

LEADERSHIP
Blind Spots

BY RANDALL MYERS



Hide and Seek is a game every kid loves to play. I still like to play it with my grandkids! When it's your turn to hide, the goal is not to be found. As a child, that was a challenge for me. I was unaware of one crucial fact: Closing my eyes didn't make me disappear. I thought this! I felt that if I couldn't see someone, they couldn't see me. I was always the first one to be discovered as I hid in plain sight with my eyes tightly shut. I remember the day it dawned on me that the best hiding place required more effort than standing behind a chair with my eyes closed.

The scary thing about being unaware is that we are unaware of it. Just like when I closed my eyes thinking I couldn't be found, we have our eyes closed to certain things in our lives. Others around us see them blatantly, but we are oblivious to them.

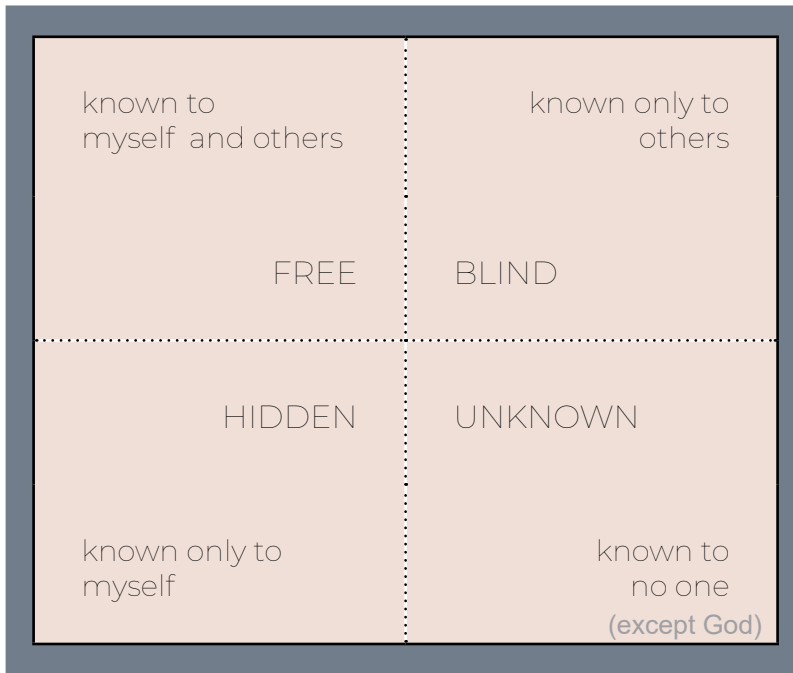
These areas we are unaware is what many have called "blind spots." The dictionary defines a blind spot as "an area where a person's view is obstructed." They cause us to be oblivious, out-of-it, ignorant, and uninformed.

The fact is, we all have blind spots that we need to become aware of. What's even scarier is that once you become a leader, you have even more of them. I read that every leader has at least 3-5 blind spots. King Solomon warned, "The wisdom of the prudent is to discern his way, but the folly of fools is deceiving." Proverbs 14:8 ESV

I remember the day a staff person pointed out one of my blind spots. A ball had been dropped at a ministry event and I immediately went to that "analytical mode." I wanted to find out what went wrong and how to fix it. Frustrated, the staff looked at me and said, "Randy, you always have to find someone to blame!" Wow! He was right. Still to this day, I need to guard against blaming others.

Travis Bradberry, the author of Emotional Intelligence 2.0, says that self-awareness in leaders "descends faster than a snowboarder on a black diamond. CEOs, on average, have the lowest Emotional Intelligence scores in the workplace."

Below is a good graph to explain the areas we are aware of and those we are not aware of. It is called the Johari Window.



The quadrants on the left we are aware of, but the right quadrants we are unaware. Note, it really comes down to two areas that need the most work: the hidden and the blind areas of our lives. If we want to lead more effectively, we must be more vulnerable and open about the 'hidden' areas in our lives.

This eBook identifies six common blind spots. If you are in leadership and don't think you have blind spots, the only person in the dark is YOU!



BLIND SPOT



**Making Yourself
the Exception to
the Rule**



The first blind spot we have as leaders is this: **Making ourselves the exception to the rule.** In college, I took a philosophy class on ethics. One philosopher we studied was John Stuart Mill, who taught a concept called “utilitarianism” He reasoned that what was right is what was best for the majority. So, if you took any behavior and made it universal, you’d ask yourself, “If everyone did this, would it be a good or bad thing? If it was good for all, it is right and ethical. If it wasn’t, it would be wrong and unethical.

Believe it or not, this simple test is great for every leader. Far too often leaders make themselves the exception. We all need to ask that utilitarian question – “What if everyone did what I’m doing or said what I’m saying?” If it’s not okay for others to do it, why is it okay for me to do it?

Our own pride leads us to exceptionalism (my word). We act one way but expect others to toe the line. My agenda is more important than the other person’s. And we come up with all kinds of excuses. “I was tired,” or “I’m overworked,” or “It won’t make a difference.”

When we make ourselves the exception to the rule it shows up in all the wrong places.

- I can shine that meeting, but when I’m in charge, I want everyone there.
- I can miss a deadline, but my staff better have their work done on time.
- I don’t have to submit to the standards and expectations of the organization I belong to, but everyone better follow me!

The Bible gives this promise: “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 14:11). Notice it says that I need to humble myself.

Are you exalting yourself? Are you unaware of your double standards? Do you have this blind spot? The last thing we should do is become defensive.

A better self-awareness comes from being honest and even listening to others that don’t agree with us. Ask yourself, do you make yourself the exception to the rule? How would you fill in the blank? What if everyone did _____?

BLIND SPOT

#2 **The Need to
Always Be Right**



Another blind spot for leaders is the **need to be always right**. While none of us like to admit we are wrong, it's craziness to think we can be right all the time.

Yet, some of us feel like we must be right, at least 99.9% of the time. Call it overconfidence, but usually, it's insecurity. Often we are overcompensating, trying to protect ourselves or ignoring a serious problem in our own lives.

Ironically, the need to be right at all costs diminishes our influence and effectiveness. Only as we admit our shortcomings can leadership thrive.

If you already know all the answers, you shut others out instead of inviting their engagement. You keep all the glory for yourself at the expense of developing enthusiastic teamwork.
— Marlene Chism

So, if you are a leader who doesn't think you have this blind spot of needing to be right, here are a few questions you need to ask yourself or have someone answer for you :-) ...

- How frequently do I admit I was wrong?
- Do I tend to blame others?
- When was the last time you changed your mind because of other's counsel?
- How frequently do I truly ask people for their opinions?
- How quick are you willing to say, "I'm sorry!" or "Please forgive me."
- Am I willing to admit that I might need help from others?
- Do I stop listening to people who see things a different way than I do?
- Do I easily play the victim when criticized?
- Am I a "my way or the highway" kind of person?

These questions can show you the extent of your "needing to be right." Rather than being right, be open to new information and be willing to change your mind. It's okay! You don't have to be right all the time but you do need to be willing to make things right when you've been wrong!

BLIND SPOT

#3 **Intimidating
Others**



Most leaders want to be approachable, yet many of us unknowingly put people off. In fact, if you are a leader, someone will inevitably be intimidated by you. This third blind spot is especially precarious because **intimidation ruins relationships**.

Well, guess what? Usually, others won't tell you that you are intimidating because you are intimidating. Thankfully, there have been a few people who have said that I come across as unapproachable at times. For me, that hurts. I want people to like me. I want to be the person people feel comfortable hanging around. But I have learned a few things in my own life that make me less approachable. Here are the culprits and a few things I'm doing to help!

1. An aggressive tone of voice. Often it isn't what I say, but how I say it. When I give a quick, firm response, it comes across that I don't value the person nor their ideas. The key is to slow down and listen. Eric Geiger says that we simply underestimate the power of our position. He writes, "Every word from the mouth of a leader is received with amplified impact, so leaders who bring sharp critiques to their teams must do so very carefully." If the leader thinks the rebuke is a "5," the people likely hear it as an "8." We have to watch our words. Slow down and be less assertive.

2. Not being friendly. This may sound too simple, but failing to say "hello" and smiling can give the wrong impression. People deserve our attention. I don't like to chitchat. I want to stay on task and move on. However, being in a rush never builds friendships. The more personable you are, the fewer people will be nervous around you. So I try to relax, smile more, and hang around to chat!

3. Criticism or Silence. Saying too much and not saying anything can separate you from others. I've done both. Someone said that any advice that isn't asked for comes across as criticism. Being an armchair quarterback comes way too easy for me. Criticizing nor clamming up doesn't solve anything. I have to remind myself that anyone can share what is wrong with something. Stay away from sarcasm and put-downs. It takes a good leader to encourage and make a positive difference.

4. Shutting someone down. There are times when I just think I'm right. I fail to take the time to consider another perspective. This is a problem, not only because it offends others, it discourages further contribution and sharing. Simply put, we turn people off along with their input in the future. Instead, ask for feedback. Let others know that you are okay with them disagreeing with you. Work on not being defensive.

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-Eric Geiger

BLIND SPOT

#4 Avoidance



Ever think that if you ignore something, it will go away? I have. But that rarely happens making **avoidance** an on-going blind spot for many leaders. It is an “intentional blind spot” in that we know we are doing it, but what we’re blind to is its destructive fallout. We convince ourselves that keeping the peace and ignoring conflict is better than facing the problem.

So why do we tend to avoid the tough challenges with others? Here are some of the reasons I’ve avoided confrontation:

1) My fear of being rejected. That’s right. I like everyone to like me. By the way, that’s crazy! In ministry, we can ignore crucial conversations just because we want to keep everyone happy. The moment you put your desire to liked over the need to address a problem, you’ve lost your leadership.

2) My lack of knowing how. Simply put, I didn’t know how to deal with conflict constructively. Most of us didn’t have good models of conflict resolution, nor were we trained in school.

3) My concern about their emotional reaction. Any time there is conflict, emotions run high. Frankly, I’ve seen people blow up and react in some very ungodly ways. Keeping one’s own emotions under control is essential if we are to engage in meaningful dialogue.

When we begin avoiding people and situations that make us uncomfortable, we give up a part of our leadership. Joseph LaLonde says that we’re saying, “I’m unwilling to step up and take responsibility for this situation. Instead, I’ll leave the bad situation the way it is.”

To be a good leader, we must face the problem. In Basic Training, soldiers are taught to run to the sound of gunfire rather than follow their instinct to run away. That’s a good lesson for every leader.

Be willing to have that crucial conversation. Reach out to those involved with the problem and let them know you want to talk about the situation. Make an appointment so you’ll no longer be able to avoid it! When you get together: Listen. Listen. Listen. Seek understanding and ask for clarification. Begin with thoughtful questions, not your perspective. Often, the chance to state their case and be heard will soften their hearts to hear your perspective, too.

Don’t ignore the problem. Smoothing things over only postpones the pain and often allows time for the situation to get worse.

BLIND SPOT

#5 **Inconsistencies**



As leaders, we'd like to think the problem is "out there" rather than realizing we need to change. That's the nature of blind spots. We may think we are consistent, but we're really not. Everyone sees our discrepancies even when we don't. They may not tell us to our face, but **our ability to lead them is weakened by our lack of consistency.**

So, where do you and I need to be more consistent? Here are three areas that come to my mind. They are essential for every leader and pastor.

- **The Example We Establish.** Nothing impacts culture more than our actions. Others may not hear what we say, but they always see what we do. Never ask other to do what you are not doing or willing to do yourself. When we are not consistent, others may still like us, but they won't respect us. We lose our credibility. Ask yourself: Do I keep my promises? Am I reliable? Do I do what I'm asking others to do?
- **The Emotions We Express.** Do people wonder which "you" will show up? Moods affect everyone. As a leader, you don't have the luxury of expressing your every feeling. When we are moody or unpredictable in our emotions, people become distrustful. People will stop being honest with you for fear of your response. Ask yourself: Am I able to control my emotions? Do I ever over-react and become defensive with others? Do I easily become annoyed or angry?
- **The Expectations We Envision.** As leaders, we often like the next new thing. But we can't be changing the direction of our churches every month. Put simply, inconsistency in our vision creates confusion. We need to make sure we are clearly communicating with others. If changes are needed, do it together. Ask yourself: Am I staying committed to the vision? Do I communicate it often? Am I careful when making changes?

Our leadership is compromised every time we are inconsistent. So how dependable are you? Here's a challenge. Ask those around you about your consistency. Start with your family. Ask your staff—both paid and unpaid. Talk to a few close friends. Be willing to listen and make the necessary changes to be more consistent.

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BLIND SPOT

#6 Offenses



Offenses happen in ministry. We see it in others, but rarely in ourselves. When I started out pastoring, I thought I would get along with everyone. After all, I was voted the “most friendly” in my High School graduating class (kind of girly, I know). I thought that if I shared a clear vision and faithfully ministered to others, everyone would like me and follow along -- Well, I was wrong. Over the 31 years I pastored New Hope Church there were three major crises. Changes in the church brought in resistance and resentment. Some people were not happy with me and I wasn’t happy with them. Offenses happened.

It was easy for me to justify my attitudes. I was the pastor. I was the person they should be willing to follow. But the reality was that people were offended. And so was I.

Two examples from the Bible of people who were offended were the older brother of the prodigal son and the older brothers of Joseph.

“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So, his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years, I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’” (Luke 15:28-30)

“They (Joseph’s older brothers) saw him from a distance. Before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. They said to each other, ‘Look, here comes that master dreamer! Let’s kill him, throw him into one of the cisterns, and say that a wild animal has eaten him. Then we’ll see what happens to his dreams.’” (Genesis 37:18-20)

In his book, *The Bait of Satan*, John Bevere wrote about an offense as a “bitter root that is nursed, watered, protected, fed and given attention.” The strength of the offense will continue to grow. Pride keeps you from dealing with the truth. Pride hardens your heart and dims the eyes of understanding. It keeps you from the change of heart – repentance – that will set you free. I was mistreated and misjudged; therefore, I am justified in my behavior. You believe you are innocent and falsely accused; you hold back forgiveness.”

These are some ways an offense manifests itself.

- It causes us to feel superior
- It allows us to play the victim card to garnish attention and commiseration from others
- It releases us from taking responsibility for our part
- It blinds us to our unforgiving and abrasive nature
- It reveals jealousy

It is never fun when you are mistreated or not accepted. It is hurtful and unfair, but when we let it grow out of control, we live resentful lives like the brother of the prodigal son, and it can grow into hatred like Joseph's brothers. An offense becomes as comfortable as an old pair of fluffy slippers. We rehash the past, inserting ourselves as the victim.

Someone gave me advice. Pray that God will allow you to have thick skin and a soft heart and keep from having thin skin and a hard heart!

Pray that God will allow you to have **thick skin and a soft heart** and keep from having thin skin and a hard heart.

BLIND SPOTS:

**WHAT
NOW?**



We need to move from being unaware to being self-aware. The more self-awareness we develop, the better our leadership and relations will be. As we are self-aware, we are more able to make needed changes in our actions and reactions.

Scott Couchenour defines self-awareness this way:

Self-awareness is the capacity to see your interactions from a bird's eye view. It's how an individual consciously knows and understands their own character, feelings, motives, and desires. When you have this capacity, you can understand how your emotions are impacted by circumstances. The more self-aware you are, the quicker you are able to see what's going on and regulate.

So, what can help us open our eyes to those sightless shortcomings? Here are a few things we can do.

1. Seek God's wisdom. The Bible says that if anyone lacks wisdom, we should ask God for it (James 1:5-6). Spend time seeking God's perspective on your life. Ask Him to give you new insight and understanding in the areas you are not aware of. Ask Him to give you a softer heart and the courage to face the blind spots in your life.
2. Take an assessment. It is essential that you take steps to get to know yourself better. I recommend you take or re-take a good personality inventory. I am trained to administer the *Talent Insights* assessment. It not only analyzes HOW we do things but WHY we do them. You can contact me to take this evaluation and we will explore your unique personality together.
3. Accept your humanity. Being more aware of any blind spot requires humility. It means listening more than talking. It means taking the log out of your own eye before trying to take the speck of sawdust out of someone else's eye (Matthew 7:5). We are not perfect. Each of us has deficiencies and areas that need work. In other words, accept and anticipate your blind spots. It's okay. Relax. We are more likely to see those deficits when we take our hands away from our eyes and look! Pretending they don't exist doesn't affect reality—we need to acknowledge them.

4. Ask your friends for input. Give permission to others to share some areas of improvement. One simple question to ask is “What do you think I could do better? I have found it easier to get constructive feedback from those I know care and support me.
5. Listen to your critics. Often our critics tell us what our friends won’t. Rather than becoming defensive, listen. Be careful not to minimize feedback. We need to slow down and fully listen to someone coming with a concern. Listening not only builds trust, but also gives us insight into others and ourselves. James 1:19 says we are to be “quick to listen and slow to speak.”
6. Look at the things that bother you. Sometimes the very thing we criticize in others is the exact area the Holy Spirit wants to work on in our own life. Our shortcomings can look pretty ugly on someone else.
7. Be willing to change. It’s weird how we assume once we are adults or have completed our education we have somehow matured to the point of completion. When you become aware of a blind spot, make it your goal to change. It requires humility and dependence on God to help us change, but our leadership will be better for it.

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