Johari's Window

A Map of Knowing and Being Known

Each of us lives behind a window of four panes. Some are clear, some are frosted, and one looks into rooms nobody has entered yet. Psychologists Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham drew this map in 1955 and named it by blending their first names. It shows how much of who you are is known to you, and how much is known to the people around you. The panes slide as you go: every time you share something true, or take in what another person sees in you, the light in the room changes.

FREE AREA **Public Self** What others know and what I know about me	**BLIND AREA** What I don't know or don't understand about me, but others usually know about me
HIDDEN AREA **Private Self** What I know about me but haven't shared	**UNKNOWN AREA** The subconscious or unconscious

Why This Map Matters

You can only change what you can see. Most leaders know the language of known knowns, known unknowns and unknown unknowns; Johari adds the people around you, who often see what you can't. Working with this map:

- Cuts down on being blindsided; blind spots are where good people get tripped up.
- Builds trust, because people follow and love those who let themselves be known.
- Sharpens decisions, by inviting the perspectives that fill your gaps.
- Makes change stick, since the patterns we can name are the ones we can shift.

How the Window Opens

1. **Sharing.** When you let a trusted person in on something you have kept private, part of your Hidden Area becomes shared ground. Trust tends to deepen this way, one honest offering met by another.
2. **Receiving.** When you ask how you come across and take in the answer with curiosity, light reaches your Blind Area. Feedback lands best when it is offered with care and received without rushing to defend.
3. **Discovering together.** The Unknown Area opens slowly, through dreams, body sensations, creative work, ceremony and the surprises that come in deep relationship. Some of what waits there are gifts you have yet to meet.

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4. **Choosing your pace.** Openness is an invitation, never an obligation. Privacy is healthy, and trust is earned over time. Share what feels right with people who have shown they can hold it, and let the window open at a pace your system can welcome.

Parts in Every Pane

Seen through Internal Family Systems, parts of you live in every pane. Protective parts often stand guard over the Hidden Area, deciding what is safe to show. Some parts are easy for loved ones to spot while staying out of your own view. Younger parts carrying old pain may wait in the Unknown Area until they sense it is safe to be found. Met with curiosity and kindness, they tend to let in more light on their own.

Questions for Reflection

- What do I keep behind the frosted glass, and what is that part protecting?
- Who in my life has earned a clearer view of me?
- What have I heard from more than one person about how I come across?
- What might be waiting in me that I have yet to discover?
- Who around me might be softening what they tell me, and how could I make it safer for them to be candid?

Leading Change From an Open Window

Every real change asks the window to open somewhere, and leaders face a particular challenge: the higher you rise, the more the people around you filter what they tell you. Organizational psychologist Dr. Tasha Eurich found that most people believe they are self-aware, yet only 10 to 15 percent of those she studied met the criteria. More experienced and powerful leaders were more likely to overrate their own effectiveness. Your Blind Area can grow right along with your title.

- Gather a few loving critics, people who have your best interests at heart and will tell you the truth. Check surprising feedback with more than one of them before you act on it.
- Ask “what” rather than “why.” “What pulls me off course?” keeps you curious and ready to act, while “Why am I like this?” tends to spiral.
- Go first. When a leader names an uncertainty or a mistake, others feel safer doing the same, and teams that feel safe to speak up learn and adapt faster.
- Listen for what hesitation protects. Pushback to change, in you or your team, often comes from parts guarding something in the Hidden Area. Met with curiosity, they tend to soften.
- The same holds for therapists and healers. Consultation and supervision keep light on our own Blind Area, so the people we serve aren’t carrying what we can’t see.
- Increasing public self is the goal, to not live in shadow. That requires disclosure, and disclosure begins with a good person, which results in empathic feedback.

Calling on Support

Being seen takes courage, and courage grows with company. Leaders who make room for awe tend to see more clearly: Dr. Dacher Keltner’s research finds that awe shrinks self-focus and makes people more humble and generous, and time in nature restores the attention that back-to-back decisions wear down. Before a hard conversation, walk a

block under open sky and let your shoulders drop. Watch morning fog lift off a valley, revealing the hidden in its own time. Find a spider web strung with dew, every thread you missed a moment ago now shining. Let the Unknown feel less like a line on a risk register and more like the Great Mystery, holding possibilities you have yet to meet. Ask an ancestor with kind eyes, a fox at the edge of the field, the mentor who first believed in you, or your future self, the leader you are becoming, what they see in you.

A Final Word

Each time you let yourself be known a little more, someone gets to meet the real you, and so do you.

Free Resources

- *A plain-language overview of the Johari Window and its history: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johari_window*
- *Tasha Eurich, "What Self-Awareness Really Is (and How to Cultivate It)," Harvard Business Review, free to read here: carleton.ca/leader/knowledge-hub/wp-content/uploads/Eurich_What-Self-Awareness-Really-Is-and-How-to-Cultivate-it.pdf*
- *Related handouts: Effective Communication Guidelines and Thomas Gordon's 12 Roadblocks to Listening.*

Influences and Credits

- *The Johari Window was created by psychologists Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham in 1955. The descriptions here are written fresh.*
- *Parts in every pane draws on Internal Family Systems, developed by Dr. Richard Schwartz.*
- *Gathering loving critics, asking "what" instead of "why," and the research on leaders' self-awareness come from Dr. Tasha Eurich. Speaking up and learning in teams draws on Dr. Amy Edmondson's research on psychological safety. Awe and its effects draw on the research of Dr. Dacher Keltner.*
- *Calling on the support of the living world and the unseen comes from Neoshamanic IFS (NIFS), the approach I practice and teach.*

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