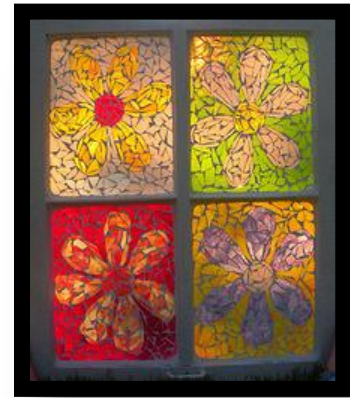


Tapping into Hidden Potential

By Shelley A.W. Roy

How do you treat people? Do you treat them as who they have been in the past? Do you treat them as who they are right now? Or do you treat them as the people they can become? How you treat others reflects back to you through their actions. When you treat them based on who they have been in the past, you keep the past patterns of your relationships alive. Those people remain stuck in the past, unable to grow and move forward. When you treat them as who they are right now, you often judge their actions in light of the persons you would like them to be, leaving a trail of shame, blame and regret. However, when you treat others as the people they can become you tap the potential hidden within them and provide them with an avenue to become their highest selves.



Johari's Window, a model that is used to describe the process of human interactions, was developed by Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham, and it provides a wonderful frame for shifting the focus from common knowledge about people to their hidden potential. The model looks at human interactions as a window divided into four panes. The first pane (top left) includes everything that you know about yourself that others also know about you - common knowledge. The second (top right) contains things that you don't know about yourself that others know about you - scotomas. The third (bottom left) represents what you know about yourself that you do not share with others - secrets. The last pane (bottom right) reflects what you don't know about yourself and others don't know about you – hidden potential. With each relationship these panes shift, and over time more information moves toward common knowledge.

When you think of communication in this way, you can build trust with others by disclosing information about yourself. Often we do this naturally when meeting someone for the first time. We ask their name and their occupation, and we ask for information about their family and background. Over time we move more and more information from the secrets box into the common knowledge box.

You can also learn about yourself and come to terms with personal issues through feedback from others. When I present a seminar, at the end of the day I review the feedback sheets completed by participants. I use this as an opportunity to examine my scotomas, my blind spots. As I read what participants have written, I pay attention to things I did that I was unaware of during the session. The next time I present I try to enhance those actions that helped the learning process and decrease those that interfered with the learning process. When I first started presenting, I was unaware that I can talk very rapidly when I get excited about an idea. Through examining and being aware of this blind spot, I have now learned to slow down. Participant feedback helps me move information out of the scotoma box and into the common knowledge box.

Much of my work centers on helping individuals self-evaluate. Each time I ask participants to do an exercise where they are digging deep into their secrets box, I remind them that they are responsible for protecting themselves and deciding what to share. I never ask someone to share a *secret* unless the person feels it is in his or her best interest. I do however; ask them to share what they learned about

themselves or what the process was like from their perspective. I believe you have the right to protect yourself and those you love. When a secret no longer is healthy to hang on to, it may be time to find a safe setting in which you can bring it out of the secrets box and move it into the common knowledge box.

As a manager, a teacher and a coach the quadrant that most interest me is the fourth quadrant, hidden potential. When you are in an environment where you trust others and know that they genuinely care about you, you feel safe and are more likely to take risks. In a trusting environment, when you are presented with new situations and challenges you often discover within yourself skills and abilities that until that moment were hidden. The person leading the group and those around you are intentionally open to seeing the hidden potential within you so you are willing to reach deep within to discover your hidden gifts. It's as if together you are opening a gift all wrapped in whom you have been and who you are and finding inside a brand new you. Approaching people with a sense of discovery creates relationships that are growing and evolving based on trust. When you approach people in this way, they begin to act in concert with a completely new set of values. They become the person they truly want to be.