality style, and preferred communication patterns. If each of us is born with these characteristics, what can we truly do to make changes? Referring back to Go-

leman's "What Makes a Leader" article, a critical part of self-assessment is to moderate and/or regulate our behavior based on an understanding of our strengths and weaknesses. Below are some successful methods that we, as management consultants, have seen administrators use effectively.

1. **Focus on your strengths.** Often people get bogged down by trying to overcome a weakness. This tendency can have a self-defeating effect if you do not develop and grow your strengths. Know your strengths and use them by taking on projects where you can best use your strengths and continue to hone them. By doing what you do best every day, you are more likely to experience personal growth and achieve success.
2. **Fill in your gaps.** One mistake we have seen new administrators make is hiring people who are most similar to themselves in personality. Hiring a similar personality is often comfortable and easy. However, this move is often not the best one for the organization or individual growth. It is better to have differing viewpoints in order to develop the best procedures for the largest number of people. If you have a style that is more analytical and numbers oriented, make sure you include a personality type on your team that is more concerned with how decisions impact people and their feelings. This person can help you soften your approach and challenge you to consider more options in the decision-making process. Conversely, if you tend to be the team builder and storyteller, find a good financial analyst to be your right-hand person. Only an individual who has good self-awareness can construct a team built for maximum organizational effectiveness.

3. **Find your mentor.** You need a person outside your organization to provide an objective view of circumstances. Often people look at a situation from their perspective and can miss an important piece of information or draw conclusions based on assumptions rather than what occurred. A mentor can be a tremendous asset, giving you honest feedback on how you could have handled a conversation differently or seen the situation from another's perspective.
4. **Write your thoughts down.** Good leaders provide clarity by putting goals and action plans in writing. These action plans should include your personal goals for monitoring your behaviors. Keep it simple and celebrate small successes as you continue to grow.

PERSEVERE

Great leaders know that they cannot begin to lead others without first knowing themselves. Self-assessment and regulating behavior based on this knowledge is a never-ending process. Effective leaders pay attention to their strengths and weaknesses. They use this knowledge strategically to create a plan that allows for continued growth and that results in increased job satisfaction for themselves and greater performance for their entire organization. *AE*



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