

# Solutions

FOR PEOPLE IN THE WORKPLACE

## "The Importance of Being Honest with Yourself"

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"Nothing is easier than self-deceit.

For what each man wishes, that he also believes to be true." ~ Demosthenes 384-322 BC



We often hear people say about someone else "He's lying to himself!" as if this is an unusual happening when in reality, most of us do it quite frequently. Whether it's believing we're not driving that fast, that we really couldn't have eaten that many cookies, that we're not late for work that often, that very few politicians lie, that the economy isn't that bad, we're all susceptible to lying to ourselves and probably do it every day in some form or another.

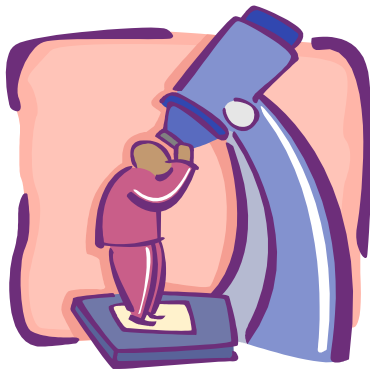
Being honest and objective takes work and can be quite uncomfortable, which is probably why we can find ourselves veering off course at times. We may be faced with evidence that tells us something is false, but the strength of our prejudices, desires, and biases work against us, leading us to believe something is true after all. This can lead to our developing a habit on not really evaluating effectively how we look at ourselves, others, and the world in general. We might think it's not such a big deal, but just looking at the examples above we can see there can be serious consequences down the road if we persist in deceiving ourselves. These consequences may be primarily to us, but also impact on others, sometimes with devastating results.

A friend of mine often said "If I'm the only one I'm talking to, then I'm always right!" He was talking about what happens when we become a closed system with no outside feedback or perspective. This can make it difficult to be truly honest with ourselves and make us vulnerable to deceiving ourselves. But are outside views always helpful? Often they come with other people's baggage and skewed perspective of the world. We have a tendency to gravitate toward people who reinforce our view of the world, who prove us right. So how do we find perspectives that are helpful and may encourage us to think critically and analytically? This is important because doing that will help us function more effectively in the circumstances we find ourselves at any particular moment. The reality is while we may not be able to change those circumstances, we can change the way we respond to them.



So, finding objective, honest input can come from many different sources. You might decide to read different books and/or articles about the particular subject or issue you are concerned about. For instance, if you are considering a job change,

you might look for books or articles about career changes, self assessment, how to interview, what are employers seeking? Or maybe you are exploring relationship issues. Those writer's will probably use language in many different ways to communicate their ideas, helping you to become clearer. They also have no personal agenda to take you in a particular direction that might be advantageous to them.



You might (and probably would) seek counsel from your friends. We would assume that they have our best interests at heart. But they have their own biases, issues, and their own definition of who they think you are. They will also be more likely to view the world the same way you do and to simply reinforce whatever it is you are already saying. Look for those people you feel will be honest with you, who are often able to see several sides of each issue. This could be a friend, acquaintance, mentor, therapist, or counselor. In fact, this is where your EAP can be an excellent resource. An EAP counselor's role is to listen to you, rephrase and clarify what they hear you saying, then offer feedback and a

variety of options and resource on how to approach you issue.

We've all heard the phrase "Seeing is believing" to indicate that we must see something for ourselves to believe that it is true, that we'll believe only our own eyes. But there is another way to look at this saying and that is "Believing is seeing". That is to say, that if I expect to see something I will be looking at everything through that filter and so will interpret what I see with that expectation.

We often go through the world viewing it with unchallenged assumptions such as everyone views the world the same way we do, and interpreting others behaviors based on what it would mean if we behaved that way, assuming they are just like us. Meeting someone for the first time and interpreting their silence as arrogance, leads us to interpret subsequent behaviors in that light. It may be that if we probe further, we may discover that the individual is simply shy and reserved. However, once we begin to treat someone as if they are arrogant, it sets in motion a reaction on their part which may reinforce our original belief, especially since we are looking for verification. If we are not aware of our bias and assumption, we can be making choices and decisions based on faulty information. This is going to get in the way of self honesty.

If we believe, without self examination or questioning, that a path that we are going to take is the best and only one to take, we may be setting ourselves up for problems down the road and missing opportunities for different experiences. Working on self honesty opens the door for discovering new aspects of and strengths about ourselves we might otherwise overlook. Questioning and looking for alternative views leads us to broaden who we are.



We've been talking about self honesty and how important it is for us to improve our quality of life and decrease problems. How can self honesty improve communication with other people?

We've talked about being aware of our biases and assumptions, which color our perceptions both in hearing and seeing, they in essence act as a filter through which we view the world and communicate with the world. Asking questions and testing the validity of those biases and assumptions which I know I carry into every situation, will help me to hear what the other person is trying to say to me. It also decreases the possibility of hearing what I expect, regardless of what the other person is actually saying. In addition, it allows me to evaluate what it is that I am communicating to them, hopefully before it comes out of my mouth, and to be sure that it is accurately conveying my ideas. Words are very powerful, so that if I say that I "have" to do something, if I evaluate it honestly, I will probably find that I "want" to do it for a variety of reasons. For instance, if I say I "have" to take my child to a sports practice, that's probably not accurate. I more than likely "want" take them because I feel it's a good thing for them to do, something they enjoy and makes them happy. I may be tired and feel rushed, but if I think it through and see it as my choice, that's more accurate and can decrease my feelings of frustration and/or resentment.

Because it is so easy to not hear our self conversation, it is best to assume that we may not have heard or seen a situation accurately because we are dealing with someone else to whom language can have a very different meaning. If you want to hear what people are saying, be very careful not to jump to conclusions. Here is where asking questions and testing things out can reap much improved communication with others. It decreases conflict due to misunderstanding and allows us to see a variety of perspectives that opens up possibilities for further communication. It takes more time and effort, but in the long run pays off.

Self honesty benefits us all as individuals, allows us to see ourselves and the world more clearly and therefore to interact with others more effectively. Ultimately, it can decrease stress by clarifying communications when we are in apparent conflict with others.

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