Building And Maintaining Self Awareness

Self awareness is one of the most important things any of us can develop. Being and remaining self aware helps you to not only live your life peacefully and have a fairly smoother time as you go about your day, it also enhances your overall experience of life.

In this busy world, where we are almost always involved in hectic activities, lacking self awareness can cause quite some damage in our lives, as well as other people’s lives.

In this brief guide, take a deeper look at self awareness and how you can build and maintain it in the long term, to increase your opportunities for peace and happiness.

What is Self Awareness And Why is it Important?

Self awareness is the ability to see ourselves clearly and to understand who we are, how others see us and how we fit into the world.

Being self aware means you have knowledge about yourself, a good understanding of the perception others have of you and how it all plays out in your life, towards your purpose.

It includes knowing you have a particular strength or weakness to which other people, who know you well, can attest.

For example, if you are a short-tempered person and know that you struggle to remain composed or self-controlled when you are angered, and your family members or close friends also know that, then you are, to a certain extent, self aware.

Being fully self aware paves the way for change, if any of your characteristics are self-destructive. It also embraces and maintains those attributes that other people appreciate about you.

Self awareness involves observing your entire self, understanding it and willingly aligning it with what you hold to be good, true and valuable, in life.

How Self Awareness Works

Self awareness is aimed at helping an individual know themselves better.
Here, you intentionally direct your attention to your thoughts, feelings, sensations, beliefs and actions as a unique person and get to discover how you work.

At times, we might find ourselves saying, “Surely, I did not just say that!” or “I can’t believe I just did that”.

Self awareness helps us avoid such situations, where we could regret words or actions. Instead, we can be much more aware of how we think, feel and act when we are alone, as well as when we are around other people.

**Self awareness is like a journey to your true self**

It is about exploring your real authentic self and realizing who you actually are. To achieve this, you first need to observe yourself from a distance.

*Just take this as a warning. Know that there’s always a price for not being yourself.* -Benilde Little

This might seem impossible, yet it is simple and achievable when put into regular practice.

Just like you would observe another from a distance, you can intentionally choose to remain aware of how you think, feel and behave without judging, forming opinions or interfering with the natural flow of your life.

**This is where it all begins**

When you observe yourself responding to various situations, you get to slowly gain an understanding of yourself. Finding yourself in those same situations more often and taking note of how you act and react, you see yourself better.

After a long period of self-observation, you can then evaluate what you have discovered and see if it is what you would want to be known for.
Since we all have our strengths and weaknesses, you can then enhance those traits or personal attributes you love about yourself and would like to maintain and minimize negative ones you would like to adjust.
After evaluating and choosing, you can move towards implementation, where you now seek to change what you don’t like or cement into your life what you do like.

This is the challenging part of self awareness because it often involves going against the grain of habits. You consciously alter what you are automatically used to doing, subconsciously.

In this phase, you get a lot of opposition from your natural tendencies and often fail to make a permanent change in your belief system, thought process, emotional aspect and even in your actions, unless you are consistent and firm.

Sometimes you do it well, other times you go back to your old ways, yet by sticking to your targets and pushing through the opposition, you eventually get to evolve towards being who you have always wanted to become.

That is the gist of self awareness and how it works in self improvement.

**How Do You Know When You're Being Self Aware?**

It is common for many of us to believe that we are less self aware than in actuality. This stems from the false premise that self awareness is this supernatural power that only intelligent, brilliant and smart people like Einstein, have mastered.

The truth, however, is quite the contrary.

Here are some of the signs that you are self aware:

**You have limits**

When you are self aware, you often have boundaries that you don’t allow anyone to go beyond. Since we all can’t agree on everything, it is obvious that we are often going to differ in thought with others.
Having the courage to recognize and accept that, therefore drawing the line on some things, shows you are self aware.

Also, having a limit on what you will tolerate from people shows a certain level of self awareness.

At the center of your being you have the answer; you know who you are and you know what you want.

— Lao Tzu

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If you make time to think about the negative things that you will not accept from others and determine how much is too much for you, you can then discover your limits and set a boundary which, when crossed, might require you to take some serious steps for protecting yourself.

You are emotionally stable

Self aware people have good control over unhealthy emotional overflow.

They understand that if they let their emotions run completely wild, they might damage themselves or others. This understanding gives them the chance to take time before responding to any situation, regardless of how heated up they are.

If you are self aware, you will find that you can remain calm or step away for a while until you are ready to respond in a more considered way.

You are not afraid to express yourself as you feel fit

Self aware people often have an easy time expressing their real feelings about various topics in life without holding themselves back for fear of being judged or perceived wrongly.

They have understood themselves and have figured out what works for them so they don’t fear speaking out. If how you express yourself is often considered authentic, unique and a bit different from others, chances are you are highly self aware.

If what makes your life fairly smooth is that you have an ability to speak out, no matter how differently your opinion might come across to others, then you are self aware.

You are intuitive and follow your gut instincts

It is said that your intuitions can tell you more than what a watchman from a high tower can.
Most people who are self aware are in tune with their intuitions and can easily tell when something is not right.

**You are at peace with yourself**

This doesn’t mean that you are perfect and always living in a zen like state.

It means that you have learned about your strengths and weaknesses and have accepted them.
While you are working on your weaknesses, don’t beat yourself down when you make occasional mistakes.

Everyone has their shortcomings and learning to live with them as you better yourself in those areas (which is a process), is a sign of self awareness.

**What is Not Self Awareness, Yet Often Confused With it**

Self awareness is often mistaken for mindfulness or self-consciousness or emotional intelligence or even self-understanding.

Let’s take a look at some of them and how they differ from self awareness.

While self awareness is the ability to see yourself clearly, understand who you are, how others see you and how you fit into the world, mindfulness is the quality of being aware of the present moment.

*Mindfulness plays a big role in self awareness* as it helps with observing oneself and it reveals you to yourself so that you know yourself better.

Self-consciousness is a state of extreme self awareness that often leads to feeling anxious, nervous, overwhelmed and stressed. Although it is temporary, only lasting as long as you feel you are in the spotlight, it can throw you off balance and make you appear awkward or confused.

*Go find yourself first so you can also find me. -Rumi*

Emotional intelligence is the ability to understand, regulate and respond to your emotions as well as other people’s emotions. Self awareness, along with empathy, self-regulation, social skills and motivation, are among the critical components of emotional intelligence.

Sentience is the capacity to perceive and feel things. It is how deeply aware a person is of their senses and those of others.

Self-understanding is the awareness of and the ability to gain knowledge of and understand your characteristics such as your norms, ideals, values and future plans.

All these areas are in one way or the other related to awareness or self awareness.
Levels And Types of Self Awareness

There are 2 main types of self awareness:

Public or external self awareness

This is the type of self awareness that is linked to you becoming aware of how you come across to other people. When you are in front of a large group of people and you are the one who everyone is looking at as you speak or do something, you tend to follow what is socially accepted as good behavior or way of carrying yourself.

Private or internal self awareness

This is the type that is associated with becoming aware of some aspect of you that you didn’t know of before, when you are alone. This includes how you react to various situations. For example, when you see your crush, being aware of how the “love butterflies”, anxiety and shyness overcome you, is a form of private self awareness.
When it comes to levels of self awareness, there are 5 main levels that people undergo from when they are children to when they are mature. These levels are:

**Level 0. Confusion**

This is the level where you have no awareness of yourself at all. Here, you have no perception of who you are and you appear to be absent-minded of what is happening in and around you. In this level, when you look yourself in the mirror, the reflection you see inside the mirror is perceived as another person looking at you.
**Level 1. Differentiation**

This is where the basic form of self awareness comes into play. You are now able to differentiate what you see in a mirror from the actual objects in your environment. You can also make out the relationship of the movements you make with the movements you see in your reflection.

**Level 2. Situation**

This is the level where you begin to gain some clarity. When you look in a mirror, you are now not able to differentiate yourself from the reflection in the mirror, yet also aware of what you feel within yourself when you see your reflection.

**Level 3. Identification**

This is another step forward from the previous level. Here, you now recognize that your reflection is you. You get to create a relation and link between you and what you see in the mirror. You gain recognition that you and your reflection point to the same person. If you are looking at a mirror and you have a sticker on your forehead, you will see the reflection with the sticker too. When you remove it from your forehead, you also see the same happening in your reflection, in real-time.

**Level 4. Permanence**

This is the level where you can identify yourself from the past. You go beyond the mirror experience which is happening live and now you can make relations of yourself from past photos and videos. You get to establish and identify yourself even when in a different environment and wearing different clothes than what you have at a given time.

**Level 5. “Meta” self awareness or self-consciousness**

This level now goes past the self in the first person which is “me”, to the third person. This involves becoming aware of how you present yourself to other people and how they perceive and value you. This is where you even get to experience feelings of pride or shame based on you evaluate how others perceive you.
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As you become more clear about who you really are, you'll be better able to decide what is best for you – the first time around.

–Oprah Winfrey

On top of that, there is also the self awareness wheel, which is commonly used in self-improvement techniques like mindfulness, basic education and counselling, for helping people better understand the situations they are in and how best to approach them.

There are different versions of the wheel based on various sources. The most common one says that self awareness is based on:
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- What you think
- What you feel
- What you do
- What you want
- What you sense

Benefits of Self Awareness

**Increases your level of productivity**

Self awareness allows you to understand the things that hold you back from being as productive as you desire. By observing yourself over a long period and determining the limitations you have and why you have them, you can move beyond them, go the extra mile and work longer and better than you have been doing in the past.

For example, if you fail to be more productive because you often get distracted by other things when you are working, when you become self aware, you can easily rectify that and work towards becoming much more focused.

**Helps you make better decisions**

When you don’t have full control of your words, thoughts, feelings, or actions, it is possible to frequently make bad decisions based on these aspects. However, when you become self aware, you gain control over your thoughts and feelings, which helps you have clarity as you think and make decisions that will have long-term benefits as opposed to temporary satisfaction that is influenced by the emotions you are having in the moment.

For instance, if you are faced with the situation where you have to make up your mind on whether to continue with a relationship with a cheating partner and you have strong feelings for them, self awareness helps you understand clearly if it is worth forgiving the partner or not based on various factors and gives you the chance to make your decision based on good reasoning, rather than the feelings you have for the person at that particular time.
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**Improves your interactions and relations with people**

This applies to both friendship and romantic relationships. When you are self aware, it becomes easy for you to regulate your emotions and the actions you take on other people, especially the actions inspired by overwhelmed emotions.

*When you are self aware, it becomes more easy for you to regulate your emotions and actions.*

For example, if you are in a situation where you disagree with your friends or they do something you find offensive, you are much more able to take your time to respond better which then avoids worsening the situation and preserves the friendship.

In the case of relationships, self awareness helps to bring clarity to the things you seriously want and require from your partner and clearly express yourself about them so that they know what’s important to you in a relationship from the start. Moreover, it helps us see things from our partners’ perspectives and be more open-minded.

**Improves our self-esteem**

As opposed to how we get treated by others which largely contributes to our level of self-esteem, self awareness allows us to understand our beliefs as well as strengths and weaknesses well, which then helps bring peace and coherence to our lives. Even with the weaknesses we have, we still remain happy about ourselves as we work towards improving the areas in which we fall short.

**Improves your skills**

Having a good understanding of yourself allows you to become aware of exactly where you stand in terms of a particular skill that you are interested in mastering or improving and how much effort you need to put in, to become as well versed with it as you desire.

**Brings fulfillment in your life**

Self awareness allows you to see yourself as the unique individual that you are. It helps you understand the aspects of your life you have been battling to mimic people you admire. With that awareness, you can make better choices that best fit your own perspective of life, beliefs and values. This brings a greater sense of satisfaction and fulfillment.
If you have been trying to be as social as the popular person in school or at work, self awareness helps you get comfortable with the person you are. If you are quiet, it helps you embrace the quietness and the tranquility and comfort it brings you. This helps you appreciate yourself rather than trying to change in order to appeal to a certain group of people.

**Pitfalls of Self Awareness**

The major pitfall that many people tend to experience when they work towards becoming self aware is being too self aware, increasing their self-consciousness.
This then leads to anxiety, depression, stress and confusion.

If you judge yourself too harshly and heavily focus on your weaknesses and how poorly you are making the changes you desire to see in your life, you can easily get overwhelmed and feel like you are just not good enough.

People who become overly aware of their weaknesses and feel a burden of needing to make fast improvements to the areas they are weak in, fall victim to the same fate.

Moderation, self-acceptance and patience help to avoid this pitfall.

**How to Build And Maintain Self Awareness**

Here are some ways to build and maintain your self awareness:

**Practice Mindfulness**

Mindfulness is the quality of remaining in the present moment. When you can shut out all the thoughts of the past and the worries of the future and simply be there in the present moment and aware of what is happening in and around you, you are said to be mindful.

Mindfulness makes a good ingredient for self awareness as it helps you understand how your thoughts, sensations and feelings work, which is an essential aspect of yourself.

*Study yourself. Become your own mentor and best friend.* -Mohadesa Najumi

People who get involved in mindfulness usually begin with mindfulness meditation which helps ground them in the present moment during their meditation sessions.

From there, they can work with other mindfulness practices such as mindful walking, mindful talking, mindful eating and note-taking, outside of their sessions, to help them become even more mindful.
**Do Meditation**

Meditation is a great practice to help you gain self awareness. It aims to get you into a meditative state where you feel relaxed yet wakeful. This paves the way for proper observation of your thoughts, feelings and actions.

Most meditation styles including mindfulness meditation and focused attention meditation, using breathing as an anchor. By focusing on inhalation and exhalation, you get to be in the present moment and have fewer thoughts that distract you.
The need to prove who you are will vanish once you know who you are.

-Danielle Pierre

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Thoughts often get in the way because they direct our attention to other things in our lives which in turn keep us away from becoming fully self aware and we end up losing that moment-to-moment awareness.

When you meditate frequently, it becomes easier to notice when you get lost in thought and you get to direct your focus back to your breathing for increased awareness.
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**Look for feedback**

This is a great way to know how others view you as a person, friend, employee, colleague, partner or sibling. It is always good to ask people you trust and you know care for you as well as those you are comfortable with.

Whether it is at home, work, school or any other place you frequently visit, always make an effort of getting feedback from people and create an environment where they can feel free to tell you what they feel are your strengths and weaknesses.

This helps to open up areas in your life you didn’t know about, that others see in you, and be able to work on them as well.

**Keep a personal journal**

Having a journal where you record the things you learn about yourself, both good and bad, goes a long way in enhancing your self awareness.

Writing about how your day was or a certain aspect of your life like character, thoughts or feelings, in your diary over an extended period, allows you to see yourself well and know how you think, act and respond to different life scenarios.

*How can you get through to yourself?* - Alexandra Katehakis

Moreover, documenting your plans and goals and following up with them until you are done helps you determine if it’s a particular personality trait that helps you or if it is just plain luck.

**Take self awareness tests**

Self awareness tests often take into account the key factors of self awareness and measure you on them so that they can determine how self aware you are.

Some of the recommended tests that test your private and public self awareness include the Insight Quiz by Tasha Eurich and the Situational Self-Awareness Scale (SSAS).

You can also use mindfulness tests and scales to help measure your level of mindfulness at a given time which also contributes to helping you increase self awareness, in the long run.
Get involved in fun activities for self awareness building

Activities like writing letters about your thoughts, feelings, achievements, failures and regrets help you better identify the areas that you might want to work on.

Also, you can consider writing a mock-up biography and eulogy for yourself, being as detailed as possible so you get a real sense of what people might remember you for.

Self awareness games with friends, where you tell each other what the greatest strengths as well as weaknesses of each person (in a positive, constructive and uplifting way). Having other people vote on whether it is true or not, can also give you deeper insights about yourself.

Become a good listener

Aim to take your time to listen keenly to your friends and family as they talk to you. Keep your phone away when you are speaking to them and give them your full attention.

Be empathetic, loving and kind to them as they speak. This allows you to build your listening skills and provides the opportunity to listen better to your self-talk and thoughts in a kind and loving way too.
If I ever leave this place - I'll make sure I'm better HERE, first!

-Markus Zusak

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Reflection

Reflection helps you understand situations well and become more self aware.

Do this in your room or a park or even take a walk in the woods, anywhere in nature, as long as it’s a place that is quiet and with few to no people who might interfere with your reflection session.
During this time, you can look at the challenges facing you and come up with solutions or you can reflect on the past week and what you plan for the coming week. You can also think about a specific issue bothering you in-depth or even simply be aware of what is happening around you and think about it.

Reflection is all about being by yourself and trying to understand an area of your life better.

**Create mental space for yourself**

This involves taking any issues or various aspects of your life and keeping them at a mental distance, viewing them from a third person’s perspective.

*You'll never know who you are unless you shed who you pretend to be.* -Vironika Tugaleva

It is like if someone came to you for advice about that specific area you are reflecting on. What would you advise them to do? Now use the same concept and apply it to your life like you are explaining things to yourself and advising yourself what the best steps are to take next.

If you try this on an issue that is getting on your nerves and you are not able to manage it well because of a heightened emotional state, you can give yourself some time until you are more emotionally steady and then do it again.

**Conclusion**

In summary, self awareness is pretty much about getting to know yourself. By building and maintaining your self awareness, you find peace, happiness and fulfillment in who you are as a person.

Becoming self aware is not a walk in the park. It requires time, patience, being honest with yourself, commitment, readiness and dedication, plus the willingness to experience challenges for making positive changes in your life.

If you take it seriously and make an effort of working on it every day, in one way or the other, through using some of the methods outlined above, you will be well on your way to a better you and any temporary pain or sacrifice will eventually pay off.
David Oscar is a huge meditation and mindfulness enthusiast.

David is also a mental health researcher and he’s the editor of (ad) Improve Your Brain Power (IYBP), a website that shares the legitimate and effective ways to improve the power and function of the brain.
Everything that irritates us about others, can lead us to an understanding of ourselves.

-Carl Gustav Jung

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At the center of your being you have the answer; you know who you are and you know what you want.

-Lao Tzu
It takes courage...to endure the sharp pains of self discovery rather than choose to take the dull pain of unconsciousness that would last the rest of our lives.

-Marianne Williamson

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You've always been what you are. That's not new. What you'll get used to, is knowing it!

-Cassandra Clare

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As you become more clear about who you really are, you'll be better able to decide what is best for you – the first time around.

-Oprah Winfrey

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The closer you come to knowing that you alone create the world of your experience, the more vital it becomes for you to discover just who is doing the creating.

-Eric Micha'el Leventhal
The need to prove who you are will vanish once you know who you are.

-Danielle Pierre

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