



Vistage EL January 2025 Meeting

Theme: Self-Awareness

Introduction: You Can't Lead Others Until You Lead Yourself

At its core, leadership starts with self-leadership. And that means being honest about how we think, how we present ourselves, and how we impact the people around us. Self-awareness is the discipline of noticing your thoughts, habits, patterns, and blind spots—and then making conscious decisions about what to do with that insight.

If we want to be effective—as leaders, parents, partners, colleagues—we need to start with ourselves. This isn't about perfection or overanalyzing. It's about learning how to observe our thinking so we can be intentional in how we lead, communicate, and make decisions. This work is internal—but the ripple effect is huge.

Why This Matters

We've all seen talented people self-sabotage. Smart, capable professionals lose credibility not because they lack knowledge, but because they lack awareness of how they come across. The opposite is also true—when you know who you are, how you think, and how others experience you, everything changes.

Self-awareness puts you in the driver's seat of your leadership. It allows you to respond instead of react, to speak with clarity, and to build trust without trying so hard. It helps you identify and shift unproductive thought patterns before they take a toll on your results, relationships, or health.

How Self-Awareness Impacts Your Career and Personal Life

Professionally, self-awareness:

- Builds credibility—people trust leaders who are grounded and consistent.

- Improves communication — when you're aware of your tone, language, and delivery, you can tailor your message more effectively.
- Increases promotability — emotionally intelligent, self-aware leaders are more likely to be chosen for senior roles.
- Enhances decision-making — clear thinking leads to better, faster, more strategic choices.
- Reduces burnout — by catching early signs of stress, overthinking, or overload, you can course-correct before hitting a wall.

Personally, self-awareness:

- Strengthens relationships — understanding your emotional triggers helps you engage more openly and compassionately.
- Improves boundaries — when you're clear on your values and limits, you stop overcommitting or tolerating what drains you.
- Deepens fulfillment — living in alignment with what matters to you brings a sense of purpose and peace.
- Reduces drama — when you stop reacting from ego, resentment, or fear, your life gets quieter, simpler, and more focused.

Key Themes: The Patterns That Drive the Work

I. Your Thoughts Are Creating Your Outcomes

Everything starts in the mind. The way you think about yourself, others, your team, and your challenges—that thinking becomes the foundation for your choices, your tone, your energy, and ultimately, your outcomes. If you're overwhelmed, disconnected, or stressed, chances are your thoughts are contributing to it. Once you recognize that, you can take ownership and shift the mental story.

This is not about being a "positive thinker." It's about learning how to think **powerfully and productively**, especially in moments when your default patterns would normally hijack your presence or your performance.

II. Internal and External Self-Awareness Are Not the Same

Many people assume that if they know themselves well, they're also aware of how they come across to others. That's a mistake. You can be deeply reflective and still be unaware of the way you affect others. Or you can be socially aware but disconnected from your inner world.

Internal self-awareness is your ability to understand your values, triggers, habits, and motivations.

External self-awareness is knowing how your behavior impacts others — how you're perceived, how your presence lands, and how your words are interpreted.

Strong leadership requires both.

III. Experience Doesn't Equal Self-Awareness

The more experienced or powerful we become, the more likely we are to assume we already know ourselves — or, worse, stop seeking feedback. This creates blind spots, arrogance, or disconnection.

True self-awareness is a **practice**, not a status. It requires humility, curiosity, and the willingness to keep learning — even when you're already good at what you do.

IV. Blind Spots Are the Biggest Risk for Leaders

A blind spot is anything you're doing (or not doing) that impacts others negatively — but you're unaware of it. The danger is that these blind spots undermine your influence, your reputation, and your ability to connect with others — without you even realizing it.

Without regular feedback, reflection, and internal check-ins, blind spots go unchecked. They show up in communication breakdowns, team tension, or lost opportunities — and often feel like "mysteries" until we realize we were the missing link all along.

V. Better Questions Lead to Better Awareness

Most people default to asking themselves "why" questions:

- "Why did I blow up?"
- "Why can't I get it together?"
- "Why do I feel stuck?"

The problem with "why" is that it often leads to overthinking, shame, blame, or circular logic. A more powerful approach is to ask "what":

- “What triggered me?”
- “What outcome do I want right now?”
- “What thought can move me forward?”

“What” questions are practical, grounded, and action-oriented. They shift you out of drama and into ownership.

VI. Self-Awareness Is About Ownership, Not Overanalysis

This isn’t therapy. It’s not about digging through your past or trying to fix yourself. It’s about learning to pause and ask, “What’s going on inside me right now — and is it helping or hurting?”

It’s about **responding**, not reacting. About choosing who you want to be — especially when pressure is high, emotions are strong, or clarity is low.

Major Takeaways: What to Remember and Apply

1. Thought is the Origin of Action

Every single thing we say or do starts in the mind. That means our outcomes—the way we lead, the way we react, and the results we produce—all begin with what we’re thinking, whether we’re aware of it or not.

If I’m thinking, “This is going to be a disaster,” I’m going to tense up, communicate poorly, and create tension in the room—even before anything happens. On the other hand, if I approach the same situation thinking, “I’m here to add value and figure things out,” I show up more grounded, focused, and present. Same situation, different thought, radically different outcome.

Why this matters:

To achieve better results, you must go upstream — not to the action itself, but to the thought behind it. Everything flows from there.

2. Self-Awareness Builds Credibility

Leaders don’t need to be perfect — but they do need to be real. People can tell when you’re self-aware and when you’re not. If you show up unaware of your own blind spots, defensive habits, or communication style, people will feel disconnected, confused, or wary — even if you have good intentions.

But when you’re clear about who you are, how you think, and how you come across, people trust you more. They know what to expect. They feel seen. You demonstrate consistency and maturity, which builds real leadership credibility — not just based on what you say, but also on how you carry yourself.

Why this matters:

Self-aware leaders build environments of clarity and trust — and those are the kinds of environments where people actually thrive. Your reputation depends less on your ideas and more on how you make others feel. That starts with you knowing yourself.

3. Reactivity Creates Noise. Awareness Creates Signal.

When we’re stressed or triggered, we often react quickly — we interrupt, jump to conclusions, get defensive, or shut down. That noise — the emotional static — can derail conversations, damage trust, and confuse your team. It also wastes time and energy.

Self-awareness helps you “hear” that inner noise before it spills out. You catch yourself thinking, “This isn’t about them — this is about me being anxious or feeling pressure,” and you pause. That pause is powerful. It gives you a choice. You can choose to shift your tone, ask a more thoughtful question, or simply remain silent instead of reacting emotionally.

Why this matters:

Reactivity might feel fast, but it creates problems you’ll have to clean up later. Awareness is what allows you to communicate clearly, lead calmly, and avoid unnecessary damage. The more awareness you build, the more you become a steady signal in a noisy world.

4. Blind Spots Undermine Results

You can’t change what you can’t see. And unfortunately, the things that most limit our leadership—such as interrupting, a dismissive tone, overcontrol, and avoidance—are often things we don’t realize we’re doing.

Blind spots are dangerous because we don’t know they’re there, but others do. People often discuss them in private or adjust their behavior around us to avoid triggering them — which means we miss out on honesty, growth, and stronger relationships.

Feedback, reflection, and genuine curiosity can reveal blind spots, enabling you to proactively address them, instead of waiting for them to negatively impact your credibility, team, or performance.

Why this matters:

Most people don’t lose trust because of big mistakes. They lose it slowly — through

patterns they didn't notice. Closing the gap between how you see yourself and how others experience you is a game-changer for personal growth and leadership success.

5. Your Emotional State Is Contagious

Even if you don't say anything, people feel your energy. If you walk into a room frustrated, distracted, or stressed, others will absorb that — especially your team. If you show up calm, focused, and clear, that energy also spreads. People take their cues from you.

This doesn't mean you have to be fake or suppress emotion. It means you learn to recognize and manage your own internal state — especially in moments when others are looking to you for reassurance or clarity.

For example, walking into a meeting with "I don't have time for this" energy will shape the room very differently than "Let's use this time well." Even a one-minute pause before entering a conversation — just to center yourself — can change everything.

Why this matters:

People remember how they felt around you more than what you said. To create focus, alignment, and trust, you must first manage your own mental state.

6. Self-Awareness is Not Overthinking — It's Noticing

Let's be clear: self-awareness is not about overanalyzing every moment or obsessing over every reaction. It's not about perfection or over-control. It's about *noticing*. Noticing your thoughts, your tension, and your habits—and asking, "Is this helpful right now?"

You don't need to fix everything. You just need to become conscious of what's happening inside you so you can respond with intention.

Think of it like a dashboard. You don't stare at your fuel gauge all day, but you glance at it to avoid running out of gas. Self-awareness works the same way—it's a tool for monitoring your internal system so you don't crash.

Why this matters:

Overthinking is exhausting and unproductive. But *noticing* — calmly and clearly — gives you power. It's the foundation of emotional intelligence, resilience, and wise leadership.

Reflection & Assessment Questions

Here are some questions to help apply this personally and professionally:

1. **What thoughts are dominating my mind lately — and are they helping or hurting?**
2. **Am I focusing more on what I *don't* want or on what I *do* want to create?**
3. **What am I like to work with? How would others describe my leadership?**
4. **What feedback have I been avoiding — or dismissing?**
5. **Am I responding to stress with reactivity or with clarity?**
6. **What strengths do I consistently use — and where might they become overused?**
7. **What habits of thought would I be better off releasing?**
8. **Where am I making assumptions about how others see me?**
9. **What would change if I started asking better questions?**
10. **What's one thought I can replace today to reduce stress and increase impact?**

Recommended Action Items: What You Can Start Doing

1. **Begin a daily or weekly leadership journal.**

Set aside 10–15 minutes to reflect on questions like:

- What energized me today?
- What challenged me?
- What did I learn about myself?
- What impact did I have on others?

2. **Replace “Why” with “What.”**

Next time you’re stuck in a loop — frustrated, confused, or reactive — catch yourself asking “Why” and switch to “What.”

- Instead of “Why do I always procrastinate?” try “What am I avoiding, and what’s my next step?”

3. Seek honest feedback regularly.

Choose 2–3 people you trust — peers, direct reports, or mentors — and ask for specific input:

- “What’s one thing I do that might limit my impact?”
- “What’s something you think I don’t see about myself?”

4. Use a thought audit.

At the end of a tough day or a challenging interaction, write down your thoughts and review them:

- Are they helpful or unhelpful?
- Are they based on fear, ego, or assumption?
- What thought would serve you better in this moment?

5. Pay attention to your energy and emotional tone.

Before walking into a meeting or starting a conversation, ask:

- “What energy am I bringing into this space?”
- “Is this how I want to show up?”

6. Track recurring triggers.

Notice patterns — moments when you feel defensive, shut down, judgmental, or overwhelmed. Track what situations or people tend to activate these responses, and ask yourself:

- “What belief or assumption is behind this?”
- “What new perspective could I try?”

Final Thoughts: Self-Awareness Is a Strategic Advantage

When we hear the term "self-awareness," it can sound soft or introspective — something nice to have, not something we need to have. But the truth is, self-awareness is a **strategic edge** in leadership, career growth, and personal fulfillment.

It makes you more effective because you’re not operating on autopilot. It makes you more resilient because you can catch and shift draining thoughts before they take you down. It makes you more human—and that makes you more relatable and trusted by others.

This isn't a one-time insight — it's a lifelong practice. But the more you do it, the more confident, calm, and focused you become.

Every meaningful change starts with awareness. From there, everything becomes possible.