

Get Real

By Shannon Warren for the July 2, 2018 edition of *The Journal Record*

Published in 1989, a treasured copy of a favorite business guide still resides on many bookshelves today. Written by Dr. Stephen Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* sold over 25 million copies and his strategies have been implemented by executives worldwide. Nuggets of Covey's wisdom have almost become truisms. Chapters entitled *Think Win-Win* and *Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood* remain steadfastly part of today's business vernacular.

Dr. Covey believed that self awareness was crucial, stating that it is "...our capacity to stand apart from ourselves and examine our thinking, our motives, our history, our scripts, our actions and our habits and tendencies."

He's right. And, Dr. Tasha Eurich, a specialist in organization psychology and *New York Times* bestselling author, tends to agree. Her findings, published in the January 4, 2018, *Harvard Business Review*, indicated that self-awareness leads to better decision-making, stronger relationships and more effective communications. From my vantage point, those skills tend to enhance trustworthiness, too.

However, her research has turned up some detours along the path toward self-awareness. Eurich has discovered that most of us *believe* that we are self-aware, but only about 10% to 15% of those studied actually fit that criteria. In fact, the more senior the leader, the more off-base they wandered.

It seems that we're asking the wrong questions. Eurich suggests that, instead of asking "why" questions, we should substituting "what" questions. For example, "What can we do to speed up the project next time?"

By changing our approach, we stay more objective and future-focused, rather than playing blame games, unproductive ruminating or rationalization.

Another problem is overcoming our biases. Everyone has them. We're driven by a pre-disposition to put things in perspective based on our own, limited experiences or expectations. We don't enjoy seeking out different opinions or facts that draw us out of our comfort zones. We don't want to engage in conversations that may contradict our positions.

Bias poses great risks. Without inviting candid, objective data and even disagreeable viewpoints, we cannot effectively test our ideas, discover truth or explore alternatives. Bias fosters over-confidence and disconnects us from the people around us. It diminishes our capacity to be open, sincere and straightforward.

As Covey put it: "Self-awareness involves deep personal honesty. It comes from asking and answering hard questions."

Right again.

Shannon Warren is Founder of www.okethics.org with monthly forums in OKC and Tulsa.