

2 DEVELOPING SELF-AWARENESS

Self-awareness is the most important aspect of personal development. It determines nearly everything else, including whether you can stay motivated and achieve your goals. As you peel away the layers, you'll discover wonderful things about yourself as you become more aware.

With self-awareness, you can change deeply held beliefs if they don't serve you well. The journey of self-discovery is never-ending and filled with surprises and adventures in your inner landscape.

When you become self-aware, you know your strengths, weaknesses, and personality type. But it's more than this. Fully knowing yourself includes being aware of your thoughts and watching them objectively as an observer, without emotion or attachment.

You might tell yourself, "Now I'm experiencing anger." You can then ask yourself why you're getting angry and where that anger is coming from. Certainly, your soul is not angry.

"To have greater self-awareness or understanding means to have a better grasp of reality."

- Dalai Lama

3 DISCOVER YOUR TRUE-SELF

Go deeper into yourself and peel away the layers until you can see who you truly are. It is the sort of analysis and probing that will help you answer the question that great minds have asked across the centuries: “Who am I?”

You may be an artist, but that’s only the face you show to the world. Identification as an artist can create limitations, too. By defining who you are, you may categorize yourself and put yourself in a “box.”

For example, a commonly held belief about artists is that they can’t or don’t make much money. Do you want to define yourself that narrowly?

As you explore yourself, you’ll discover that you can transform yourself and create your world.

You’ll be able to see yourself as you are. You can either try to escape from this knowledge or welcome it with open arms as an opportunity for self-development.

If you welcome it, you could change the traits you dislike and build on those traits you do like. Frequently, we have behaviors leftover from childhood that served us well then but don’t work well for us as adults.

“A human being has so many skins inside, covering the depths of the heart. We know so many things, but we don’t know ourselves! Why, thirty or forty skins or hides, as thick and hard as an ox’s or bear’s, cover the soul.

Go into your ground and learn to know yourself there.”

- Meister Eckhart

4 TURN THE SPOTLIGHT WITHIN

The only person you can change is yourself. When you choose to transform yourself, you'll notice changes in your environment, including the people surrounding you. The world is your mirror, and you create both the negative and the positive situations you encounter.

When you are irritated by someone, examine yourself to see if you harbor the same negative trait they manifest. Usually, you'll find the answer yes. You likely possess the same trait in some form or another.

Take Emily, for example; she might find herself attempting to converse with her six-year-old nephew. The boy is anti-social, glowering and scowling at people. He never speaks to anyone.

This prompted Emily to call him a “bad boy,” which made the six-year-old even more aggressive. Fortunately, this happened in the presence of some of Emily's good friends, who gently pointed out her folly.

Emily turned the spotlight within. Why was the Creator showing her this little boy? Did she also lack respect for others? She realized the answer was yes. The moment this thought crossed her mind, she stopped feeling irritated.

Emily believes that everything has a purpose and that the people and situations we face are meant to teach us something we've been previously unable or unwilling to learn. This understanding has helped her use events in her life to become more self-aware.

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Of course, to make decisions, you'll also make judgments. They're a necessary part of life. Yes, the boy was rude, but the most important part of this situation is what Emily could gather from it. Likewise, you can use situations in your life to become more aware of yourself.

“Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves.” - Carl Gustav Jung.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHILE DEVELOPING SELF-AWARENESS

To be self-aware means you're conscious of the following:

- ✓ Your goals
- ✓ The events, thoughts, and beliefs that make you happy and sad
- ✓ Your strengths and weaknesses
- ✓ Your values and beliefs
- ✓ Your philosophy in life
- ✓ Your achievements, how you accomplished them, and what you learned from them

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- ✓ Your failures, how they came about, and how to prevent them from recurring
- ✓ How you relate to others
- ✓ How you see yourself and others

BE AWARE OF YOUR MOTIVATIONS

Whenever you do or say something, be conscious of its reason. If you scold a child, ask yourself why. Do you want to assert your seniority or authority, or do you want the child to improve their behavior for their best interest?

“I think self-awareness is probably the most important thing towards being a champion.” - Billie Jean King.

WHAT IS YOUR PERSONALITY TYPE?

The introvert is more prone to self-reflection and prefers solitude. He's more interested in his inner landscape. The extrovert thrives on social interactions and is expressive. He's interested in the external.

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You, like most people, have a mixture of both personality types. You may express some aspects of your personality in an introverted way and others in an extroverted way.

For example, at work, you may be more of an extrovert, a team-oriented person. You like the energy generated by a group working towards the same goals. You may feel uncomfortable and insecure when you're required to work on your own.

On the other hand, during your time, you may learn more about enjoying meditation, reflection, and quiet activities instead of pursuing the adventures of a social butterfly.

Once you're aware of your tendencies, you may want to get out of your comfort zone occasionally to increase your flexibility. In turn, this will enable you to be more comfortable in diverse situations.

“The outward freedom that we shall attain will only be in exact proportion to the inward freedom we may have grown at a given moment. And if this is a correct view of freedom, our chief energy must be concentrated on achieving reform from within.” - Mahatma Gandhi.

8 HOW TO FLEX YOUR FLEXIBILITY MUSCLE

Step out of your comfort zone with the following exercise:

1. On a piece of paper, sign your name. Notice the feeling of comfort. This is familiar. Signing may be automatic for you.

2. Now, write your signature with the other hand. Notice the difference? You'll probably do it more consciously. You'll pay more attention to the process. Does your signature look like the one you created with the hand you usually write with?

3. Write your signature another six times using alternate hands. You'll probably begin to feel more comfortable when writing with your non-dominant hand. The signature will also start to look better. If you keep at it daily, you'll eventually be able to write your signature well with either hand.

In other situations, practicing a certain way of being or doing things, such as working on a project on your own, will widen your horizon and possibilities.

“Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.” - Leo Tolstoy.

9 “WHAT THE BLEEP DO WE KNOW?”

This famous documentary, made in 2004, marries quantum physics with spirituality. You see how you create your world with every thought. It's a view shared by many quantum physicists and spiritual teachers such as The Buddha.

The TV series cites the example of the Japanese Professor Emoto's photographs that reveal the transformation of water molecules through exposure to spoken and typed words, music, videos, and pictures.

A simple molecule of water becomes beautiful after a priest prays over it. A water molecule from a jar with the word “Hitler” written on it appears ugly.

Imagine, then, how our thoughts and words affect us! The human body is about 70% water. This opens up a whole new world of revelation!

According to quantum physics, everything is interconnected. We are one with everything. We influence our environment.

In the documentary, the protagonist Amanda, played by Hollywood actress Marlee Matlin, begins to transform her frustrated self. She remembers that the human body comprises 70% water and thoughts and that emotion and words affect the molecular structure of water. We watch her becoming a serene, self-confident being.

“Men are disturbed not by events, but by the views which they take of them.” - Epictetus.

10 THE IMPORTANCE OF APPRECIATION

Now that you know that your thoughts influence water remember to thank your Creator whenever you drink a glass of water. Your appreciation and gratitude will turn into an elixir.

Appreciate the air you breathe, the food you eat, the people you live with, and those you don't see, such as farmers who provide you sustenance. No man is an island!

Do you see how becoming more self-aware can help you create your desired life? When you know how you're affecting the world around you, you can transform it to align with your desires by transforming yourself.

UNITY CONSCIOUSNESS

In realizing how all things are interconnected, you've entered the concept of "Unity Consciousness." Being self-aware includes seeing how you're connected to the rest of the world.

How do you attain this feeling of oneness with all things? One way of doing this is by not differentiating between the Divine and sentient beings. What you do to any of them, you do to the Divine.

"We cannot live only for ourselves. A thousand fibers connect us with our fellow men, and among those fibers, as sympathetic threads, our actions run as causes, and they come back to us as effects."

- Herman Melville.

11 SELF-AWARENESS AND THE TAO

Taoists urge us to believe in the goodness of our inherent nature, the True Self, and the interconnectedness of all things. In Tao te Ching (Power of the Way), the author Lao Tzu, the great sage and founder of Taoism, writes: **“The great Tao flows everywhere. It nourishes the ten thousand things. It holds nothing back.”**

In this book, he gives us “three treasures” to help us experience unity with all things:

1. Compassion. With compassion, you don't condemn others for their mistakes; you recognize them in yourself.
2. Frugality. The frugal one avoids being wasteful and going to extremes. Living frugally, you can enjoy abundance. Your life will be as simple as your needs.
3. Humility dissolves the ego and removes all possibilities of disharmony and conflict. Watch for signs of humility in yourself. True humility revolves around knowing your strengths and weaknesses and taking responsibility for your actions.

“He who knows others is wise. He who knows himself is enlightened.”

- Lao Tzu

12 ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR NEGATIVE TRAITS

Embarking on the never-ending journey of self-awareness requires courage. While it's easy for us to think of our good qualities, our negative traits are often pushed aside. You may even find justifications for your negative thoughts and behaviors.

One way to cultivate awareness of them is to look deep into yourself and write down all of your characteristics, positive and negative.

Avoid chastising yourself for your negative traits. Instead, know that everyone is an amalgam of productive and destructive qualities. The desire to change what doesn't serve you distinguishes the self-aware from the deluded.

“You will not be punished for your anger. You'll be punished by your anger.” - Traditional Buddhist quote.

PERCEPTION IS THE KEY

Returning to our story of Emily, today, Emily has reached a higher understanding of the nature of good and bad. She's realized that there is no such thing as good or bad. Everything is an emanation of the Divine.

A “bad” situation can become “good” if perceived that way.

When Emily found herself jobless, her spiritual teacher suggested she clean the temple's main hall every day. That would be her new “divine job.” Trusting her guru completely,

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She went to the temple every morning, and after sweeping and mopping, she would be invited to have lunch with her guru and the nuns.

It was a joyous time for Emily because she chose to make it so. No one who saw her could tell that she was jobless and frustrated. In about two months, she found another higher-paying job.

“Your vision will become clear only when you look into your heart. Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside awakens.”

- The Dalai Lama

14. USING SELF-AWARENESS TO BE YOUR BEST SELF

1. Consider your strengths. This is the fun part. Make a list of your strengths and think of how they're contributing to your happiness and that of others. Some examples may include creativity, initiative, determination, self-reliance, and empathy.

✓ If you find it impossible to list your good qualities, ask a friend or family member to write down what they like about you. This will give you leads, but avoid asking them when they're in a bad mood or annoyed by something you've done!

2. List your achievements. Make a list of ten of your accomplishments in multiple areas of your life. For example, list some social achievements, work successes, and achievements in personal growth.

✓ Next to each example, write down the skills you used to realize them. For instance, if you went shopping independently for the first time, what new competencies did you pick up in the process? Maybe you learned navigational skills or discovered that you have good taste in clothes.

✓ Now enjoy your list of accomplishments, skills, and competencies. Consider how you can use these in the future. Do you have more than ten accomplishments? Note the others too.

3. Write down your preferences and habits. You may prefer a certain armchair or place at the dinner table. You probably have a morning routine with which you're comfortable. Maybe you feel out of sorts if you sometimes have to change the habit.

✓ Sticking to your routine is a great way to beat stress or take the edge off making difficult decisions that take you into uncharted territory. Be aware of your patterns and let go of those that aren't constructive, but don't hesitate to cultivate those that benefit you.

**“Knowledge is learning something every day.
Wisdom is letting go of something every day.”
- Zen Proverb**

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RESOLVING CONFLICT BY BECOMING MORE SELF-AWARE

The cause of conflict is always within us. When you find yourself in an uneasy situation, check whether your ego is in the way. Usually, conflict is caused by the need to assert your wishes or the desire to be right. Once you become aware of this in yourself, you can begin to resolve it. Or, it could be that you feel stressed out because of the emotions simmering within you. You may have yet to be aware of them at first. For instance, there could be worrying, fear, jealousy, anger, resentment, or frustration, sometimes all at once. Take a deep breath at such times and observe what's happening in your mind. This simple practice will help you to think more clearly.

“Everything is based on mind, is led by mind, is fashioned by mind.

If you speak and act with a polluted mind, suffering will follow you, as the wheels of the oxcart follow the footsteps of the ox.

Everything is based on mind, is led by mind, is fashioned by mind.

If you speak and act with a pure mind, happiness will follow you, as a shadow clings to a form.”

- The Buddha

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KEEP A JOURNAL

Self-awareness entails observing your thoughts and actions. One of the best ways to do this is by writing in a journal daily. You may only recall some important things if you keep putting them off and allow a week to go by without making notes.

Keeping notes will help you see the patterns and values you've been harboring. Once you can identify these patterns, you can change them if they're not leading to positive outcomes.

“I am, indeed, a king because I know how to rule myself.”

- Pietro Aretino

17 WAYS TO DEVELOP SELF-AWARENESS

When you're self-aware, you learn from your mistakes as well as the mistakes of others.

Here are other ways to develop self-awareness:

1. Adhere to good values. If you have humility, you'll be able to see your mistakes and faults and correct them. You'll also be able to accept criticism. With honesty, you can be open about yourself.

- ✓ Courage enables you to look within without fear and carry on when faced with difficult circumstances.

2. Read self-help books. Read all you can on the subject and put what you learn into practice.

- ✓ Join a community of like-minded seekers. This is an effective and enjoyable way to develop self-awareness. It's easier to polish yourself into a diamond among a community of like-minded people than to go it alone. You may find self-help communities you enjoy online or at your church.

“Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the

barriers within yourself that you have built against it.”

- Jalal ad-Din Rumi

Your self-awareness will create the life of your dreams. This may not be an easy journey, but it's sure to be interesting and enjoyable. And the rewards are unfathomable.