

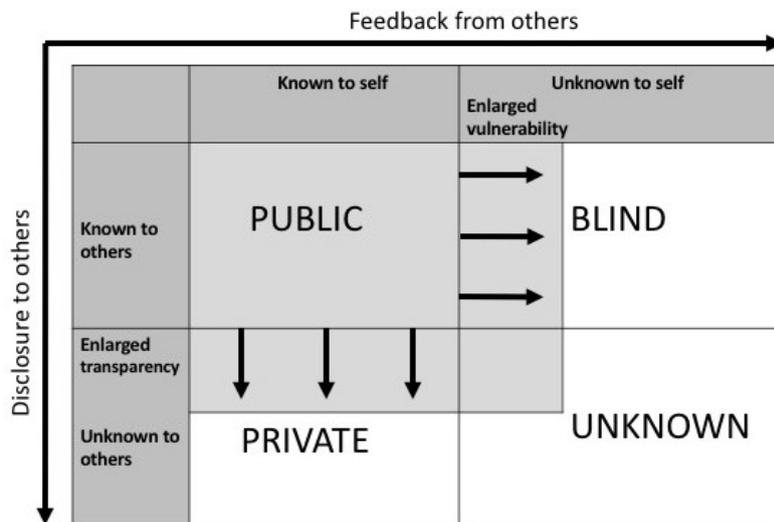


I often find myself in settings where there is an opportunity of receiving prayer and ministry and the question is asked, “How can I pray for you?” At that point I have a choice. What level of openness will I share at? Something on the surface and a little safer or something much deeper? When I selectively share, I refer to this as transparency. When I share out of my brokenness and where there is more risk involved, I am making myself vulnerable. I was recently reading “The ascent of a leader” by Bill Thrall, Bruce McNicol & Ken McElrath and they shared on this important subject. Let me pass on some of their insights. Transparency and vulnerability are important qualities but quite different. These were their definitions: Transparency is the willingness to open up our lives to others in such a way that we are seen for who we are, in the areas we choose to share. Vulnerability on the other hand, is a willingness to lay our lives open to the influence and advice of others. Vulnerability is the next step to transparency.

My thoughts go back to my national leadership team in Scotland. As we headed off for retreat, the choice was before me of how deeply I would share. I realised that the first person often sets the bar, so I decided to go first. I can still remember the feelings I had to face. If I shared vulnerably, what would they think of me? Would they still respect me if I shared my current temptations and failings? Summing up my courage, I took the risk, overcoming a sense of shame, and shared my heart. Others followed suit and we experienced a new depth of vulnerability and depth of relationship together. From that point there was a closeness and connection that would never be lost.

You will no doubt have seen the the following diagram or one like it and even perhaps taught it in a discipleship training school. It's a picture of how we can grow relationally and open our lives to one another in order to become the person God wants us to be. We are complex beings and whenever two people meet there are really six people present. There is each person as they see themselves, each as the other person sees them and each as they really are. To come to the full understanding of who we are therefore, requires a depth of relationship with others.

The Johari Window – Public quadrant: The PUBLIC quadrant is all about transparency – what I know and what I share with others. How far does our



transparency go at this point? What level of things do we open up to people? For example, “I’m struggling with a lack of finance; my quiet times are dry; I’m weary and need a break;” ... Some would find even this basic level of transparency quite difficult. To open up to having a need in my life, can be a challenge!

The problem of isolation – Private Quadrant: Many leaders disclose multiple areas of difficulty in their lives like fear of failure, anger, judgement, disorganisation or a lack of emotional intelligence. However, these areas are often only shared when the leader can maintain control, has an aspect of victory to share or doesn't need to let others keep him or her accountable. In fact, the more eloquent a leader is, often the more skilfully he or she may be selectively transparent – a clever means of remaining isolated and keeping the PRIVATE quadrant in tact. How sad it is, to not enjoy a greater depth of relationship that comes from the choice to go to a new level of transparency and vulnerability.

The greater the degree of influence, the greater the potential for a leader to lead a lonely and hidden existence, where people only see what the leader wants them to see. We have more communication than ever, with social networking giving us the opportunity of connecting and relating with thousands of ‘friends’ but we see greater levels of isolation than ever before! It’s easy to ‘like’ a post on Facebook but takes a lot more commitment to meet and encourage and pray and invest in the life of another.

A study was done on leaders about deception – it was entitled, *‘everybody lies but leaders do it better!’* The Interviews with leaders exposed ‘isolation’ as the primary reason the leaders gave themselves permission to lie. This separation was a soul separation from others. It wasn't the appointed isolation that God had for Moses, Paul and Jesus in the desert but rather a state of being lost. The longer leaders are in their roles and the more competent they become, potentially, the worse their isolation can become.

We don't necessarily live alone but many live apart from the benefit of significant others speaking into their lives. Some leaders feel more comfortable with isolation than they do with letting people get close to them. They depend on personal distance for protection and don't know what to do about their isolation. We overcome isolation by choosing vulnerability but its not easy.

Blind Quadrant: As we grow in trust for one another, we begin to move into the BLIND quadrant of the Johari Window – what I don't know and what you know. Of course the challenge is: How do we know the person we are relating to is able to see our blind spots, if, try as we might, **we** can't see them? Well the short answer is, ‘we don't.’ Nobody who is acting in an appropriate way is going to jump into confronting others without any kind of invitation. We need to pursue someone we trust and invite them to observe us, pray for us and receive understanding from God to speak into our lives.

The first time I was invited to speak into someone’s life, I agreed perhaps just a bit too enthusiastically. Soon after agreeing to mentor and invest some time into this person, I began to see some character issues that made others on the team feel uncomfortable. Whenever this individual spoke in the team, it came across with an air of arrogance and seemed to cut across conversation and bring a tension in the room. He seemed to be unaware of this and

so I wanted to follow through on my commitment. With a little apprehension, I approached our scheduled one to one, with the intention of raising this observation. As gently as I could, I brought the feedback and invited his comment but no comment was made. He got up, stomped over to the door and slammed the door behind him. My first thought was “oh dear what have I done?” Several hours later, he returned with a reluctant, “Thank you – I needed to hear that!” Working on people’s blind spots isn’t always easy.

I realised in retrospect, that we needed to talk through the process a little more and recognise that this is not an easy process he was asking for. Ideally the invitation should come something like this: “Would you be willing to help me grow? I would like you to observe me as I live, relate and function in ministry and give me feedback on anything that you feel I could improve, or in areas that I am unaware of and will cause me trouble if not attended to. I don't have the answers or understand the changes that I need to make and you may not either, but can you pray and seek God for me and bring your advice to me?” If the person doesn't come with this kind of invitation, the mentor needs to help the individual recognise that this can be a painful exercise and even when we ask for input, to actually hear from another and face up to our blind spots can be quite challenging.

Others’ perceptions of us can be life-changing and should be listened to with great attention. Many of their perceptions will tend to do with our character. The problem is that we establish habit patterns over many years and these habits become normal life for us and even when seen as growth areas, they will take a great deal of energy and perseverance to see change come about. The truth is this: If we believe we have mature character but haven't asked a friend about it, we probably don't! This is where there is such a need for godly friends and elders who have the time, integrity and fear of God to invest and bring wisdom into our lives.

Vulnerability & Submission: True vulnerability is what the bible means when it speaks of submission. Submission in its true setting is a love word, not a control word. Submission means letting someone love you, teach you, or influence you. In fact, the degree to which we submit to others is the degree to which we will experience their love, regardless of how much love they have for us. Submission goes hand in hand with vulnerability.

Vulnerability leads us into uncomfortable places. Vulnerability means things like unguarded, unsafe, defenceless and naked. No wonder why so many leaders skip this value of vulnerability. They would say, “Why open ourselves to the possibility of more pain?” It's funny how we are so scared of being vulnerable when in reality it brings such freedom into our lives, makes us more human as leaders, and builds more trust. Vulnerability is the key to understanding and releasing our strengths for the benefit of others – to knowing who we really are and being truly known by others.

William Wilberforce once faced this issue of vulnerability. His early political career looked bright. Through the encouragement of an old college friend, Isaac Milner, a tutor at Queens College Cambridge, Wilberforce began to take a serious look at his life, leading to an encounter with the claims of Jesus. After much personal struggle he trusted God with his destiny. Soon he concluded he should leave politics and become a minister. His personal study convinced him that he must first go to his trusted friends, asking for their counsel, not simply their agreement. First he went to Pitt, the soon to be Prime Ministry of Great Britain.

He asked him to stay in politics. This wasn't enough, so Wilberforce, wrestling with his conscience, sought out John Newton who also encouraged him to use his political know-how to champion good causes. It was not easy for him but he listened to his friends.

How many people have you approached with the desires of your heart, asking them to provide counsel on whether those desires make sense or not? How many people have asked you to comment on their life purpose or destiny lately? This is vulnerability.

Peter Drucker says, "Its amazing how few people know what they are good at. What comes easy, one tends to disparage. If it comes easy, value it. One thinks that what comes hard is more valuable because you have to work at it. Sometimes the only way we can see our talents objectively is through the eye of others."

Wilberforce chose vulnerability over and over again. After a time of doubt and reflection, he did decide to stay in politics. But then he came under others influence again, asking friends to help him choose which issues to focus on. Slavery rose as the top issue. Soon thereafter, he decided to recruit others near his hometown of Clapham, gathering regularly with the goal of mutual vulnerability and support. His vulnerability wasn't a passing fad. It became a pattern of his life as he consistently opened his heart to the influence of others. As a result of coming under the influence of others, Wilberforce is remembered as the great reformer whose work led to the abolition of slavery in the British empire.

Back to the question of opening our lives and destinies to others. Perhaps we see it more with the younger generation who are starting out in their journey, but what about ten or twenty years later when you come to a crossroads and don't really know what to do or where to go. Do you open up your life at this point to trusted friends and listen to what they have to say?

When we entrust our needs to God and others and choose to open our lives for their review, we soon face the next step – to align with truth. We must ask a soul searching question – will I listen to what they say? Do I believe it is true? Will I follow their advice? This is the true test of character – not just coming under others' influence but acting on the wisdom and truth of their counsel. We all need a small group of people with whom we can be transparent and vulnerable and who feel the freedom to speak into the blind spots of our lives. Only then will we grow in the way God intended and be conformed to the image of Jesus.

Until next month

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