

Conversation 28 – Hidden Diversity: *Improving Leadership Skills*

Purpose: This is a reminder that most aspects of diversity are not outwardly visible, but recognizing hidden variables can be of great value to your personal and professional life. Let's jump in.

When you think about diversity among people, what things do you notice?

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Now, consider what aspects may *not* be visible?

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The Discussion: I regularly meet new people, and I talk daily with people I've known for years. But how well do I really know them? How well do they really know me? Aside from a couple of friends in the counselor and clergy professions, I know few who can set aside their first visual impression (or their one-hundredth time seeing someone), truly look beneath the surface, and remind themselves that this person may have sadness or joy of which I know nothing. They may have recently experienced loss or gain, an acute mental health crisis, an ongoing battle with dyslexia, addiction, food insecurity, or any number of other afflictions (or prosperity). We may observe signs, but we simply do not know.

If we do not pause and remind ourselves of these hidden differences, it is easy to interact on the surface in an "I - It" transaction. In *Social Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman describes this as treating others as objects, not persons. The inverse is the "I - You" relationship in which others' feelings not only matter to us but change us. This is a picture of empathy.

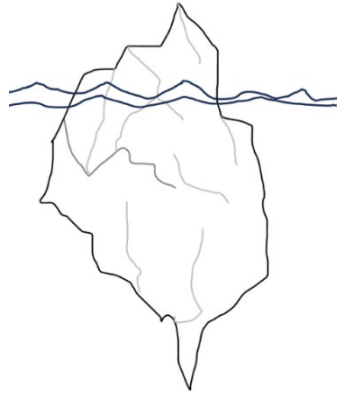
So how might focusing on *hidden diversity* improve your EQ (emotional intelligence), a skill which Goleman contends is learnable? Let's quickly review hidden aspects of diversity.

What people see (above the water line):

- Outward appearance
- Physical behaviors
- Sound of voice (including accents)

What's hidden (beneath the waves):

- Values
- Beliefs, worldviews, faith traditions
- Socioeconomic status
- Intelligence, ability
- Mental and physical health
- Pronoun/gender identity, sexual orientations
- Ethnicity
- DNA / physical variation
- History, geography, and more



I love that last point with history and geography. We sometimes miss these aspects. For example, I am fully Appalachian—a geographic, socioeconomic, and cultural designation. But people do not see that outwardly, nor do they *hear* much of an accent when I speak. But my family holds close this proud heritage. We celebrate our unique foods and music and family and faiths. We also experience stereotyping and degrading humor. Raising awareness of hidden diversity can help everyone become more sensitive and considerate of others. It can also strengthen friendships and teams at work, quickening goal attainment.

Here is a closing question to consider for more personal reflection.

List some aspects of hidden diversity that others may not know about you.

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Homework: This week, casually observe someone with whom you interact and wish to know better or improve the relationship. Become curious about hidden diversity, and initiate a conversation. Think about how learning more about others can help you improve your relationships *and* leadership skills.

General Reflections:

One thing that struck me about this topic was: _____

I'm still pondering (*and may seek more information on*): _____

As a result of this reflection, I plan to: _____
