

## Social Awareness

Many smart people today are known as “the brilliant jerk” because no one wants to work with them. This is often because they had a misbelief that their smartness alone will get them to the top. Thankfully some of them are beginning to learn that they need other tools. Social Awareness is that other capability. In order to be effective in the workplace and to activate authentic community we need to be socially aware. Social awareness is one of the pillars of emotional intelligence. Social awareness is the ability to get outside yourself and be in tune with what another is going through. Social awareness requires you to get outside yourself and focus on others. Sadly, we live in a society where self-absorption is the norm. So many people are caught up in Me, Myself and I. We are preoccupied with self. We may be Christians but often our world-view is riddled with what I call humanistic me-ology. We may sing, “Jesus be the centre of it all” but if we are honest with ourselves many of us dread such a life. We much prefer being the centre of our own universe. What would your life look like if you were more socially aware? Central to social awareness is empathy. Empathy comes from two Latin words meaning “feeling into”. Rom 12:15 *Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.* In this message I will discuss the different types of empathy and why they are important. I will also highlight some barriers to social awareness and leave us with practical tools that can help us to become more socially aware. Social awareness comes when you get out of yourself. Social awareness affects all aspects of life. For example, deliverance from self-centredness and selfishness is a major key to marital bliss. In essence, social awareness is an antidote for selfishness.

### Phil 2:3-4

<sup>3</sup>*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, <sup>4</sup>*not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.**

eritheía = (“mercenary self-seeking”) of acting for one's own gain, regardless of the discord (strife) it causes. 2052 /eritheía (“selfish ambition”) places self-interest ahead of what the Lord declares right, or what is good for other

Hupo + Echo = to hold above, to rise above, to be superior

Do you know what others’ interests are? How do you know? Have you made assumptions? Have you spent enough time listening to them and observing in order to find out? Are you only fighting for your interests?

### Rom 12:10

*Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves.*

**What does it mean to be so socially aware that you are devoted to certain people? If we were to honour others above ourselves what would our community look like?**

### Rom 2:8

*But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.*

In its original use the word ambition was negative and referred to flattery and unsavoury means of gaining a following but today it has a more neutral tone. In the Latin it spoke of “going around” in the sense of soliciting votes but in modern times it is a bit more neutral. There is nothing wrong with ambition. Ambition is a strong desire and determination to succeed at something. However, there is something wrong with selfish ambition.

### 1 Cor 10:24

*No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.*

Meditating on this scripture will impact how you drive your car and how you make decisions in the workplace. When you fellowship with your brothers and sisters what is your main goal? When you attend a church service what is your main goal? How socially aware are you in

these contexts? Are you primarily seeking your own good or that of others? We are drawn to people that are socially aware? We often feel drained by those that are not.

### **Mt 6:31-33**

<sup>31</sup>*So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'* <sup>32</sup>*For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.* <sup>33</sup>*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

Seeking first God's Kingdom will involve social awareness. God has placed you in an environment so that you can change it and influence those around you. This will only happen to the degree to which you are socially aware.

### **Is self-preservation or anxiety limiting your social awareness and displacing it with self-absorption?**

### **Gal 2:20**

*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

### **Dead people are not easily hurt**

### **Mark 10:45**

*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

### **Reflect on your primary purpose. Does it involve serving others and giving your life up for them? How far does it go?**

A revelation of social awareness will affect your leadership style. Look what Jesus says about leadership:

### **Matthew 20:26-27**

<sup>26</sup>*Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,* <sup>27</sup>*and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—*

The world is always punting how to get ahead and dominate other people, yet Jesus' approach was completely different. It was rooted in social awareness based on love.

### **Mt 6:19-21**

<sup>19</sup>*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.* <sup>20</sup>*But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.* <sup>21</sup>*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

If you are still bound by mammon there will be no room in your heart for social awareness. Mammon includes the debasing spiritual influence of money. Mammon is the spirit behind materialism and greed as it relates to the use of money. If you are in business it is important to always think win-win. There are some shrewd business people who do not do illegal things but everyone around them always comes out second best because they are not socially aware. They do not think win-win. They are so consumed with winning at all costs because they are bound by mammon.

One of the biggest barriers to social awareness is self-protection and self-absorption. Am I too preoccupied with protecting myself from danger that I don't have the mental space for you and your current needs? My folks were with us recently and I dropped off my Dad at the physio but I don't actually remember asking him how he felt afterwards. I was caught up in the next task.

## **1 Pet 5:9**

*Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.*

Being socially aware will help you to remember that you are not the only one going through a tough time. There is something powerful about remembering other who are going through tough times when you are too.

How socially aware are you as a leader? In a leadership blog, Vicki Noel states: *Social awareness is our ability to accurately pick up on the emotions of other people and understand what is really going on with them. Leaders have to suspend doing what they like to do in order to practice social awareness. We have to stop talking. We must stop the running monologue in our head during an interaction. We should stop anticipating someone's answer before they speak. And we have to quit trying to come up with our answer while they are speaking...Instead of looking inward to learn about and understand our self, social awareness is looking outward to learn about and appreciate others. Social awareness is grounded on our ability to recognize and understand the emotions of others.*

### **Curiosity**

There are two basic capabilities that will help you to be more socially aware. The first one is Curiosity. Many people think they understand their people, but you will only truly understand the people around you when you dig deeper with regards to the following:

- What are their strengths?
- What are the over-extensions of their strengths?
- What are their deepest fears?
- What motivates them?
- What are their gaps?
- What makes them cry?
- What energizes them?
- What are their emotional triggers?
- What are THEIR wins?
- What brought them here?
- What will make them leave (deal-breakers)?
- Who influences them?
- Who are their heroes?
- What do they expect from me?
- What do they need from me that only I can give them?

### **Leaders understand the norms of their followers**

**Learn to ask people questions that they have never been asked before to get them to talk about things they have never spoken about before.**

### **Empathic Listening**

I believe that one of the main antidotes for self-absorption and selfishness in general is listening with empathy. Empathic listening often manifests as listening with a heart that is

deeply embedded in curiosity. There are 3 types of empathy; Emotional empathy – I feel you. Cognitive Empathy – I get you. Empathic Concern – I am here for you.

**I have learned that every relationship is built one conversation at a time. It is crucial for us to master the art of conversing.**

The natural question to ask in a message like this is: What does social awareness look like in the context of conversing?

**James 1:19**

*My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry...*

When was the last time you set aside time to solely listen to someone important to you (as opposed to setting aside time to tell someone something)?

Do you plan what to listen to, as opposed to just planning what you will say? If you want to build your listening muscle, you need to consider planning how and when you will listen.

Do people talk about how great you are or how great you have made them?

When people share their opinion do you automatically start sharing yours or do you draw them out because you are genuinely curious?

How do you start conversations? Do you ask people how they are doing in a conditioned way but then don't listen?

*"Real communication happens when we feel safe" (Ken Blanchard).* What are you doing to make your family members feel safe around you?

*"The most called upon prerequisite of a friend is an accessible ear." Maya Angelou, the Heart of a Woman*

Often we blame other things for our poor attentiveness. Who or what do you blame?

Are you creating meaningful spaces for your people's stories to be heard? There are certain stories that will only be told when the right questions are asked and when a safe environment is created. Instead of forcing your family members to talk, focus on creating the right environment as a social architect.

Let's take a long hard look at ourselves and assess our listening skills.

**Eccl 3:7**

*... a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak*

*John Vawter, "The truth is, I interrupt because I like to control conversations. I want them to follow my agenda, to proceed at my pace, to end where I would like them to end. Because of that I am quick to speak ... slow to listen."*

Often it is easy to talk, convince, and persuade. We often have the mindset that we have the best thoughts to share but in doing so we are missing out on a whole world of ideas that could enrich us, this is pride. The person who is the most influential in a conversation is actually the one who speaks second not first. When I only speak after having first listened to you, I can use fodder from what you have said as I engage and propose. If you are struggling with talking too much and not listening, give yourself the "silent" test. For how long can you be quiet in a conversation? Quiet and engaged, not quiet and detached.

Often you can tell when someone is asking you questions just to be polite and when someone is asking because they are genuinely curious. So let's be authentic in our social awareness.

**We honour God's creation by being attentive to it.**