

## **I Know Myself and Neither Do You**

Leadership is in crisis today. Leaders in organizations and institutions worldwide have failed to deliver on their promises, inspire people and initiate changes to improve people's well-being and that of our planet. In poll after survey, trust in our leaders is at an all-time low. In both government and business, media stories abound about corruption and wrong doing. All too often leaders act out of self-interest, blind to the welfare of others. The result often is political and social unrest, and declining productivity and well-being in the workplace.

Many observers and pundits have given explanations for the current negative state, ranging from the negative impact of technology to increasing polarization and tribalism of the population and income inequality, but many of those factors are external to the inner workings of people, and the solutions offered are often external as well. Rarely do the pundits look inside.

This book looks inside the minds and hearts of leaders as a perspective and strategy that could change the culture of organizations and address the issues identified above. I suggest that the development of greater self-awareness by leaders can be a powerful way of improving our working lives, and perhaps also our personal lives.

I argue that leader self-awareness as a core foundational piece of emotional intelligence has been relatively ignored as a leadership and organizational strategy, yet the benefits and positive impact can be significant.

Part of that strategy would be a shift from leader self-interest and focus on external things to a greater focus on a leader's thoughts, and emotions, which in turn impact the leader's decisions and actions.

Allied to this shift is the need for leaders to embrace solitude and quiet reflection time, which aids in self-awareness to improve the quality of their decisions, ideas and relationships.

This book describes the research on self-awareness and also outlines specific activities that leaders can engage in to improve their self-awareness. The book is a natural progression from my previous book, *Eye of the Storm: How Mindful Leaders Can Transform Chaotic Workplaces*, which examines in detail the benefits of mindfulness practices for leaders and the workplace.

**The following is an example of a leader who struggled with self-awareness, with unfortunate results for him. I will call him Robert.**

He sat behind his large desk and gazed out the floor to ceiling window at the city of skyscrapers. Behind him was a large screen TV tuned into CNBC. On his desk was an active

computer, and in front of him on the desk was a large smartphone, with the active screen face up.

He was the CEO of a large company that was going through the process of reorganization and repositioning in the marketplace. His Board had recommended he engage an executive coach.

He called me.

Our first meeting was a revelation of his lack of self-control and egotism.

"I'm pissed off that we're not getting the results my team had committed to," he exclaimed in a loud voice, slamming his hand on the desk, "I made a commitment to the Board, and they'll hold me responsible."

As yet, we hadn't talked about what he hoped to accomplish with our coaching arrangement or an agenda for our first meeting.

"You're angry," I said calmly.

"Wouldn't you be too," he snapped, "if some people on your executive team were lazy or incompetent, or disloyal?" He turned and glanced at the stock market screen behind him and then glanced at the face of his smart-phone on his desk.

"How does that make you angry?" I inquired.

"The board expects results, and the hell if I'm going to take the fall for others' failures," he answered vehemently.

"So you're angry because the board is holding you accountable or because others won't be blamed for failure?"

He stared at me for a moment, but said nothing.

"So what's the outcome you want here?" I asked.

"It's obvious, isn't it? I want my team to produce results and fast. I made that abundantly clear."

A notification on his phone lit up and he picked it up to read, then looked at me with critical eyes.

Directly, I asked, "Is it possible you could be part of the problem?"

He laughed, glancing at his phone, and then his watch. "Get serious, Ray. And just a reminder, you're here to help me strategize ways to get my term functioning effectively. I'm not the problem."

This was not going to go well for Robert, I thought. "So what other emotions are you feeling right now about the situation?" I asked.

"My feelings have nothing to do with it. It's obvious that I have a problem in some team members lacking the skills and attitude to do what is necessary."

"What kinds of things might you do to motivate them to perform better?" I inquired.

"The only motivation they need is the threat of losing their jobs," he replied, half laughing.

Glancing again up at the TV screen, then down to his watch, he added, "I've got to run to another meeting. Thanks for listening to my problem."

And at that, he stood up, signalling the session was over.

As I was leaving, I said in an even tone, "Reflect on the questions I asked you today when you have some quiet alone time. And at our next meeting, let's set some outcomes for our coaching process."

He sighed, "Sure, if I get some time."

I knew he would never get the time, and definitely would not get what he wanted from his organization. Despite his overconfidence and arrogance, his self-awareness was seriously impaired.

You'll read more about Robert and what happened to him later in the book.

I've had this kind of conversation with varying degrees of seriousness with more than a few senior executives during my 35 years of working with leaders. It is reflective of a phenomenon all too commonplace in our organizations, where leaders see their organization's problems as someone else's fault. These leaders often exhibit a serious lack of self-awareness and the negative impact they have on others. And the results are often detrimental to the organization and ultimately the leader.

Along with this lack of self-awareness were the signs and behaviors of a fragmented way of working, which affected their ability to focus, and increased levels of stress, which included a constant and continual race to keep up to the e-mails, text messages, meetings, phone messages and conversations, with no time for reflection, and virtually no attempt at gathering their thoughts in solitude and quiet.

The workplace and job of leadership has changed. Traditional organizational structures, bureaucratic practices, and leader recruitment and promotion are still common in many of our institutions. Yet automation, a global economy, and the values of the younger generations are challenging these traditional structures and practices.

The successful leaders I've had the privilege of working with have developed rigorous habits which promote and enhance self-awareness and make them more effective and help them to rise to greatness. This book identifies, describes and promotes the importance of the process of "inside-out"-- the mastery of self, and incisive self-awareness that becomes the major stepping stone to great leadership.

Great leaders resonate with others because they know themselves and are attuned to what others think and feel. Learning how to be more aware of the perceptions of others is a skill set that will benefit those who seek to be more effective as leaders or in any relationship. By understanding more about ourselves and our unconscious tendencies to self-deceive, we can improve our ability to build relationships, strengthen organizations, and confront the fears that cause us to live beneath our potential. Self-examination is a preparation for insight, a groundbreaking for the seeds of self-understanding which gradually bloom into changed behavior.

Great leaders have also recognized the importance of regularly seeking out quiet solitude and stillness to allow the brain to integrate a cascade of the thoughts and feelings that inundate them on a daily basis, understanding also that these quiet times can be a source of creativity.

Making the commitment to explore the inner reaches of our hearts and minds allows us to be true to ourselves and enables us to honor the duties we owe to self, others, and the society in which we live.

Now, more than ever, leaders in organizations need to raise their self-awareness both internally so that they are truly connected to their inner emotions, thoughts and perceptions, and externally, to see themselves as others see them, so that they can more accurately assess the impact they are making on others and the world.

Leaders require elevated self-awareness, self-reflection and the habit of seeking out quiet solitude to become great leaders in their organizations and communities.

It is my hope that this book can be a valuable resource for leaders, leadership trainers, consultants and coaches searching for ways leaders can be more successful, and fulfilled in their work.