



Discover the Gifts in Your Blind Spots

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ABSTRACT:

Conversations are how we connect and communicate with others, personally and professionally. Unfortunately, most conversations fail. Each party is coming from their own specific point of view which includes a lifetime of personal and professional experiences that has shaped their verbal and non-verbal communication. Often, we are left with Blind Spots, traits or behaviors we do not see that negatively impact our conversations and, in turn, our relationships. Knowing that each person has on average 3.4 Blind Spots offers us the opportunity to do a bit of self-discovery and become a better communicator. This article highlights the 6 most common Blind Spots exhibited by Leaders and invites readers to look within and gain greater self-awareness to determine their own Blind Spots and show up for themselves, their teams, and their families more compassionately

KEY WORDS:

Blind Spots, Leadership Blind Spots, conversations, Meaningful conversation, Leaders, stronger connections, team, Conversational Intelligence, leadership, crucial leadership element

Introduction:

We come into conversations with our unique perspectives, stories, and expectations. These perspectives, stories, and expectations are created by our specific life experiences from the family we grew up in, our environment, our culture, and from the type of feedback we've received over the years from supervisors, our industry, and society in general. Even with all this information we still are left with Blind Spots—traits or behaviors we do not see that negatively impact our conversations and, in turn, our relationships with others. A mentor of mine, Judith E. Glaser, and author of Conversational Intelligence--“How Great Leaders Build TRUST and Get Extraordinary Results” often said, “Everything happens in conversations.”

Blind Spots are generally invisible to us, and they are often glaring to others, especially during a conversation. It is easy to notice Blind Spots in others, yet we usually cannot see them in ourselves. If you Google Leadership Blind Spots you will find 5,990,000 results. These Blind Spots are often addressed when Leaders are seeking greater executive presence, navigating their career and seeking advancement or building high-performing teams. Faulty thinking limits access to revealing and addressing Blind Spots. My clients have found Blind Spots in areas such as black and white or all or nothing thinking, being addicted to being right, personalization, ‘should’ beliefs and rules, blaming others, and catastrophizing.

Blind Spots can cause pain, challenge relationships, or inhibit growth. However, becoming aware of your Blind Spots can offer you a richer life experience and help you and your team get to the next level of greatness. To do this, we as leaders and teams must be vulnerable, willing to look inward, experiment, and commit to grow personally and professionally in tandem. We must be willing to consider what behaviors we need to do “more of” or “less of and find words that open others up versus shutting them down. We all have unproductive behaviors. Here are 6 of the most common leadership Blind Spots I have seen when coaching leaders, executives, and teams.

6 Most Common Leadership Blind Spots

1. Not Knowing: While it has been well studied and supported that self-awareness is a crucial leadership element, 90% of leaders lack self-awareness in at least one or more area (Korn/Ferry Institute, 2010). Leaders frequently underestimate or overestimate their skills, and the higher a Leader is in the organization the less they are aware of their impact. Not knowing can also apply to our strengths. This might be the greatest Blind Spot—not knowing how to own and leverage our strengths.

2. Everyone thinks like me: You may have heard, or thought, “If only everyone worked and thought like me.” People interpret messages through the frame of their experiences, beliefs, and biases. Therefore, it is so important to check for understanding. In Conversational Intelligence® we call this ‘double-clicking’, as a Conversational essential. During conversations click on certain words or phrases and ask the other speaker to explain what they mean by it to make a stronger connection. If you are a Leader that leans toward being a “teller”, sooner or later your team will shut down their thinking and innovating – and wonder why they should bother. Become a better “asker” and notice how others open up and get engaged in the conversation.

3. Discounting Feelings: Strong feelings cause us to respond to situations and cues and can cloud our judgment. If something was said or done that caused us or the other person to feel threatened or defensive, the brain will likely respond by shutting down access to our best executive thinking just when we need it most. Notice feelings, emotions, and triggers as they emerge or erupt during conversations.

4. Lack of Empathy: Empathy is a skill that allows Leaders to understand what another's perspective, experience, and feelings are. Sometimes by merely adding, “I can see why this matters to you,” “I get why you got excited about this idea,” or “I never thought of it that way, what else can you share” is a worthwhile response to someone on your team who has a unique or unusual idea. Show empathy to first understand conflicting ideas before squashing them with your opinion. Leaders do well by going last. By this I mean holding back on your opinion and realizing that often what you say as the Leader carries more weight and is taken as a directive, so let others offer their thoughts first. Hear them out.

5. Assuming We Remember: So much time is wasted by conversations that start with, “I thought we decided”. Even if all the players are in the same room (or zoom room virtually), it is rare that they are all in the exact same headspace or listening capacity at any given moment. Different levels of engagement lead to miscommunication and misremembering. Miscommunication is a fatal business flaw and the ramifications are costly. To keep everyone on the same page, as Leaders we need to check in with our team often during a conversation or meeting to ensure high engagement, connection, and buy-in.

6. I believe I’m Listening: We may feel like we’re Being aware that Blind Spots do exist can help you become more attuned to your own personal blocks as well as the blocks challenging your team, culture, and organization. This awareness assists you in navigating Blind Spots intentionally, leading to more successful conversations than failed ones. While this sounds simplistic, it takes focus, practice, and work to change our default behaviors. Yet behaviors can change. Leaders, you can grow by discovering your Blind Spots. Understanding your Blind Spots and working to reduce their impact can have an enormous positive influence on your team and your organization. Meaningful conversation fosters connection, which is the basis of all relationships. To have a meaningful conversation both parties must have trust in the other. When meaningful conversations are happening throughout your team, stronger/healthier organizations are created. Make it a point to discover your Blind Spots and dramatically improve your conversations, relationships, and career. Small changes yield huge results.

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