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By Theresa Vertucci

“Self-Observation: A Powerful Tool for the 21st Century Leader”

[A Wisdom Scholar's thoughts on an article available for purchase at: wisdom-works.com]

Unfortunately, Ricardo and Martine’s conversation is all too common in the work place. The slightest edge used in verbal or body language can quickly cue an emotional response from another person. When people are unaware of their own signals that they are sending, as well as their emotions and responses to others, communication quickly collapses both in and out of the work place. When communication is hindered, good leadership is hard to sustain. Rene Moorefield brings a solution to the frequent breakdown of leadership, which is self-observation. By being aware of your own language, body, and emotions, you can adjust the manner in which you interact with people and create a more conducive working environment that cultivates rather than impairs cooperation. Moorefield’s proposal may transform not only the work place, but relationships in general if people become more capable of addressing a specific situation rather than a feeling that they are prone to.

The main problem with introducing self-observation as a critical leadership skill is that it involves an individual transitioning from an intuitive reaction by reprogramming how we as people think. Look at college education for example. Most of my classes have trained students to memorize and recite the answers. A multiple choice test does not teach anybody critical thinking skills which are essential for self-observation. If anything, these types of testing methods train the upcoming leaders to react on the first impulse that occurs. I have only had one class in my college career that asked me to evaluate what I think with what I do which is an essential part of self-observation. For the majority of my classes however, there is a strong importance on quantity not quality. How much can I answer about *blank* and how quick can I do it? This is the main skill tested in my classes and doesn’t ask the student to actually engage with the material. However, the issue becomes grading. College institutions need a system that ranks students to separate those who do perform with those that do not. The easiest way to measure this is to ask simple questions that produce numerical answers that can be quantified. Grading an essay test is more subjective than a multiple choice. Although I understand why institutions need grading systems, I also think it is a big reason why Moorefield’s leadership method of self observation will take some time. When everyone is ranked against each other, who is worried about communication or cooperation and how their words, emotions, and body language are being interpreted. Students are mainly concerned with where they lie on the curve. Obviously college gives very important leadership skills that are essential in the business world, however, my point is that the main ideology behind the grading process teaches students that their peers are their competition and not their business companion. No wonder animosity and hardheadedness enter the business world when students become the new leaders.

Currently, my leadership roles involve functions at school where I am not a boss, but I am a leader. For example, I have two freshmen mentees who I try to give guidance, but do not manage them. My goal in my leadership is simply to help them learn and grow so I can constantly make sure that my language, emotions, and body language constantly communicate my support for them. Self-observation takes more than analytical skills because it requires an individual to be objective about themselves which is difficult to do. Objectivity is an important aspect of self-observation that I can introduce into my leadership abilities. For example, when I am working in a group and perhaps have a group member that is underperforming, I can try to be

more objective about the situation. If I can do this, my emotions will influence my decisions less and I can create a more productive environment and work on encouraging my group member to work rather than responding in anger. Self-observation is difficult, but is definitely an excellent personal goal to aspire to. For self-observation to be introduced into leadership, it needs to be explored and encouraged in the college environment where people learn how to work with one another.