

Daniel Goleman: How Self-Awareness Impacts Your Work

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Through my research in emotional intelligence and brain function, I've developed a model of the mind as a three-tiered building. The first tier is the foundation and where you'll find the **brain**, the control center. The second tier contains the four realms of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skill.

And above that, at the top tier, are leadership competencies. These come from a methodology called Competency Modeling, one of the main developers of which was my mentor at Harvard, David McClelland. Following this model, we identify who will be best in a specific role by evaluating those who have excelled in that position—using whatever metric applies—and then comparing them with people in the same role with mediocre success. This allows us to identify the competencies found in the stand-outs that you don't find in the average... *these* are the leadership competencies we're seeking. Then we hire people with those competencies.

In the decades since McClelland proposed this, it has become standard operating procedure for identifying leadership competencies in most world-class organizations. When I was conducting research for my book *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, I had access to about 200 competency models that companies use to identify star performers. These are all proprietary since they provide each organization with a competitive edge, but I was able to identify common themes. For example, emotional self-awareness is a leadership competency that shows up in model after model. These are the leaders attuned to their inner signals, recognizing how their feelings affect them and their job performance. They integrate their guiding values into their work. They can deduce the best course of action. They see the big picture and they're genuine.

I had a discussion about this model—and particularly self-awareness—with my colleague Daniel Siegel, who's a psychiatrist at UCLA and whose research informs much of my work in emotional intelligence. I asked what his research had to do with the parts of the brain that are self-aware. I've paraphrased our conversation below.

What's particularly exciting about this model is how it asks the question, "How does emotional intelligence create a bridge between competence creation and the brain?"

First off, people hear about the brain and they become glassy-eyed; they think it's going to be too complicated. But I think there are some basic statements about the brain that can make us feel much more comfortable... Remember that the brain is actually the social organ of the body. Everything that allows us to be social is mediated by certain circuits in the brain. Also, your experience—just the subjective quality of being alive—has a lot to do with how you use your brain. Let's take self-awareness, as you mentioned. When someone is aware of how feelings affect his reasoning, thinking, and ways of interacting with other people—he has self-awareness. This is one component of emotional intelligence. And we know that there are circuits in the brain that allow you to be aware of your mental world that are distinct from the circuits that allow you to be aware of your physical world.

During medical school I knew certain professors who were aware of their internal experiences, and subsequently could also be aware of the experiences of their patients. So if someone was given a difficult diagnosis, they knew to stay with the patient and be attentive to their feelings. Other

*professors acted as if it was just a diagnosis. And it struck me then that some people could see their minds, and some people couldn't. I termed this ability **mindsight**.*

*So as I said, with self-awareness, we know there are certain circuits that map your mental life. These are very different from the brain circuits that map what you physically see, for example. Some people have cultivated these **mindsight map-making** areas beautifully and have great self-awareness, because it's a learnable skill, and other people haven't. Some **mindsight** may be innate, but studies also suggest that your experiences with your parents can generate the kind of reflective competencies upon which self-awareness depends.*

Keep in mind that self-awareness isn't just navel-gazing. It's the presence of mind to actually be flexible in how you respond. It allows you to be centered, and know what your body is telling you.

The physiological state of your whole body can drastically affect how you respond in a given situation if you don't pay attention to it. (For example, a study in 2011 indicated that judges hand down stricter sentences when they're hungry.)

This is also true when we're threatened or challenged at work: The brain quickly judges people who are not like us in one certain way, and those like us in another way. If you're not aware of that as a leader of an organization, you may find yourself making all sorts of gut-based decisions that require more reflection.