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FIVE SELF-AWARENESS QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Self-awareness gives you the ability to foster collaborative relationships that engage in joint work to identify a challenge or an innovation and take it from the surface level to a deep level of transfer within a classroom, school, or district. Peter Drucker (2005) writes,

To do those things well, you'll need to cultivate a deep understanding of yourself—not only what your strengths and weaknesses are but also how you learn, how you work with others, what your values are, and where you can make the greatest contribution. (p. 2)

To do this work of self-awareness, Drucker says you need to answer five important questions.

1. *What are your strengths?*

Drucker suggests that people are more likely to know what they are *not* good at than what they *are* good at. He recommends we write down our actions that are tied to our priorities and reflect 9 or 12 months later to see our actual results.

2. *How do you perform?*

Drucker (2005) believes you need to spend time focusing on how you perform in your position:

Amazingly few people know how they get things done. Indeed, most of us do not even know that different people work and perform differently. Too many people work in ways that are not their ways, and that almost guarantees nonperformance. (p. 4)

Part of what you need for practicing intentional leadership is an understanding of how you best take in information. Some of you do this through reading. You read research, long emails (you don't scan them!), and reviews about programs you wish to implement. Others of you do it through listening. You have listening tours where you engage in conversations with stakeholders, or you have committees where you use protocols to help you engage in in-depth conversations with those around the table. The importance is to know which one you are best at.

Drucker (2005) asks,

The first thing to know is whether you are a reader or a listener. Far too few people even know that there are readers and listeners and that people are rarely both. Even fewer know which of the two they themselves are. (p. 4)

3. *What are your values?*

What are your values, and do they line up with the values of your organization? Drucker (2005) says that if your values do not align with the values of your organization, then you will “not only be frustrated but also will not produce results” (p. 6).

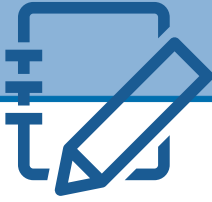
4. *Where do you belong?*

“A small number of people know very early where they belong. Mathematicians, musicians, and cooks, for instance, are usually mathematicians, musicians, and cooks by the time they are four or five years old” (Drucker, 2005, p. 7). For those of you in education, it may come down to understanding what position within a school works best for you (e.g., moving from teacher to principal or from principal to director) and knowing what position does not work for you.

5. *What can you contribute?*

How do our strengths and values help us connect with ways to contribute to the greater good?

Drucker’s work around self-awareness, along with what we are laying out here in this chapter, means being aware of your strengths and blind spots. The only way to engage in that behavior is to surround yourself with diverse-minded people and set the conditions necessary to invite them to provide you with their perspectives even if those perspectives are different from your own.



WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

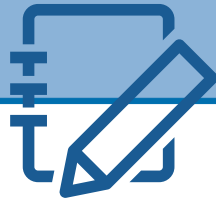
Take some time to reflect and write answers to Peter Drucker's (2005) questions.

What Are My Strengths?

How Do I Perform?

What Are My Values?

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WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

Take some time to reflect and write answers to Peter Drucker's (2005) questions.

Where Do I Belong?

What Can I Contribute?

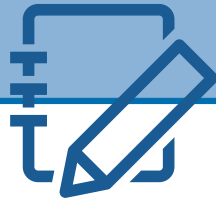
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DO I NEED TO JUMP IN OR OBSERVE?

Let's take these questions from Drucker (2005) and go a little deeper. As a new school principal, I (Peter) was hired without any leadership experience. I had been teaching in a high-poverty city school district and was hired to take on a principalship in a rural area about 15 miles from my home. I engaged in a lot of proactive work before I officially started this position, like spending two days at the school, going over one late afternoon a week after my students went home for the day, or attending some board of education meetings in what would be my new school district. Those are examples of jumping right in because I was eager to learn and also develop relationships before I officially started the role.

However, I also knew when to wait and see where I fit in. I did not go in and try to make changes right away, because I knew that I first needed to understand where I fit into the school. Too often new principals want teachers to fit in around them, whereas the opposite is true. New leaders need to understand where they fit in, and take time to reflect on their own leadership practices and what they can learn from the situations taking place around them.

This takes self-awareness. Leaders who lack this level of awareness are more at risk to make hasty decisions that may lead to initiative fatigue because they may try to plug a hole in a problem without a true understanding of the root. This is where we see reactive (as opposed to proactive) leadership play out. We want leaders who take time to process and engage others before they define an adaptive challenge and try to solve it. To do this, leaders have to consider their own level of self-efficacy.



WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

Do you jump, or do you sit back to see where you fit in? Take some time to think of a situation where you jumped right in. Then think of another situation where you waited to see where you fit in.

I Jumped Right in When...

I Waited to See Where I Fit in When...

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LEADERSHIP SELF-EFFICACY

Knowing when to jump in and when to see where we fit in takes self-efficacy. A common understanding of self-efficacy comes from Albert Bandura (1997):

Self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments. . . . Such beliefs influence the courses of action people choose to pursue, how much effort they put forth in given endeavors, how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles and failures, their resilience to adversity, whether their thought patterns are self-hindering or self-aiding, how much stress or depression they experience in coping with taxing environmental demands, and the level of accomplishments they realize. (p. 3)

It's important for all of us to understand self-efficacy because people who seem resistant to ideas or initiatives may just lack the self-efficacy to do the work, but they don't feel comfortable sharing that fact.

We are mindful of the “overplayed song syndrome.” The more researchers and school leaders focus on self-efficacy, the more it seems to become like a favorite song. We all have favorite songs when they are first released, but after a while we hear them so many times, we begin to change the station or hide it on our playlist. Self-efficacy is at risk of suffering this fate. This would be unfortunate, as it explains so much of how people move in professional settings; it's all based in human behavior. Bandura (2010) writes,

Human behavior is extensively motivated and regulated through the exercise of self-influence. Among the mechanisms of self-influence, none is more focal or pervading than belief in one's personal efficacy. (p. 179)

Internal self-awareness and external self-awareness play critical roles in shaping an individual's self-efficacy. Internal self-awareness involves a deep understanding of one's own strengths, weaknesses, values, and emotions. When individuals possess high levels of internal self-awareness, they can more accurately assess their competencies and limitations. This self-awareness allows them to set realistic goals and make effective plans to achieve them. Consequently, their

self-efficacy tends to be higher, as they have confidence in their abilities and can channel their efforts effectively toward desired outcomes.

External self-awareness, on the other hand, pertains to one's ability to understand how others perceive them, including their strengths and weaknesses. This external perspective can be a valuable source of feedback and insights that can help individuals improve their self-efficacy. When people receive constructive feedback and validation from others, it can boost their confidence and belief in their abilities. Additionally, external self-awareness enables individuals to build a support network and seek assistance when needed, further enhancing their self-efficacy. In contrast, those who lack external self-awareness may struggle to gauge their true capabilities and may have difficulty mobilizing external resources, which can hinder their self-efficacy. Therefore, a balance of internal and external self-awareness is essential in nurturing and sustaining high levels of self-efficacy.

Intentional leadership is about understanding your strengths and areas of growth. It requires you to engage in situations that will help you learn how to strengthen your areas of weakness and learn from others. This is important because when it comes to self-efficacy, Bandura (2010) writes,

When faced with obstacles, setbacks, and failures, those who doubt their capabilities slacken their efforts, give up, or settle for mediocre solutions. Those who have a strong belief in the capabilities redouble their effort to master the challenge. (p. 180)

One of the other reasons it is important for you to understand self-efficacy as a leader centers on how our self-efficacy can work against you. Bandura (2010) found that

individuals who are highly assured in their capabilities and the effectiveness of their strategies are disinclined to seek discordant information that would suggest the need for corrective adjustments. (p. 183)

What this means is that confidence doesn't always equate to competence. Due to this aspect of self-efficacy, we are suggesting that self-awareness also means understanding one's confidence but being open to listening to dissenting opinions. The bottom line is that just because you think you are right doesn't always mean you are actually right.

We would like to give you some time to reflect on this topic of dissenting opinions and being open to listening, so please engage with the Leading With Intention deep reflection activity. The activity is meant to bring two different topics together. We want you to reflect on your leadership self-awareness, and we want you to reflect on whether you are comfortable with people who challenge you as a leader.

LEADING WITH INTENTION

Self-efficacy is the confidence we have in our actions. All of us, including the two of us authoring this book, have areas where we feel confident and areas where we don't. However, Bandura's (1997, 2010) research shows us that confidence is not enough, and that we must seek out "discordant information." You will notice a theme from our self-awareness conversation that surrounding ourselves with a diverse group of people who will disagree with us and "be real" is important. Take some time to consider the following:

- Who makes up your diverse group of people that will be real with you?
- How have they helped change your thinking?
- Consider one example of a situation where your level of confidence prevented you from asking the right questions because you thought you knew it all already?
- How might you move forward in your leadership practices knowing that confidence doesn't always mean competence?

Leadership self-awareness is not just about understanding how you lead and listen to those confidants that you keep close around you. Leadership self-awareness is about how you are open to the insight and opinions of those educators that you often find yourself disagreeing with as well. Why? Because educators who are disgruntled often are those who don't feel like their voices are valued. They feel less valued as time goes on. Those educators have something positive to offer you.