

## **The New Johari Window:**

### **#11. Quadrant I: Openness to the World**

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Quad One is a very clear pane in the Johari Window. It's easy to look through this pane and see what's inside the window of another person. However, that doesn't mean that one is automatically allowed into this person's psychic home. Furthermore, while the Quad One window pane may be clear, the entire window certainly is not open, nor is the psychic door necessarily open. Some people are not welcomed in, even though Quad One is crystal clear and large. This is an important theme that I will address throughout this series of essay on the New Johari Window – the appearance of openness and the illusion of an open window or open door that seemingly allow other people to enter – though it is, in fact, quite closed.

The picture gets even more complicated as we introduce the notion of a double paned window. The clarity and size of the inner pane may be under our control; however, the outer pane, over which we don't have much control, provides considerable intrigue with regard to what other people know about us and how much we feel that this knowledge is truly in our hands – another theme that will frequently reappear throughout this series of essays.

#### **Working Fictions**

Joe Luft often used the term *working fiction* when describing the dynamics and purposes of the first quadrant. Luft proposes that most of us live with a specific working fiction: we are an “open book” for other people to see. We can be trusted because we say what is on our mind and let people know what we think of them. Most of us not only embrace this fiction about ourselves, but also assume that other people with whom we interact can be trusted. They tell us what they are thinking and let us know what they think of us. This is a fundamental assumption that underlies all daily interactions with other people. There must be a modicum of trust between two people if they are to interact, and this trust is invested primarily in the

first quadrant that each person presents to one another.

I will explore Luft's working fictions in several different ways throughout these essays. First, I will examine the "fiction" that each of us is transparent to other people. This is a fiction that enables us to believe that Quad Three (Luft's Hidden Self) is actually Quad One. We don't realize (or want to realize) that we are hiding things from other people. A second fiction concerns the belief that other people don't want to know more about us. We believe that we are giving other people what they want, when, in fact, we are hiding (Quad Three-I) important information about ourselves. We don't realize (or want to realize) how guarded we really are. There is a third fiction that concerns Quad Two (Luft's Blind Self). These are window panes that are open to other people – and we're not aware of them and don't have direct access to the information about us that is contained in this quadrant. We are transparent in ways of which we are not aware. At the heart of the matter is a fundamental, over-arching fiction that somehow we control what we reveal to other people.

These three working fictions suggest that the nature and dynamics of internal and external locus is most easily understood in this first quadrant. There are typically few "hidden agenda" or mixed motives associated with this quadrant. We simply choose to present ourselves in certain ways (Quad 1-I: presentational self/persona). However, at the same time we can't help but "leak" other parts of ourselves. When we are able to minimize the "leakage," we have more control over our image; however, we may seem "stiff," formal or unnatural. We "hold our cards too close to our vest." Conversely, when the inadvertent self tends to dominate, we are likely to seem out-of-control, but also spontaneous. Other people can "read us like a book."

### **Internal and External Focus of Control**

While Quad One may not initially seem to be as complex or multi-tiered as the Second, Third or Fourth Quad, even in Quadrant One there is great complexity, especially when the dimension of internal and external locus of control is introduced. We are fully in control of our public self to a certain extent; however, the circumstances in which we find ourselves dictate at

least part of our public self. In certain high-context and enmeshed cultures, most of the public self is dictated by other people and, in particular, by traditions, social status, gender and related role-defining characteristics. In other cultures – such as we find in the United States, Canada and many Northern European cultures – there is considerable control of the public self being exerted by each member of society (or at least every adult member who is not a consistent victim of stereotyping or prejudicial assumptions).

Whether externally or internally dictated, the public self is in certain important respects a mask or persona – another working fiction that is dictated mostly by the situation in which we find ourselves. What is the script? What role do I play? What am I to believe about the self you are bringing to this relationship and what are you to believe about the self I bring to the relationship? I will probably assume that you operate similarly around other people (attribution error).

Even if I think you operate differently with other people, I don't need to know about these differences. I only need to know how you are likely to interact with me. The working fiction is established through and reinforced by many simple rituals, as well as by clothing and physical distance.<sup>i</sup> When two people know each other well, the public self is readily established and, in essence, becomes habitual. Erving Goffman describes this as “the presentation of self in everyday life.”<sup>ii</sup>

We operate with this working fiction in our public self so that we might agree about what specific behavioral patterns mean and how we should expect other people to react to our own behavior (verbal and nonverbal). The Continental school suggests that it is in the midst of these working fictions that our socially constructed versions of reality are formed and reinforced. Thus, interpersonal relationships are critical not only to the establishment of a clear sense of self and other, but also to the way in which we define the fundamentals of “reality.” It is the third form of trust – shared perspectives – that is most clearly dependent on the working fictions that two or more people establish when they meet together.

## Settings and Openness

The behavior that is engaged in working fiction is dictated primarily by the setting. Personality, according to many traditional behaviorists, involves intrinsic, stimulus-independent variables – personality is something that remains constant and intact (despite changes in time, place and environmental conditions). From this strictly behavioral perspective, personality variables have minimal predictive value. In statistical terms, distinctive “personality” traits are nothing more than “error” variance (the “slop” in the system) While, according to attribution theory, we typically believe that we are acting as we do because of our own free will and in line with our personal intentions, many behavioral researchers point out (to our collective dismay) that our public self tends to be strongly influenced by the setting in which we find ourselves – and our working fictions are primarily dictated by these settings.

However, we are not totally the victim of circumstances and settings. Working fictions can provide us with short moments of sanctuary – when and where (in a trusting relationship) we can try out new behaviors and test out new concepts (that lie outside the realm of dominant social constructions in our setting or society). These short-term sanctuaries and small challenges keep the day interesting. They represent short-term examples of what Csikszentmihalyi calls the “flow” experience.<sup>iii</sup> Humor, a bit of over-dramatization (e.g. a gracious bow or salute), or a slight variant in the usual ritual (a woman opening the door for the man, a child pretending to be an adult by speaking in a deep, stern voice) help to keep us alive and interested in the people with whom we interact.

There is a further point to be made. Many of these small, incremental changes can eventually lead to changes in the formal rituals and eventually to changes in our social constructions of reality. We see many instances in our daily life of these gradual (but profound) shifts in presentational self-rituals. A handshake is no longer a test to see if the other person holds a weapon in his hand. It is now a sign of friendship or the start of a relationship. Our opening

statement (“How are you?”) no longer really concerns physical health (very important in earlier times when infections readily spread), it now simply means “I am ready to interact with you.” An interpersonal haystack (big change) results from the accumulation of many pieces of interpersonal straw (many small changes).

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<sup>i</sup>Robert Sommer devotes considerable attention to the dimension of physical distance between people in his book, *Personal Space* [Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969].

<sup>ii</sup>Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Press, 1959.

<sup>iii</sup>Csikszentmihalyi, M. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: HarperCollins, 1990.