

ME, MYSELF AND I

Part 1

Self-Awareness: An Examined Life is Worth Living

#WellbeingWarriors

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Do you aspire to continuously create better versions of yourself? The first step in mastering your life and being proactive in creating your preferred future is self-awareness.

Throughout man's cultural, religious, and philosophical histories, the importance of self-awareness is highlighted. The philosopher, Socrates, said: "The unexamined life is not worth living". One of the central maxims of stoic philosophy is "*nosce te ipsum*", or "*know thyself*". The world-renowned author and scientist, Daniel Goleman, wrote: "If your emotional abilities aren't in hand, if you don't have self-awareness, if you are not able to manage your distressing emotions, if you can't have empathy and have effective relationships, then no matter how smart you are, you are not going to get very far".

Quote by Dan Jansen: "I do not try to be better than anyone else. I only try to be better than myself."

So, what exactly is self-awareness?

Self-awareness is not a singular truth. It is a very intricate balance of distinct, possibly even contending, perspectives – that of internal and external self-awareness.

Internal self-awareness: How clearly do we view our own values, strengths, weaknesses, behaviours, thoughts, feelings and aspirations. How do we perceive our fit with our environment and our impact on others? Internal self-awareness is associated with happiness; personal and social control; and increased relationship and job satisfaction. It is also negatively related to stress, angst and low mood.

External self-awareness: Having an understanding of how others view us, in terms of the above listed internal factors. It allows us to see things from the perspective of others.

If we want to increase productive self-insight, develop, and live our best life, there is a selection of elements we require. We can obtain these through asking 'what', as opposed to 'why', as 'what' questions enable us to stay objective and empowered to take action:

1. We need to be aware of the need or necessity to change certain facets.
2. We need an understanding of *what* necessitates changing and how aspects of ourself relate to it.
3. We need sufficient awareness to distinguish between the things we can change and those we cannot change.
4. We need to be aware of and clearly understand our own [strengths and limitations](#) in order to figure out how to change.

There are various avenues to constructing increased self-knowledge and reaping the many rewards that it delivers. Here are 3 of the most effective ways to cultivate self-awareness:

1. Journal

Process your thoughts, viewpoints and awareness through writing in a journal. Identify an area of your life that you need or want to change. It may be an area you find challenging, such as a specific relationship, a difficulty in completing tasks or dealing with distress. Write down your experiences in relation to the area or challenge. Write down your thoughts, feelings, reactions, needs, and behaviours that are present in these challenging situations. Also, jot down details of the situation and the reactions of others.

A written expression can help us to identify and understand certain mental and situational patterns that significantly impact our life and goals.

2. Seek feedback

Many a time, we struggle to see and understand how our behaviours impact certain situations. Obtaining feedback from trusted sources may assist us in becoming aware of our blind spots. A blind spot is something that is present and has an impact on our lives, even though we are unaware of its influence. It helps us to recognise aspects of ourselves, or situations, that we are oblivious to.

Try the following activity: Take a piece of paper and draw a line down the middle to create two columns. In one column, list what you perceive to be your top three qualities or strengths. In the other column, list your top three weaknesses or limitations. Then, ask someone who knows you well, that you trust, the same two questions: What do you think my top three qualities or strengths to be? What do you consider my top three weaknesses or limitations to be? Write down their responses and compare the results. You might learn something about yourself that you did not realise before.

3. Practise paying attention

Very often, we behave on autopilot, reacting to situations automatically and impulsively with little awareness of how our own and others' reactions affect the conditions of a situation. Sometimes we are distracted or fused with our own internal experiences in such a way that we notice less. This can be detrimental. Practise being more present through mindfulness and meditation exercises. Learn to pause before responding, ask more questions to understand the motifs and behaviours of others, and embrace silences. With this increased attention, you are more likely to understand others better and to respond wisely, instead of reacting impulsively.

So, as you can see, self-awareness is essential. It can potentially enhance virtually all our experiences, grounds us in the moment, assists us in evaluating ourself and the situation realistically, and enables us to make positive choices.

“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step”, said Lao Tzu. If you practice these three steps, that which is beyond your current awareness will become clearer. Darkness becomes light, and we can only change that which is visible to us.

In Part 2 of Me, Myself and I, we focus on how you can use your newfound self-awareness to make positive life changes and further develop yourself in meaningful ways.

Quote by Hixon and Swann: “Thinking about why one is the way one is may be no better than not thinking about one’s self at all.”