



Identify, Examine & Challenge Your Blind Spots Using the Johari Window

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Why Bother With Blind Spots?

Examining blind spots helps leaders avoid derailment and directly supports the skill- and reputation-building needed for continued advancement. Strong leaders value career-long professional development and continuous improvement. The growth we expect from our business we expect from ourselves as well. We don't believe that once we reach a certain title, P&L or scope that we've arrived and done learning. **Investigating and addressing our blind spots is a core ingredient to building elite leadership competencies.**

Identifying and challenging blinds spots helps leaders uncover and address harmful status quo norms and unwritten rules in our workplaces and on our teams. Norms and unwritten rules that are harmful range from exclusionary culture, to microaggressions, to assessments of potential and performance that are rooted in unconscious biases.

There can be all kinds of risks and costs to upholding harmful norms, from [the high cost of losing talent](#), to lack of progress on DEI goals and the brand-damage that brings, both with customers and employee candidates. If harmful norms are contributing to a not-diverse workplace, the company, on balance, will be making poorer decisions, not keeping pace with changing demographics of customers, and losing ground to competitors.

Leaders who investigate and address blind spots with openness and curiosity, establish better rapport and relate better to all team members, including those who don't look like them and aren't from similar backgrounds. These are leadership super-strengths: they lead to stronger, [higher performing teams](#), longer employee retention and reduced turnover expense. Since [diverse teams drive better business outcomes](#), you can differentiate, and win, by being better at building and leading diverse teams.

Step 1

Reflection: Acknowledge & Assume You've Got Blind Spots

You realize by now this exercise won't work at all unless you decide to believe you've got blind spots. Sadly, this means a lot of leaders with serious blind spots that need to be addressed will likely not go looking for them. Good thing you will — it's a strong differentiator for you! Start by reflecting on why you want to investigate. **Write down your responses to the following questions.**

To what degree do I truly believe I've got blind spots?

If I believed I've got blind spots, might my thoughts & actions be?

What is the risk of investigating my blind spots?

What am I concerned I might find out?

How will my leadership & work outcomes benefit from examining my blind spots? (How about my team? My company?)

Step 2

Brainstorm Ways to “See What’s Unseeable”

By definition, our blind spots are unseeable by us ourselves. So we need outside help.

Brainstorm 30 sources of external information about yourself. The number is deliberately large: it’s an old design trick to help you pull past the first few obvious answers and get to more impactful, creative ideas.

Some examples to get you started:

- 360-degree anonymized feedback
- Exit interviews with former team members or clients
- Can you expect candor from your current team? If so, ask them
- Survey trusted colleagues who you believe will be balanced and candid (no pollyannas)
- Ask peers with whom you’ve had past conflict
- Data from the recruiting team
- Data from the company employee engagement survey
- Self-assess: how do you typically react to feedback? What feedback have you received more than once that you strongly disliked, struck you as odd or that you didn’t “get”?
- Compile themes from past performance reviews
- Take another, closer look at past leadership assessments

List your sources here:

Pick three sources from your list that are reasonable for you to execute. Keep your list close to hand, you’ll need it in Step 5.

Step 3

Identify & Challenge Your Open Self (Quadrant I)

Quadrant I, the Open Self, is also called the Arena. It's all about things that are known to everybody — to yourself, to your team, to your colleagues. As in, what would be known to all if you were standing in an arena, with colleagues and clients as the audience.

First, list what everybody knows in Quadrant I on the template at the end of the workbook. Be brutally honest: this is about both what you say is true, as well as your *actions* — even if (especially if) your actions sometimes differ from your statements or from company policy.

Need some prompts? Try these:

- Your leadership style, and how you “show up”
- Your communication preferences
- How you uphold or disrupt the company culture
- Unwritten rules about working with you; hot buttons and quirks
- How to get promoted or get the bonus when working with you
- Track record on hiring, inclusion, retention, promotion and representation of a variety of highly diverse team members
- Interests you consider worthwhile and important
- Your beliefs about what makes someone high potential or a great candidate
- Your attitudes towards clients, peers, senior leaders, other stakeholders

Next, challenge the elements of your Open Self to combat confirmation bias (write your answers in the space below):

- What might make them untrue?
- Are they ever just *conditionally* true?
- Can you find three material contradictions to any of these known knows?
- Are there “false knows,” old stories that aren't relevant anymore, or other irrelevant knows?

Step 4

Identify the Personal Knowing in your Hidden Self (Quadrant II)

Your Hidden Self isn't readily seen by others, but it's known to and understood by you. You might choose not to expose the Personal Knowing you keep hidden, or you might just instinctually keep it hidden. Personal Knowing is about beliefs deep within, as well as confidence, assuredness, creativity, thought processes, the way you see and understand your environment(s).

First, list your Personal Knowing in Quadrant II of the template at the end of the workbook. Ask yourself questions, like:

- What do you personally know about your leadership, working style, approach, biases and impact that others *don't* know?
- What makes you keep this Personal Knowing hidden? (Or, why do you prefer it hidden?)
- What does your lived experience tell you about good leadership and the workplace?
- How do you put your Personal Knowing to work for you?

Next, reflect: How often do you dismiss or second-guess your Personal Knowing? (Write your answer in the space below):

- **If you answered, "Frequently:"**
How might you reframe your Personal Knowing as a strength or asset? What actions might you take if you did that?
- **If you answered, "Never:"**
To what degree might this put you at risk for overconfidence or derailing behavior? What evidence may contradict this Personal Knowing you're so sure of?

Step 5

Dig Further Into Your Blind Spots (Quadrant III)

This is where your brainstorm and short list from Step 2 come in!

First, gather qualitative and quantitative data from the three sources on your short list. **Then, reflect on the results.** Write your answers in the spaces below.

How are you showing up in ways you didn't realize?

What are you surprised about (pleasantly? disappointedly?)

Is your default response to difficult feedback to believe or to disbelieve?

- How might this play into your ability to understand your Blind Spots?
- How does this change if the feedback is positive?

Is your default response to others' statements of lived experience to believe or disbelieve?

- Does the default change based on how similar to you the other person is?
- How might this play into your ability to understand your Blind Spots?

Step 6

Prioritize What You Will Act On

Pull it all together. What does the data, your reflection and your attempts to disprove what Everybody Knows tell you?

What do you think your top three blind spots are?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Take action to work with your blind spots over the next two weeks:

1. Identify a trusted friend or colleague you can use as a sounding board. Do they agree these are your blind spots?
2. Take note throughout the day of times you see or suspect blind spots are coming into play. What's going on? Do you take different action when you become aware of them?

What commitment will you make to “showing up” differently, now that you're armed with this knowledge? Write your commitment below:

Investigating Blind Spots



| | | |
|---------------------|---|-------------------|
| Known to others | I. open self (or, arena) | III. blind spot |
| | II. personal knowing (hidden self, or façade) | IV. unknown |
| Not known to others | Known to self | Not known to self |

Special Note:

The Johari Window exercise presented here intentionally skips the “Unknown” Quadrant IV of the Window. Uncovering things unknown to *both* others *and* oneself is far beyond the scope of this article.

If you’re interested to investigate this quadrant, consider approaches like therapy, coaching, meditation, faith-based practices, or deep journaling.