



## Significance of Self-Awareness in Predicting and Fostering Success

---

Dr. Guyla J. Greenly  
*Dandelion Leadership Coaching*  
*Roundtable: Professional Coaching*

### Abstract

---

This paper highlights the crucial role of self-awareness, a core aspect of emotional intelligence, in predicting and nurturing success. It emphasizes how self-awareness acts as a cornerstone for personal and professional accomplishments, exploring both its indicators and the risks associated with its absence. The transformative advantages of heightened self-awareness on one's life and career are also discussed. The paper concludes by providing practical suggestions, offering individuals a roadmap to kickstart their self-awareness journey and seamlessly integrate the topic into their coaching practices. These insights aim to clarify the significance of self-awareness and provide actionable steps for individuals and coaches to harness its power for success.

Keywords: self-awareness, coaching, emotional intelligence, success

---

During the 2023 Regent University Professional Coaching Roundtable, Dr. Guyla J. Greenly introduced self-awareness and the research that indicates it is the key to personal and professional success. The presentation, "Research Indicates Self Awareness is THE Key to Success," originated from a workshop presented in 2022 to leaders in Casper, Wyoming, during a break at the 2022 Global Leadership Summit simulcast. When asked what they think is the key to success, workshop participants often respond with single-word answers:

- grit
- determination
- humility
- education
- ambition
- passion
- confidence

- patience
- discipline
- courage
- optimism
- dedication

These are all great words and aspirational qualities that do have an impact on individual success. However, according to a 2013 Cornell University Study, self-awareness is the top indicator of overall success (Lipman, 2013). Claire Hughes Johnson, former Google vice president, emphasized the rarity of self-awareness in job candidates. Hughes Johnson (2023) said she always looks for self-awareness when interviewing job candidates, but, sadly, she does not find it as frequently as she would like. Eurich (2018) indicated that while most people believe they are self-aware, only 10-15% meet the criteria.

## What is Self-Awareness?

What does self-awareness mean? Organizational psychologist Tasha Eurich (2018, as cited in "Understanding the Why and What of Self-Awareness, n.d) defined self-awareness as "the ability to see ourselves clearly, to understand who we are, how others see us, and how we fit into the world" (What is Self-Awareness section). To understand self-awareness, it is important to recognize that it comprises two key components.

### Internal Self-Awareness

Internal self-awareness is how clearly individuals view their personal values, reactions, and impact on others. Eurich's research found that internal self-awareness is associated with higher job and relationship satisfaction, personal and social control, and happiness. It is negatively related to anxiety, stress, and depression (Eurich, 2018).

### External Self-Awareness

External self-awareness is concerned with understanding how others see us. Eurich (2018) showed that people who know how others see them are more skilled at showing empathy and taking others' perspectives. Eurich concluded that for leaders who see themselves as their employees do, their employees tend to have a better relationship with them, feel more satisfied with them, and see them as more effective in general.

### Emotional Intelligence

Self-awareness is an element of emotional intelligence (EQ). EQ has gained popularity in leadership and career arenas. Some experts have asserted that EQ is more important than intelligence quotient (IQ). Before 1995, according to Viezzer (2023), IQ was "the prime determinant of success in life" (Which is More Important? section). After the

publication of Daniel Goleman's book *Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More Than IQ*, researchers began extensively studying EQ. In the workplace, IQ is associated with leadership success, while EQ "allows for a better understanding of employees' needs and priorities, which can enhance team trust and cohesion" (Viezzler, 2023, IQ vs EQ section).

The CBS television show *Scorpions* illustrated the importance of EQ as the show's basic premise. It was about a team of geniuses who started a consulting company. When they began working with the government, FBI officials insisted they hire an EQ expert to help them develop their own EQs. The thread woven throughout the series was an ongoing study of the differences between IQ and EQ and how dangerous and debilitating the lack of EQ can be in workplace and personal relationships.

### **Divine Design**

Another element of self-awareness is the understanding of how individuals are wired. Scripture states that God knit us together in our mothers' wombs (Ps. 139:13). He is our designer. Dr. Elizabeth Murphy (2023), author of *The Developing Child: Using Jungian Type to Understand Children*, said personality types begin to become evident in infants as young as 6 months old. For example, if an infant given a toy looks at the new item, puts it in their mouth, and discards it to move on to the next thing, that child may be showing a preference for intuitive (N) type. Another baby might take the same toy and spend a significant period of time exploring the toy, examining it to notice its size, shape, color, function, etcetera. This could indicate a preference for the sensing (S) type (Murphy, 2023).

### **Recognizing Worldview**

What do you believe in? What do you NOT believe in? The *American Heritage Dictionary* (2022) defines worldview as:

1. the overall perspective from which one sees and interprets the world,
2. a collection of beliefs about life and the universe held by an individual or a group.

Worldview is the foundational mechanism by which we make life decisions. A person's worldview is much like an organization's mission and vision statements. The worldview is the lens through which individuals see their lives, make their decisions, and reconcile differences.

### **Identify Habits, Likes, and Dislikes**

Everyone has blind spots, but the more focused on gaining self-awareness a person is, the better they get at recognizing both healthy and unhealthy habits. This increased self-

awareness of blind spots allows leaders to identify distractions and take improvement actions.

Individuals who know their likes and dislikes can make quicker, more confident decisions. When considering leaving a stable career for the unknown, the author journaled about her work history. Greenly wrote down what she liked and disliked about her current job and then added what she had liked about every job she had had and what she had disliked. She identified a pattern of what brought her joy or stress in the workplace. Armed with this knowledge, the author was better able to make wise decisions about her future.

In addition to knowing personal likes and dislikes, it is important to identify the difference between wants and needs; then, decide what you really NEED and what you truly WANT. Self-awareness is not just likes and dislikes, wants, and needs. It also means having a deeper understanding of emotional responses.

### **Emotional Responses**

Do you get angry quickly? What are your triggers? Do you get discouraged? Can you identify what or who has a way of leaving you feeling deflated? Once you understand your emotional responses, you can learn how to control them. Thomas Oppong (2023) asserted that “irritation is key to mastering yourself” (Byline under title). Oppong stated that self-awareness leads to self-correction: “Our reactions to the behaviour and traits of others can reveal deep-seated insecurities, fears, and unresolved issues within ourselves” (Self-Awareness Leads to Self-Correction section).

Understanding how your emotional reactions affect those around you is also important. Failure to do so can limit your effectiveness as a leader and lead to a breakdown of trust and psychological safety for you and your colleagues (Chhaya, 2022).

### **What Lack of Self-Awareness Looks Like**

What about those who lack self-awareness? What does that look like?

Some of the biggest red flags are (a) they are unwilling to admit mistakes, (b) they criticize others, (c) they avoid making hard decisions, and (d) they tend to either be stuck in the past or worried about the future.

Nobody wants that person on their team! So, how does everyone benefit from greater self-awareness? Those who increase their self-awareness will become more open to receiving and learning from constructive criticism. Some other benefits of increased self-awareness are empathy, self-control and self-regulation, improved relationships, higher self-esteem, and increased creative achievement (Miller, 2019).

## Getting Started

There are many ways for individuals to develop self-awareness. This section introduces three ways to start the process of increasing one's level of self-awareness.

### Journaling

Those old enough to remember the television shows *Doogie Howser, MD* and *Star Trek: The Next Generation* will know the first two journaling styles. Doogie typed a journal entry into his computer at the end of every episode. Captain Jean Luc Picard made voice entries into his Captain's Log. Use either of these options: keep a video journal, or you can really get back to the basics and write in a notebook.

While journaling, ask *why* questions in moderation. It is better to focus on *what* questions. Instead of asking, "Why do I feel so terrible?" try asking, "What situations make me feel terrible, and what do they have in common?" Focusing on what questions helps journal writers stay objective, future-focused, and empowered to act on new insights.

### Assessments

Another option is to take assessments. These measurements can help people understand how they are wired, why they developed some of their coping mechanisms, and identify their strengths.

### Work With a Coach

The final recommendation is to work with a coach. Even the most elite athletes need coaches, and even coaches need coaches. Coaches employ active and reflective listening techniques to unveil the client's narrative. Additionally, they utilize impactful questioning to scrutinize any inconsistencies or incongruities within the client's story, viewing these moments as chances to unearth judgments, biases, and preconceived beliefs that may impede progress toward their goals. Clients who demonstrate self-awareness and insightfulness tend to exhibit increased confidence and a heightened capacity for personal and professional growth and development (Knowles, 2021).

### Recommendations for Coaches

Many coaches use some form of assessment or worksheet at the beginning of a coaching engagement. Some examples include the Wheel of Life, CliftonStrengths Finder, DiSC Profile, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, etc. These tools help the coach and client establish a baseline indication of the client's beginning level of self-awareness. If using personality or strength assessments, the author recommends choosing one the coach especially likes, using it at the beginning of a coaching relationship and then weaving in lessons throughout the coaching process.

One way to establish the baseline level of self-awareness and track growth is to conduct a 360-degree survey at the beginning of the coaching process and again at the end. Alliance for Leadership Acceleration and the LEAP-Leadership Acceleration Program creator Lynda Silsbee (2023) recommended five best practices for using a 360-degree survey for leadership development in a coaching relationship. She suggested (a) establish trust and confidentiality, (b) always review the results together, (c) set clear development goals, (d) create an action plan, and (e) schedule regular progress check-ins.

## Conclusion

After reviewing what self-awareness is, here are a few things it is not.

- It is not quick.
- It is not a cure-all.
- It is not easy.
- It is not painless.
- It does not have to be done alone.

There is a great deal of conflict, toxicity, and overall dissatisfaction in the workplace. Quiet quitting and quiet firing are popular buzzwords in today's online literature, indicating employees and managers are tired. They need renewal and solutions to the emotionally exhausting behaviors they experience daily. Gaining a deeper, clearer picture of themselves and the impact of their behaviors and emotions on others is a valuable step in the right direction for improved workplace harmony. Coaches have a unique opportunity to work with their clients to build meaningful self-awareness for greater personal and professional success.

---

### About the Author

Dr. Guyla J. Greenly, owner of Dandelion Leadership Coaching, brings over 30 years of leadership, business, and communications expertise. A certified TypeCoach master and facilitator of Appreciation at Work and Toxic Workplace Prevention and Repair, she specializes in leadership enrichment. She earned a doctorate in strategic leadership from Regent University in 2021 and published her first book, *Knock it Off! How to Quit Being a Jerk @ Work* in 2022. Dr. Greenly is committed to helping leaders and emerging professionals make confident decisions, manage stress, and create thriving work environments.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Guyla J. Greenly, Dandelion Leadership Coaching, 141 S. Center, Ste 407, Casper, WY 82601. Email: [guyla@dandelionleadershipcoaching.com](mailto:guyla@dandelionleadershipcoaching.com)

---

## References

- Chhaya, N. (2022, February 14). *Managing anger, frustration, and resentment on your team*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2022/02/managing-anger-frustration-and-resentment-on-your-team>
- Eurich, T. (2018, January 4). What self-awareness really is (and how to cultivate it). *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2018/01/what-self-awareness-really-is-and-how-to-cultivate-it>
- Hughes Johnson, C. (2023, March 7). *I was VP at Google for 10 years. Here's the no. 1 skill I looked for at job interviews – Very few people had it*. CNBC.com. <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/03/07/former-google-vp-shares-no-1-skill-she-looked-for-at-job-interviews-that-people-rarely-had.html>
- Knowles, S. (2021). *Positive psychology coaching*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-88995-1>
- Lipman, V. (2013, November 18). All successful leaders need this quality: Self-awareness. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/victorlipman/2013/11/18/all-successful-leaders-need-this-quality-self-awareness/?sh=6ebf11b91f06>
- Miller, K. (2019, June 16). *Top 11 benefits of self-awareness according to science*. Positivepsychology.com. <https://positivepsychology.com/benefits-of-self-awareness/>
- Murphy, E. (2023, April 17). *Kids and type: BAPT in conversation with Elizabeth Murphy* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-TbRJH6WY20>
- Oppong, T. (2023, March 14). *Carl Jung: Everything that irritates you about others is the secret to self-awareness*. Medium.com. <https://medium.com/personal-growth/carl-jung-everything-that-irritates-you-about-others-can-create-immediate-self-awareness-58e2e8631110>
- Publishers, H. (2022). *The American Heritage Dictionary Entry: Worldview*. American Heritage Dictionary Entry: worldview. <https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=worldview&submit.x=52&submit.y=29>
- Silsbee, L. (2023, September 12). A coach's toolkit: How to use 360-degree survey feedback. *Forbes*.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2023/09/12/a-coachs-toolkit-how-to-use-360-degree-survey-feedback/?sh=721ab5cc9430>

*Understanding the why and what of self-awareness.* (n.d.). The Coaching Room. <https://thecoachingroom.com.au/blog/understanding-the-why-and-what-of-self-awareness/>

Viezza, S. (2023, October 9). *IQ vs EQ: Why emotional intelligence matters more than you think.* SimplyPsychology. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/iq-vs-eq.html>