

Self-Awareness: The Leadership Multiplier

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Sari is a senior operations leader. She's driven, capable, and respected. She delivers results. She runs a tight ship. She has earned her seat at the table. Early in our work together, she said something that caused us both to pause.

"I know I have the skills," she told me, "but I'm not always sure how I come across to others."



That sentence is more common than most leaders realize. Sari wasn't questioning her competence, and she wasn't lacking confidence. What she was accurately sensing was a growing gap between who she knew herself to be and how others were experiencing her leadership. That gap is where self-awareness lives, and it's often where the most meaningful leadership growth begins.

Leadership isn't just about what you do. It's also about how others experience you while you're doing it. Many high-performing leaders are promoted because of their strengths. They are decisive, structured, results-oriented, efficient, and reliable. They know how to get things done. Sari was no exception.

But over time, as responsibility increases and pressure builds, leaders can drift outward toward execution, outcomes, and urgency, and lose touch with the quieter internal signals that help them calibrate their impact. I often describe this as losing connection with the **Quiet Compass**. It's the internal guide that helps a leader sense how they're showing up, how they're landing with others, and whether their intent is aligning with their impact.

Self-awareness is how leaders learn to listen to that compass.

To give us a shared language, we used the Hogan Personality Inventory, not as a label and certainly not as a judgment, but as a mirror. A way to surface Sari's natural tendencies under normal conditions and better understand how those tendencies might be experienced by others. A few themes emerged clearly. She was highly driven and goal-oriented, always pushing for progress. She was structured and detail-focused, which allowed her to execute with precision. She also preferred task-oriented interactions, especially when the pressure was on.

None of this surprised her. These were the very traits that had fueled her success. But as we talked, she paused and said, “I can see how these strengths have helped me, and I can also see how they might be holding me back.” That moment mattered. It was the Quiet Compass speaking and pointing not toward failure, but toward refinement.

Here’s the subtle truth most leaders miss: strengths don’t turn into weaknesses overnight. They drift there quietly when they’re overused, unexamined, or left unchecked. In Sari’s case, her drive sometimes landed as intensity. Her structure could create distance. Her efficiency occasionally crowded out connection. No one on her team would have said she was ineffective. But some hesitated to speak up. Others kept interactions strictly transactional. A few found her hard to read.

This wasn’t a character issue or a motivation issue. It was an awareness issue. And awareness creates choice.

I asked her a simple question: “What small, intentional shifts could you make so your team experiences you as both a high performer and an approachable leader?” We weren’t looking for dramatic change or a personality overhaul. We were looking for small adjustments guided by awareness; course corrections informed by her Quiet Compass.

Sari chose to start with two. First, she committed to more intentional connections. She made brief, informal check-ins each week that weren’t about tasks or deadlines, just space to listen and be present. Second, she began creating more room in meetings. She paused more often, invited input earlier, and allowed silence to do some of the work instead of filling it with efficiency.

Nothing about this required her to change who she was. It simply required her to lead with more awareness.

A few weeks later, she shared an update. “I feel more connected to my team,” she said. “People are more open with me. I’m hearing things I wouldn’t have heard before.” Then she added the line that told me the work was landing: “It’s not about changing who I am. It’s about making sure my leadership brings out the best in both them and me.”

That’s exactly right. The assessment didn’t change Sari’s leadership. Self-awareness did. By listening more closely to her Quiet Compass, she learned how to multiply the impact of the strengths she already had.

This is where leadership development often gets misunderstood. It’s not about fixing what’s broken, becoming someone else, or sanding down your edge. It’s about seeing yourself clearly enough to lead intentionally. The most effective leaders I know don’t abandon their strengths as they grow. They learn how those strengths show up under different conditions, and they make thoughtful adjustments so their impact matches their intent.

Self-awareness is the multiplier. It sharpens judgment, deepens trust, and expands influence. It allows leaders to move forward with clarity while staying anchored internally.

If you're a leader reading this, it's worth pausing to listen to your own Quiet Compass. How do your strengths land on others when you're under pressure? Where might efficiency be crowding out connection? What one small shift could change how your leadership is experienced?