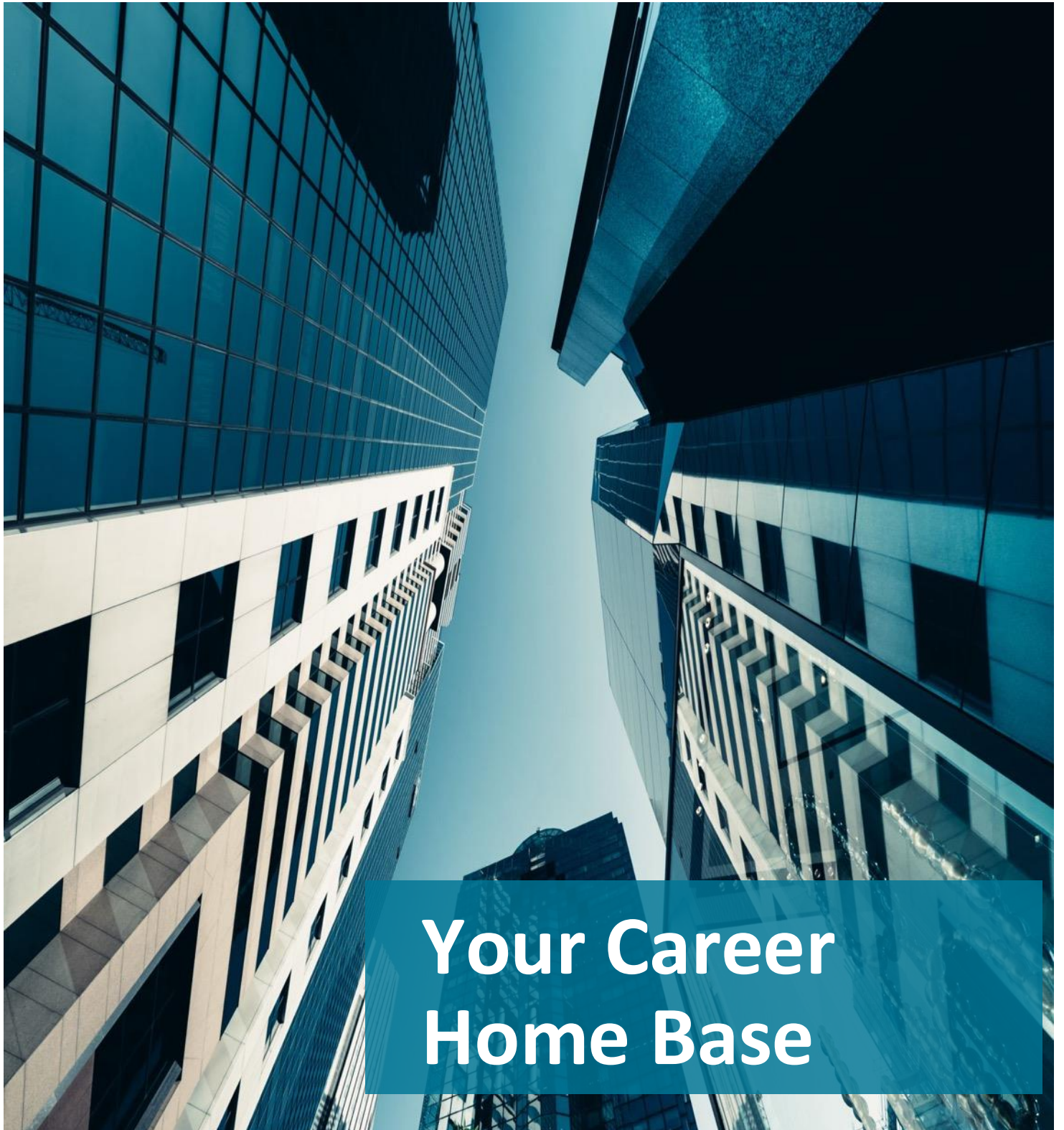


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Developing Self-Awareness: A Key to Successful Leadership and Teaming

By Alison Marandola, Chief People Officer; and Kathryn Peacock, Principal of Partner Engineering and Science, Inc.



In today's fast-paced and ever-evolving workplace, the ability to adapt and lead effectively is paramount. Central to this is the development of self-awareness. By understanding one's own strengths, weaknesses, and behavioral patterns, leaders can better manage change, engage their teams, and foster a positive organizational culture. Even the most effective leaders have room to grow, and by demonstrating self-awareness, reflecting, and taking action, they can improve even further. This article discusses the importance of self-awareness in leadership and offers five practical strategies for its cultivation.

1) Active Listening

Listening is a fundamental skill that significantly impacts job effectiveness and the quality of our relationships. Despite its importance, most of us remember only 25% to 50% of what we hear. Active listening is a technique that can help bridge this gap. It involves making a conscious effort to not only hear the words but also understand the complete message being communicated.

Key elements of active listening include:

- Paying close attention and staying focused;
- avoiding distractions and returning to the conversation if you stray;
- demonstrating that you are listening through nods, smiles, and brief verbal acknowledgments like "uh huh""":
- paraphrasing and restating to ensure understanding;
- not interrupting and remaining open, honest, and candid in your responses; and
- building on the conversation and comparing differing views without suggesting the other person is wrong.

Leaders who embody effective listening often employ various non-verbal actions to show their engagement and openness to listen and learn. For instance, they might maintain eye contact to build trust, or lean slightly forward to express interest. Additionally, an open posture with uncrossed arms, relaxed shoulders and a receptive stance conveys their readiness to listen and learn from the speaker's message.

2) Communicating Effectively

Effective communication is vital to organizational success. It boosts morale, increases engagement, improves team collaboration and cooperation, heightens accountability, and drives better results for individuals, teams, and organizations.

To communicate effectively:

- Be respectful in both words and behaviors,
- actively listen and remain polite and professional, and
- handle challenging situations with grace by learning to manage ambiguity while maintaining a professional demeanor.

3) Embracing (Constructive) Conflicts

Conflict, when approached correctly, can be a gift. It offers a chance to gain insights into our strengths and weaknesses through feedback and reflection. Amy Gallo, a writer, speaker, and coach, emphasizes the importance of seeing conflict as an opportunity to understand different perspectives. She explains that while many people naturally avoid conflict, expressing disagreement constructively can lead to productive outcomes when approached with compassion and kindness.



Below are some tips she offers on how to navigate conflicts productively:

- **Wait for the Right Moment:** Address issues when emotions have settled, and your brain's amygdala is no longer in a fight-or-flight mode.
- **Prepare Thoroughly:** Clearly define what you need from the conversation, such as resolving a specific issue or meeting a deadline.
- **Consider Perspectives:** Empathize with the other person's viewpoint.
- **Focus on Data and Facts:** Concentrate on what is actually being disputed, relying on observable data rather than assumptions about the other person's motives.
- **Approach Calmly and Confidently:** Maintain a composed demeanor and approach the issue with confidence.
- **Assume Positive Intent:** Apply the most generous interpretation to the other person's actions.
- **Demonstrate Compassion and Kindness:** Handle disagreements with empathy. Recognize that not every conflict will resolve perfectly but approaching it with compassion helps navigate these situations gracefully.

4) Developing Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is crucial for effective leadership and more successful interactions. It involves understanding our strengths, weaknesses, and blind spots through feedback and reflection. Here's how to enhance your self-awareness:

- **Objective Data:** Analyze data objectively to distinguish between perception and fact.
- **Reflect on Impact:** Regularly reflect on your actions and their effects on others.
- **Seek Honest Feedback:** Request candid feedback from multiple sources and accept it without defensiveness. Respond simply with 'Thank You' versus explaining why you did or said something.
- **Practice Active Listening:** Fully engage with others by listening to their perspectives and feelings.
- **Admit Mistakes:** Acknowledge and learn from your errors to demonstrate humility.
- **Continuous Learning:** Recognize what you don't know and seek growth opportunities.
- **Observe Yourself:** Monitor your behavior and reactions without judgment.
- **Take Action:** Use feedback constructively to make improvements.

Enhancing one's self-awareness is key to personal and professional growth.

5) Identifying and Addressing Counterproductive Behaviors

Marshall Goldsmith's book, *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*, identifies 20 bad leadership habits that create challenges in interactions. Examples include winning too much, adding too much value, making destructive comments, and not listening. Overcoming these habits requires openness, courage, humility, and discipline. By identifying these behaviors and actively working to change them, leaders can create a more positive and productive work environment.

Figure 1 provides a comprehensive list of these behaviors. To effectively address and overcome these habits, consider implementing the following approach:

1. **Conduct a Self-Assessment:** Review the behaviors listed in Figure 1 and identify the two to three habits that are most relevant to your leadership practices. If you are unsure which you do, ask people in your professional or personal life for their observations.
2. **Engage an Accountability Partner:** Partner with a colleague, mentor, or coach who can provide honest feedback and hold you accountable for progress.
3. **Implement Regular Check-Ins:** Schedule monthly/periodic reviews (10 minutes maximum) with your accountability partner to evaluate progress, discuss challenges, and make necessary adjustments to your action plan. Ask if they see a difference, what you can do to improve, and say ‘Thank You’.

Figure 1: Common Counterproductive Leadership Behaviors

Behavior	Description
Winning too much	The need to win at all costs, even when unnecessary.
Adding too much value	Overwhelming desire to add our two cents to every discussion.
Passing judgment	Imposing personal standards on others.
Making destructive comments	Using sarcasm or cutting remarks.
Starting with “No,” “But,” or “However”	Negative qualifiers that suggest disagreement.
Telling the world how smart you are	Need to showcase intelligence unnecessarily.
Speaking when angry	Using emotional volatility as a tool.
Negativity	Sharing negative thoughts unasked.
Withholding information	Keeping information to maintain an advantage.
Failing to give proper recognition	Inability to praise or reward appropriately.
Claiming undue credit	Overestimating personal contributions.
Making excuses	Justifying annoying behavior as unchangeable.
Clinging to the past	Blaming past events or people for current issues.
Playing favorites	Treating individuals unfairly.
Refusing to express regret	Not taking responsibility or acknowledging impact on others.
Not listening	Disrespecting colleagues through passive-aggressive behavior.
Failing to express gratitude	Neglecting basic manners of appreciation.
Punishing the messenger	Attacking those delivering bad news.
Passing the buck	Blaming others instead of oneself.
Excessive need to be “me”	Justifying faults as inherent traits.

Conclusion

Remember that true growth comes through practice and experience when applying the insights shared here. Learning isn't just about attending events or receiving coaching; it's about applying what you've learned in real situations. Be open to feedback, express gratitude, and acknowledge mistakes when they occur. Changing habits that don't serve you and being willing to be vulnerable with colleagues will enhance accountability and support your growth. To deepen your self-awareness and emotional intelligence, consider exploring Daniel Goleman's work, which highlights self-awareness as a core component of emotional intelligence.

Increasing self-awareness is a journey that requires continuous effort, practice, and a willingness to be vulnerable. While these approaches may seem straightforward, they require effective implementation of openness, courage, discipline, and humility. By doing so, we can enhance our leadership and teaming abilities, leading to more effective and meaningful interactions in both our professional and personal lives.

