



Release the Power of Your Self-Awareness

by Gaelle Piernikarch, July 2019

"Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom"

– Aristotle

From ancient Greece philosophy to modern psychology, knowing who we are and understanding our own inner world has been playing a key role in bringing human beings to a stage of personal growth.

Defined by psychologist Daniel Goleman as "knowing one's internal states, preference, resources and intuitions"¹, self-awareness helps us, in a non-judgmental way, to acknowledge, understand and monitor our thoughts and emotions as they arise.

Thus, releasing the power of our self-awareness is essential to start our personal development journey.

What is Personal Development?

Personal Development is the conscious process of increasing awareness, building identity, unleashing potential and eventually pursuing personal growth.

Looking at Maslow's hierarchy of needs², we could say that the ultimate goal of Personal Development is to fulfil the highest of human needs: Self-actualization.

¹ Daniel Goleman, "Emotional Intelligence", 1995.

² Abraham Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation", 1943



Based on: Abraham Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation", 1943

For Maslow, self-actualization is the only "growth" need of his hierarchy of needs. He defines self-actualization as the process of developing as a person to achieve individual potential. On the other hand, Maslow sees physiological, safety, love/belonging, and esteem needs as deficiency needs, arising due to deprivation. Therefore, based on his theory, fulfilling our growth need is only possible once we have satisfied our deficiency needs.

So, being a self-actualized person means living at our full potential and in a conscious state of happiness, striving and growing over time.

How can we develop to our full potential?

We can certainly find part of the answer in this quote from Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung:

"Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate."

Being able to make conscious choices and being self-directed is essential to personal growth. Each Personal Development journey will therefore start with increasing our self-awareness. We first need to become aware of who we are, where we come from and of our strengths and potential, so we can consciously start developing. In other words, Personal Development all starts with getting to know ourselves better.

Beyond the pursuit of our own growth, self-awareness also proves to be crucial to understand others better and therefore enhance the quality of the relationships in our lives.

Self-awareness is the first step toward empathy

Some recent studies show that in addition to being a fundamental step in Personal Development, self-awareness leads to empathy-building and improved collaboration.

With a study called "Know Thy Selves: Learning to Understand Oneself Increases the Ability to Understand Others", researchers³ discovered that becoming more aware of our inner world and our behaviours strongly fosters perspective change.

³ In Journal of Cognitive Enhancement, June 2017, Volume 1, Issue 2, pp 197–209.

This way, we can build empathy and thus open new ways to unlock the full potential of our social and work relationships. Furthermore, we can improve collaboration, performance and leadership at work.

Do you personally think that it is important to understand why people behave the way they do? If your answer is YES, then you agree with 98% of the respondents of another study⁴ about the benefits of self-awareness.

As a matter of fact, when asked about the advantages of self-awareness, respondents answered that the most important benefit was “Understanding reactions and motivations”.

There is a strong link between self-awareness, workplace performance and collaboration. For example, being asked where their self-awareness had been most helpful, the majority of participants answered “Working with others in a team” and “Coping with stress”.

How to increase self-awareness?

Studies show that getting feedback from our trusted environment (peers, managers, family and friends) as well as completing personality assessments play a fundamental role in becoming more conscious of who we are. Both practices help us self-reflect and shed light on our emotions and behaviours.

Other techniques to increase self-awareness include meditation in any form, as a practice of self-awareness that improves our moment-by-moment consciousness. Another useful exercise is to keep track of what we decide to focus on, writing down things that matter to us having a greater impact over time than a mental recollection of them.

In conclusion

With a better understanding of who we are and where our reactions and behaviours come from, we all have the power to re-energize our life. The more self-directed we feel in stressful situations, the better we can transform stress into positive energy and refocus on what really matters. We can decide what to grow, what to change, and try out new behaviours and actions. Further, we develop our ability to reflect on new experiences and learn from them.

Last but not least, beyond setting us free for our journey towards personal growth and happiness, increasing our self-awareness is the magic key that unlocks both our potential and our social intelligence.



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⁴ “Type and Self-Awareness” survey, OPP Ltd., 2017.