

We Simply Don't Know What We Don't Know

The notion that we don't know what we don't know is pretty familiar to all of us. What is less clear is that it applies to all areas of our personal behavior even those we feel comfortable about.

I have a friend who is very warm and willing to do anything for his friends. I don't have a lot of professional contact with him, but he has solid training in his field and seems to have good ideas that should translate into success; but success isn't leaping at him and he isn't sure why.

Many of his co-workers could tell him, he just doesn't seem very professional. He rants and reveals harsh judgments of clients; he shares experiences in meetings that if true make him sound at the least ineffective if not incompetent. They probably aren't even true, but rather just how he blows off frustration.

My point is that he doesn't seem to know how others see him. He is straightforward and kind and he seems to assume that the self image he sees is also the one his colleagues see. Self-image is an important internal foundation we build our comfort on, personally and professionally. Self-image can also act as a defense against the truth. One of the more disturbing things that can happen to us is to have our self image shaken. To avoid this we tend not to ask for honest feedback about how others see our behavior.

I was working with a very intelligent professional who made several appearances each quarter in front of groups of potential clients, but his presentations weren't translating into many new clients. When I attended one of his presentations the reasons were strikingly obvious – he was way too technical and detailed, and he didn't take questions or ask for feedback.

In front of the right audience his presentation would have been outstanding and he knew it. What he didn't know was that all his audiences weren't just like him. His blind spot was sabotaging his success, and perhaps even more of a problem was that he didn't know enough to ask for or listen for feedback. Without a nudge from the outside, he wasn't likely to know enough to even try to change his self-image.

An experienced coach can help you see yourself in ways that can lead to important changes and help make your interactions more effective and productive. Give a call today if you'd like to better understand how things could be better.