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Moving Forward Through Self-Awareness
By Gabriela Leighton



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What makes a good leader? What differentiates a good candidate from an average one? How do you build a high performing team? How do you progress your career successfully? These and many more questions are constantly asked by our clients here at Maximus. Our job is to answer them.

While seemingly unrelated at first glance, I started thinking about these a few months back as I was working on a project to support an individual's self development. My conclusion? While my favourite concept of emotional intelligence was part of my thinking process, I managed to narrow it down to the one concept that I believe underlies all others: **self-awareness**.

I'm not sure what happened first – whether I made up my mind about this and then all I could see was this concept everywhere I looked or vice versa. While I would like to take credit for the former, I'm *aware* enough to realise that it likely arose from all my exposure to it. Don't believe me? Have a look at your LinkedIn conversations. It's been interesting to observe how over the last few months, the concept has shown up everywhere one can look. From peer-reviewed Psychology journals to well-known business journals and websites (Harvard Business Review, Inc. Magazine, BusinessWeek etc), the proof is in the pudding.

My 'eureka' moment came last week when one of my clients shared her experience of having attended an emotional intelligence program. Her enthusiasm and excitement when she spoke about how she realised who she is at work and how she thinks about herself and others when trying to achieve her goals was pivotal to me. She discovered that she was the personality type of "ENSJ" according to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and that she was 'blue' in her thinking according to the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI). However, these were not her key lessons. What reached her most was her new found feeling of empowerment that came from understanding herself and others. Her advanced sense of self awareness encouraged her to realise that the sooner she can acknowledge the differences between her and others, the quicker she can act on ensuring these differences are utilised.

Interestingly enough, I was reading an article in The Sydney Morning Herald yesterday ('Safe, secure, but more stressed than ever' by Kelly Burke) which spoke about the importance of feeling in control to manage stress. While this may seem a little farfetched, it seemed relevant to my point on self awareness and my client's experience. The empowerment she felt from becoming self aware made her feel in control, which will ensure that she will constructively move forward. Not to mention how motivated and energetic she is likely to be now that she has the 'tools'.

This also links to my conversations with managers about the strengths and challenges a candidate can present in a selection process. When asking these people what are the key aspects that could transform a naturally reserved candidate to become reasonably social in building relationships, the answer came back to self awareness. If the candidate is the first one to mention that they are aware of their reserved style and of having to consciously work on this aspect to interact with others, I truly believe half of the work is done. On the contrary, if the candidate does not seem to identify this as a development area or comes across as quite inflexible in a 'this is who I am, so deal with it' kind of way, then, be cautious.

To many people self awareness may be intuitive and quite natural, but there are many others who lack it and may therefore need some support to develop it. If this is you, help yourself to succeed and take control of your learning and development through the process of self awareness.

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