



What a Gift!

Be good to yourself at least once a day!

*O wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us!*

These words of Robert Burns point to the value of being able to view ourselves as we appear to others. We call this ability self-awareness, but it extends also to our awareness of those around us. It is a vital skill if we are to lead or work effectively with other people.

Awareness is the foundation stone of Emotional Intelligence. Without it we are left rudderless in a boiling sea of misunderstood relationships. Knowledge of oneself can be gained from inviting feedback from others and by looking inwards toward ourselves. It is the latter we are concerned with here.

We can think of awareness as existing along a continuum. At one extreme we find sleep, where our 'awareness' is largely unconscious. At the other end our senses are on full alert and nothing escapes our attention – we feel fully alive.

Developing awareness might be thought of as turning up our 'curiosity button' by paying attention to how we are feeling, right here and now. Gestalt psychologists provide a simple structure to help both raise awareness and focus it on three balancing zones.

The **Inner Zone** refers to our inner world and includes such things as breathing, muscle tension, heart rate and physically felt feelings such as anxiety and fear as well as joy and elation. The body tells us how our limbic brain is responding to our environment – information that is not sent directly to our neo-cortex and therefore not necessarily conscious. It acts as the body's barometer – not very sophisticated but useful in alerting us to what may not otherwise be aware of.

The **Outer Zone** represents our contact between the external world and all our senses. What stands out or is figural for you at the moment? What are you noticing? We each tend to see different things. Some are conscious of details and facts whilst others notice relationships and patterns. We also pay

attention to what is important to us at any particular point in time without consciously thinking about it. Conversely, it is also instructive to consider what we are *not* noticing - what we might be neglecting. The outer zone also includes our own behaviour, speech and action. By putting these together we notice what responses we get when we act in a particular way - an essential connection for learning.

The **Middle Zone** is where we make sense of our experiences and sensations. It acts as a mediator between our inner and outer zones making meaning between the two. It contains our memories, self-beliefs, our understanding of how the world works, recollections of events long past and anticipations of the future. Many of these understandings about people and relationships are rooted in our formative years and relate to very specific instances and people. For that reason the middle zone is susceptible to making the mistake of creating general rules out of specific cases. We don't always update our rules to fit with new experiences. Accordingly the middle zone is ripe with potential for misunderstanding, assumption and conflict.

We can use the three zones as a structure for grounding ourselves as we prepare for an important meeting, conversation or simply the day ahead.

Spend a few minutes with your attention turned inward. Follow a track from you toes to your head checking out each part in turn. If you find yourself thinking about something, notice it and let it go for the time being. What *sensations* do you notice? Then move your attention to the world outside. What can you hear, see, feel or smell? What are you drawn to? Does anything you sense relate to what is happening inside? Move toward the thoughts of the middle zone. What explanations or reasons do you find yourself offering? Challenge them. Are they always true? Where have they come from? Could there be an exception?

Awareness means to be in touch with our own present existence; to be aware of what we do, of how we do it and to be alive to what happens. Crucially it means to know that we have alternative behaviours available to us and that we choose which behaviours we show.

Go on - give yourself a good listening to...

