



LEADERSHIP insights

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BLIND SPOTS

It's time for my performance review, and I wonder if I see myself at all accurately. One good thing about data (such as customer ratings, revenue generated or number of programs delivered compared to goal) is that it provides an objective, impersonal metric – and a good case for setting SMART goals so you can know if you reached them. But when asked to self assess on more subjective qualities (like commitment to excellence, interpersonal influence, positive impact on culture), it makes me wonder if many of us might have **blind spots**. Maybe we get a little too puffed up about our strengths, or the opposite, are too hard on ourselves to see the value that we bring.

Many arrive in the manager role as a result of a series of **successes**. It has been said that those who have experienced much success can often struggle the most when they do fail or fall short. Unaccustomed to missing the mark, it isn't always handled well when we do. It is easy to either get defensive or take feedback personally and feel hurt. And sometimes we are the last to know that these reactions get in our way of being perceived as an effective leader. But it's **in our best interest to have our blind spots revealed so that we can continue to learn**. Consider the following suggestions to see yourself more clearly:

Set an intention. Before your performance review or feedback session begins, think of a **guiding intention**, a statement that focuses you and helps you to manage your emotions should they rise up. Some examples:

- *There is something I can learn from all feedback*
- *I will maintain an open mind*
- *I choose to hear all perspectives*
- *Information is just that-information*
- **Q-TIP: Quit Taking It Personally**

Write your intention on a post it note and keep it in front of you during the meeting. If you start to feel hurt or defensive in the review, look at your intention as a reminder of what is in your own best interest.

Do an assessment of yourself using [Strength Finders 2.0](#) to reveal your top 5 leadership strengths, and learn new ways to maximize them. This tool reinforces that diversity is a good thing and **none of us can do everything well**. We don't necessarily change what our weaknesses are, but we can learn ways to manage them better, get more mileage out of our strong suit and keep our perspective.

Seek 360 degree feedback, even if it is not part of your organization's performance review process. Ask a mix of employees to fill out a few questions about your performance. Have them sign their name to these, even sit down with you after writing their responses to share them with you face to face. Some might argue that this approach takes away the ability to be anonymous and therefore more honest. But thinking ahead, strive for a culture where a person could say to his manager, for example, *"It is hard for me to hold people accountable for customer service behaviors like smiling and greeting people when I see you with a frown a lot of the time."*

NOTE: If you do offer a 360 opportunity, be RIGOROUSLY non-defensive when hearing feedback. Resist the urge to explain away any negative feedback and find blame or you will do more harm than good.

Listen reflectively. Say your manager shares feedback like this in your performance review: *"As we have discussed throughout the year, I am concerned about your follow through on coaching with your employees. Things get better for a while but I notice them slipping back into old behaviors. When that happens, generally I am the one bringing it to your attention, and I would like to see you being more proactive about this."* Whether you take this feedback personally and start to feel bad, or start to get defensive and want to tell your manager all the efforts you have made that she isn't even aware of, you can **choose to pause** and act differently. **Reflective listening slows down defensive responses** and opens a window for you to see potential blind spots about yourself. **Show you are listening by saying**, *"It sounds like you do see things improve when I coach employees on issues, but you are concerned that I am not keeping you up to date on challenges they are facing, and you would like me to bring this to you without waiting for you to ask about it; is that right?"* **Be willing to be corrected** if you haven't captured it accurately, and this will lead you both to a much clearer understanding.

Use thoughtful inquiry. Another response to the feedback above might be, *"I may have some blind spots in seeing myself accurately on this; can you tell me more to help me understand how you came to this observation, and what you would like to see instead?"*