



## Self-Awareness - QUICK TIPS

*Five quick tips to help academic leaders with self-reflection.*

### Understand Yourself

- The best leaders know themselves, and deploy a range resources to build an accurate picture of their strengths and weaknesses, their foibles, and their generousities. They are alert for ways to gain self knowledge. The best leaders consider positive and critical feedback to be gifts and use them to become the best leaders they can be.
- Seek to understand yourself in the context of your leadership role. You may fall for your own illusion of positive-self when only relying on subjective self-reflection. Many leadership have found it helpful to use one or more a self-assessment tool/s that highlight strengths and weakness, and that measure elements of core leadership qualities. There are many valuable tools available for self-reflection as well as workshops on various topics; some leaders find journaling to be useful.
- A good leader is self-aware and engages in ongoing practice of self-reflection. Ask questions to understand yourself and it will help you be better prepared for for challenging situations:

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- \* What pushes your buttons? What elevates your blood pressure or infuriates you? In what situations do you have a physiological reaction, especially one disproportionate to the stimulus?
  - \* Do you have a go-to, constructive way of responding if you feel overwhelmed in the moment?
  - \* Do you have an effective strategy you can use under stress to build in some time to think or to take a break from an interaction headed in a bad direction?
  - \* Before turning immediately to defending yourself or rationalizing your actions, step to the balcony mentally and try to see situations from other perspectives.
  - \* Can you identify the characteristics of people that cause you the most difficulty? Do you have a strategy for recognizing and responding professionally when you encounter those characteristics?
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**SAMPLE QUESTIONS**  
for understanding oneself

### Observe Yourself

- All of us have "blind spots" where we become less than realistic, authentic, and accurate about our own self assessment. All too often, each of us is the most inaccurate observer of our own selves. Know and act upon this reality as you take on new challenges.
- Consider what others see you say and do. Take feedback from others seriously and reflect upon it with a constructive mindset. Although self-confidence is an important virtue in a leader, without humility, improving is hard to achieve. If you can learn to accept criticism without denial, blame, or excuses, and look for ways to grow from it, you will a better leader.
- It is remarkably easy to stumble from cognitive biases and blind spots that increasing responsibilities and power bring. To counteract falling prey to their damaging effects, bear in mind the short-hand we recommend of the pitfalls in Career-TRAGEDIES (Temptation, Rationalization, Ambition and over confidence, Group (peer) and authority pressure, Entitlement, Deception, Incrementalism, Embarrassment, and Stupid systems).





## Be Aware of Your Power

- Your leadership position grants power-- or at least the perception of power in the minds of others--that you might not feel. This is because you have at least some control over rewards conferred (both tangible and intangible) and an ability to complicate or ease the life of others.
- Your words and actions will be visible and scrutinized for meaning--even those you may consider to be trivial. Be self-aware, and notice your effect on others. Strive for consistency between your words and actions. Learn to apologize when you are wrong.
- Your position amplifies your words and actions. What you say as a leader will be taken more seriously, and repeated to more people than what you said in your role before. This effect may be stronger than you anticipate. Encouragement can make someone's day; criticism or a denigrating remark can damage morale and loyalty. Likewise, being too blunt or harsh in your feedback can make other's wary of offering suggestions.

## Are You Just?

- Fairness, or justice, is essential for building trust between you and others. While identifying and assigning work and cultivating positive relationships are two important pillars of your leadership, fairness and the perception of even-handed treatment for all in the unit are a critical third pillar. In instances where not everything can necessarily be equal across the board, be sure that your decisions are well explained and fully understood.
- Evaluate whether each of your decisions is just:

- \* Is the outcome fair? Do you distribute resources fairly? Would those affected by your decision agree with your assessment? (Distributive justice)
- \* Is the procedure fair? Do you follow rules and policies that are agreed with others or acceptable to others? (Procedural justice)
- \* Is everyone treated fairly? Do others feel respected? Is information appropriately shared? (Interactional justice)

**SAMPLE QUESTIONS**  
for fairness evaluation

## Take Care of Yourself

- You cannot take care of others if you are not taking care of yourself. Have a plan for rest and rejuvenation. Pace yourself: Allocate time so you have sustainable work-life balance over time--your leadership responsibilities are a marathon, not a sprint.
- Reflect on the stressors to which you are most vulnerable and which strategies work best for limiting their cost to you in real time. What are your best replenishing tools? They can be physical (exercise and nutrition), social/emotional (spending time with friends or family), mental (reading and writing), or spiritual (meditation, playing musical instruments, or being in nature). Whatever form it takes, have a stress management strategy.

