

What Self-Aware Leaders Know...

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So how self-aware are you? It's a skill I've been trying to build every year for many years as a leader, husband and friend.

Here's why. I realized a while ago that self-awareness is a characteristic I'm drawn to in people I work with and do life with. In fact, I try to get as many self-aware people on board any team I'm building as possible and personally prefer the company of self-aware people to those who aren't.

Before those sounds too discriminatory, the good news is self-awareness is a **skill** and it can be learned. If you want to grow your self-awareness, you can. If you want to develop your team's self-awareness, you can. You just need to know what to look for.

SELF-AWARENESS IS A KEY TO EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

About 20 years ago, Daniel Goleman rocked the leadership world with a new theory: that emotional intelligence was as or more important to success than intellectual intelligence. His theory on emotional intelligence is now commonly now called EQ (although Goleman prefers the term EI, not EQ), and many organizations are hiring for EQ as much as they are for IQ or other more traditional hard skill sets.

If you want to dramatically improve the climate in your church or organization, hire and recruit self-aware, emotionally intelligent people. For example, if you had a choice to invite a self-aware leader who had a B+ gift set on to your team, and a leader with an A gift set on to your team who wasn't self-aware, whom would you choose?

For me, it's not much of a contest. I'll take the self-aware leader. They tend to make a bigger impact in their leadership, and they are MUCH easier to work with.

FOUR SIMPLE BUT SURPRISING THINGS SELF-AWARE LEADERS KNOW

So, what do self-aware people know that other leaders don't? In my experience, there are four things. The four things are simple when you think about it, but it's surprising how many people and leaders lead day to day strangely unaware of them:

1. THEIR IMPACT ON OTHERS

Of all the characteristics of self-aware people, this is the most endearing. Self-aware people understand their own emotions and actions AND the impact of their emotions and actions on others. That sounds simple, but the implications are staggering.

Think about it. How many times have you had a bad day only to not know *why* you're having a bad day? And then how many times has your mysteriously bad day had a negative impact on your spouse, your kids and your co-workers?

Far too often, right? Me too. That's what self-awareness and emotional intelligence starts to address in leaders. It stops that. Self-aware leaders refuse to let a bad day on the inside spill out to others on the outside. Self-aware people just don't have many of *those* days.

Sure...they might not feel great. But they realize their mood has an impact on others, and they regulate it. Who doesn't want to be around people like that?

If you struggle with your mood (and how doesn't?), here are a few ways to handle it:

- Be the *first* to recognize it.
- Pray about it.
- Regulate it.
- Be more interested in other people that day than you are in yourself. (This really helps.)

If you want to become more emotionally intelligent, be aware of the impact of your emotions on others.

2. THEIR WEAKNESSES

Nobody likes to admit they have weaknesses, but we all do. The longer I lead, the more I realize how small my sweet spot really is (for me it's content creation, communication, vision casting and team recruitment...it's all downhill from those four). Self-aware people understand their weaknesses and limit their activities in areas for which they are not gifted.

This does two things:

1. It creates space for others to shine.
2. It allows them to spend most of their time working from their strengths.

It takes real humility for a leader to admit where they are not strong, but that characteristic is often endearing. If you want to become more self-aware, understand your weaknesses and start acting accordingly. Your team will be so much better for it.

3. THEIR STRENGTHS

While it may take humility to acknowledge your weaknesses, it doesn't take arrogance to acknowledge your strengths. Someone who understands their strengths is not inherently egotistical; they're just self-aware; arrogant people can just as easily work out of their weaknesses as their strengths.

So...don't be afraid of understanding and leading from your strengths. Self-aware people know what they're best at, but don't brag. They just do it.

4. THEIR LIMITS

Everyone has limits. As much as some of us push back on them, they're still there. Self-aware people know what level their tank is at and behave accordingly. When they need a break, they take one. When they're tired, they acknowledge it and take responsibility for getting some rest. When they are running on all cylinders, they give whatever they've got to whatever they do.

Again, everyone benefits co-workers, their team and even their family. Ironically, a leader who knows where their limits are often operates at much closer to their limit than a leader who has no idea that they're tired, over capacity or heading for a crash.

Leaders who *aren't* aware of their limits usually crash into them, painfully.