

Leading from Within – Mastering self-leadership

“Before we can conquer the world, we must conquer the self.”
(Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*)

Intro

One of the foundational questions for leadership is, “Can you effectively lead others without first leading yourself?” While the obvious answer is NO, in reality there are so many people trying to do it. Just remember your doctor, who’s a smoker, and tells you to “quit smoking”; or think about that always broke friend who has just discovered a new way to invest and make money. We all know it: it doesn’t work.

It's common to overlook the inconsistencies in those we idolize. When our favourite public figures experience setbacks in their personal lives, we may choose to disregard those aspects (marital difficulties, unconventional choices, substance abuse, or even tragedy). This tendency to separate the appealing from the unappealing raises a question: does this approach work when we examine our own lives?

At HIM Research we believe one leads from within (values, non-negotiable principles), and outwardly, by example. No one is perfect, and we are not finished artefacts in galleries and museums but rather prototypes of what we are becoming. And we need to be true to ourselves before trying to influence anyone else.

“Nosce te ipsum”

An ancient aphorism, it means *know thyself*, expressing the idea that self-discovery is crucial in life.

Why begin with “know thyself”?

Consider that you are in constant conversation with yourself, privy to both your deepest truths and most subtle deceptions (yes, lies). Self-knowledge is a lifelong journey of uncovering our strengths, weaknesses, biases, limitations, and potential, equipping us to navigate life's challenges and opportunities. (It's worth noting that in our algorithm-driven world, social media networks often possess a significant amount of information about us.)"

We lead by example. If our example is not good, many will be unwilling to follow, no matter what we say. Others may still follow but for the wrong reasons (transactional): to please the boss, to gain the favour of a teacher, to get personal benefits etc.

Beyond the why, we are mostly interested in the “how”.

How do we know ourselves?

There are many ways to learn about us. Of course, the first things we learned about ourselves came from others such as parents, siblings, extended family, and the stories they told, *family narratives* or propaganda (“you’re the best”).

Identity markers

Your ID and your mirror tell a lot about who you are: name, family, race, gender, culture, age, health and so on and so forth. But your CV, on the other hand, tells your story from different lenses. Remember all those confident statements, positive self-evaluations and reflections? Remember the academic or work experience evidence that is inserted in your CV? They all describe you as you want everyone else to know you (Do you believe all you read in someone’s CV?).

And yet, we all know and accept that there are countless other stories no one adds in their CV. You know them, growing up with all the ups and downs, navigating life situations. Yes, even surviving critical life situations – a financial crisis or resignation, a health issue or a broken relationship, a painful divorce or losing someone in death.

Standardised tests

The easiest and most common way to learn about yourself is to learn via standard tests (like personality, temperament or IQ tests). In a work or academic environment, the options are refined forms of appraisal and performance reviews. None of them is perfect, not one tells the entire story, and we should not aim to find the one and only test which can tell who we are. Their contribution is to add another layer, to help us see from a different perspective, to connect the dots of different dimensions.

In some cases, thorough medical investigation and specialized assessments are essential. We lack the capacity for self-diagnosis and treatment; we cannot directly examine our own brains or perform surgery on ourselves. A medical diagnosis can have a profound impact, potentially devastating or uplifting. Seeking a second opinion can be transformative, offering a different perspective and outcome.

Experience

Beyond formal assessments, experiential learning is equally important. Immersing oneself in a foreign culture, such as through a missionary trip, can reveal unexplored facets of one's character and capacities. Furthermore, our time commitments – our projects, hobbies, endeavours, and accomplishments – speak volumes about our priorities and values. Open and honest conversations with trusted family and friends, conducted in a safe and supportive environment, can also yield valuable self-insights. These discussions might explore areas such as health and well-being (diet, exercise, sleep), the pursuit of new knowledge or skills (like learning a language or developing a website), and the examination of one's fears, dreams, and aspirations. (It's worth acknowledging that our leisure choices – playing computer games, eating unhealthy foods, spending huge amounts of time on social media – can also be revealing.)

Lessons from running

Christiane, my partner in HIM Research is a runner. I am running as well. We're not professional athletes, we're not going for races, but rather running for ourselves, for health and wellbeing, at times for a charity project/funding etc. They use to say, "You don't know how many things running can teach you about yourself."

I want to ask her: Christiane, what did you *learn about yourself* by running?

(I am thinking of mental and physical struggles, pushing the physical limits, being aware of strengths, weaknesses, recognising crucial points of feeling like either dropping off or points of no return, personal bests, failures, moving forward, plateau and growth, etc.)

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Myers-Briggs

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) indicates your personality preferences in four dimensions:

- Where you focus your attention, how do you direct and receive energy
Extraversion (**E**) or Introversion (**I**)
- The way you take in information
Sensing (**S**) or Intuition (**N**)
- How you come to conclusions and make decisions
Thinking (**T**) or Feeling (**F**)
- How you approach and deal with the world
Judging (**J**) or Perceiving (**P**)

When the letters for each of these preferences are combined, 16 distinct personality types form which consist of different characteristics unique to that type.

Sources:

- <https://www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/the-16-mbti-personality-types/>
- <https://eu.themyersbriggs.com/en/tools/MBTI/MBTI-personality-Types>
- <https://www.16personalities.com/free-personality-test>
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/my-brothers-keeper/202002/in-defense-the-myers-briggs>
- <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26554264> (see Abstract)

What did I learn about it? I am an ESTJ
(<https://www.16personalities.com/estj-personality>):

Practical, realistic, matter-of-fact. Decisive, quickly move to implement decisions. Organize projects and people to get things done, focus on getting results in the most efficient way possible. Take care of routine details. Have a clear set of logical standards, systematically follow them and want others to also. Forceful in implementing their plans.

The main challenge for ESTJ personalities is to recognize that not everyone follows the same path or contributes in the same way. A true leader recognizes the strength of the individual as well as that of the group and helps bring those individuals' ideas to the table. That way, ESTJs really do have all the facts and are able to lead the charge in directions that work for everyone.

Tests are very good. However, being limited tools, we need to enhance the insights with other tools, encouraging us to know more about ourselves while connecting to others. One such tool is Jo-Hari window.

Jo-Hari window

This framework was created by psychologists Joseph Luft (1916–2014) and Harrington Ingham (1916–1995) in 1955. This helps improve self-awareness & understanding through feedback & self-disclosure.

The Johari Window is split into four quadrants:

1. the Open Area (things you know about yourself; known to others),
2. the Blind Area (things you don't know about yourself, but others do),
3. the Hidden Area (things you know about yourself, but keep hidden), and
4. the Unknown Area (things that are unknown to you and to others).

Please note that the 4 quadrants, while sharing the same size in graphic layout, are not equal in real life.



The Open Area contains the things you know about yourself; known to others. Also called **Arena**, it covers what everybody may openly know about you: name, behaviour, traits, qualities. You learn about yourself from self-disclosure and feedback from others.

The Blind Area contains the things you don't know about yourself, but others do. It is like the **Blind Spot** while driving and changing lanes – the other car is there, on your left or

right, but none of your mirrors can capture it. It may be things you are completely unaware of, or you are willingly blind towards.

The Hidden Area contains things you know about yourself but keep hidden or choose to disclose only to few (if any). Also called also **Façade (or mask)**, it includes attitudes, fears, (some) ambitions, dreams, as well as private information, issues, secrets.

The Unknown Area contains things that are unknown to you and to others, generally because you've never been exposed to it (difficult situations, strange turning of events – positive or negative). Were you prepared to react to Covid-19 crisis? What would you do if your country was invaded like Ukraine was? Your son tells you he wants to start a transitioning process to become a woman. The person you appreciated the most turned out to be a fake, maybe a sexual predator. The **Dark** should not be viewed only from a negative perspective. What would you do if called to be the Education Secretary for the Government? (It is about potential.)

Sources:

- <https://www.mindtools.com/au7v71d/the-johari-window>
- <https://positivepsychology.com/johari-window/>
- <https://www.hee.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Johari%20window.pdf>
- <https://www.storyboardthat.com/articles/b/johari-window>

Break-out rooms Session

We have one question to start with: Looking at the four quadrants, where does the growth of knowledge about oneself does take place?

While intuitively we lean towards bringing the hidden into the light (thus the blind spot and the unknown), we grow in fact in ALL areas.

Questions for the breakout rooms:

1. (From Blind Spot Area) What is a recent piece of feedback that surprised you, and what did you learn?
2. (From Unknown Area) Describe a time you faced an unexpected challenge. What did you discover about your capabilities (strengths and weaknesses)?

Feedback from the break-out rooms: awareness, insights, new perspectives, conclusions.

Group 1.

Group 2.

Etc.

Intentional reflection

“We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience.” (John Dewey, philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer whose ideas have been influential in education and social reform.)

The third way to learn is through intentional reflection. We suggest you take these four questions and, trying to reflect and answer, prepare an essay of one page.

1. What are your existential questions? (“Who am I?”; “Where did I come from?”; “What is the reason I’m here for?”; “Where am I going with my life?” Etc.)

2. Try making a list of your key 5 values in life and say why. (“What will they say about me at my funeral?”)

3. Guided by the answers above, **what matters most deeply to you?** What is the one thing you do with exceptional skill and genuine enjoyment – the activity that resonates so strongly it occupies your thoughts and dreams?

4. What significant project are you undertaking that connects to this purpose? **How do you plan to grow** in this area?

Next presentation

Our first presentation describes the call for spiritual leadership, where one lead focusing on values, sense of calling, membership in something greater. This second presentation built on the idea that one can’t lead others unless knowing and leading himself/herself.

For our third presentation the question builds up: Can you lead others without knowing how you’ve been led so far?