

Authentic Leadership: Identifying our Blind Spots

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As a proponent of the need for leaders to identify their strengths and giftedness, I've advocated various inventories that seek to help identify one's abilities and gifts knowing this will often lead to the ability to better use, and perhaps mastery, of these strengths.

Recently I have been somewhat intrigued, however, by a compelling desire to identify my weaknesses. About ten years ago, a colleague Jeff Johnston and I wrote a workbook for our mission agency's use based on J. Robert Clinton's work that we entitled *Focusing our Lives*. In addition to helping missionaries identify areas of gifting, role, and methodology, mentors, etc., in one small section we had each participant write down and reflect on potential "blind spots" in their lives that God may want to work on.

Identifying one's own blind spots, in essence, is a conundrum. For by definition a blind spot is an area that one cannot see (thus how can I identify it?). But I have become increasingly convinced as I have moved into my mid-forties that perhaps my most important work as a Christian leader in this season of my life is to really begin grappling with my blind spots -- those major areas of character weakness and sin that I have not always been aware of which have inhibited God from doing more complete work in and through me.

Over the past ten years, I have worked through the *Focusing Our Lives* workbook three times with different missionary groups who have been our community at the time. I have continued to add to the lists of ministry insights; unique methodology, and major role. But what has intrigued me is that I have also added to the blind spot list -- each time with a new aha! Each major blind spot that I am finally able to see in myself also allows me to recognize why I have felt stymied at times in certain ministry and relationship endeavors, and to begin to see an emerging pattern in how I have responded to leadership challenges.

The four major areas of character weakness/blind spots that I have identified in my own life the past few years have allowed me to find the places where I need healing, grace, and God's transformation. It has felt very freeing upon identifying an area to be able to confess it, when appropriate, with fellow sojourners, and walk in the light of this reality. It is not always easy, but it is a relief, to be able to approach one's leadership from both one's strengths, and one's weaknesses.

How does one begin to identify the ever-illusive character blind spots? A good place I have found to start is with a tried and true friend -- someone who has known you for years and has your best interest at heart (your spouse may be the most helpful). They can help guide us in areas where we already have inklings.

Another more analytical tool I have found insightful in my quest to identify blind spots is called the Enneagram. This is based on an ancient personality-type system that helps one identify our "capital sin", or "false self." There are numerous online sites and free assessments; Richard Rohr's *The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective* is a helpful, fascinating read from a more evangelical perspective.

Perhaps we won't get to a place where we announce speakers or advertise leaders listing their capital sins; nor do we need to. But as Christian leaders who are called to "walk in humility," "confess your sins to one another," and "be perfect as I am perfect" -- getting a handle on our blind spots and allowing God to work in our areas of character weakness is an essential aspect of authentic Christian living.