

The New Johari Window:

#10 An Appreciative Perspective on Human Interaction

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Setting aside (for a moment) hope for a selective self, we return to the fundamental question: how do we address the deep and abiding challenges associated with a postmodern self that is threatened by saturation and minimization, and that can easily be overwhelmed by a world of complexity, unpredictability and turbulence? How does one relate authentically with other people who face similar challenges to self? I propose that the answer, at least in part, resides in the act of *appreciation*. This action involves an appreciation of self, an appreciation of the other person, and an appreciation of the remarkable relationship that has been established.

Martin Buber described this sense of intimate appreciation many years ago when he declared that our relationship with an object (“It”) is different from our relationship with someone (or perhaps something) that we truly appreciate (“Thou”). According to Buber, we all spend a great deal of time in our life interacting with objects and do so in a superficial manner:ⁱ

Man travels over the surface of things and experiences them. He extracts knowledge about their constitution from them: he wins an experience from them. He experiences what belongs to the things.

In our appreciation relationship with another person, however, we do not just glide over the surface:

When *Thou* is spoken, the speaker has no thing for his object. For where there is a thing there is another thing. Every *It* is bounded by others; *It* exists only through being bounded by others. But when *Thou* is spoken, there is no thing. *Thou* has no bounds.

Directly *apropos* to the writings of Joseph Luft about the mystery of interpersonal relationships, Martin Buber suggests that “all real life is meeting. The relation to the *Thou* is direct. No

system of ideas, no foreknowledge, and no fancy intervene between *I* and *Thou*." In such a relationship – appreciative and direct – trust is created. All three kinds of trust are created. Trust, in turn, as I have already noted, is the driving force behind the dynamics of the New Johari Window. Appreciation creates trust, and trust enables appropriate and constructive disclosure and feedback to occur. In this setting, both the opaque (Q2) and protected (Q3) self retreat, while an authentic public self (Q1) emerges and the potentials of the unknown (Q4) self can be released.

I am offering a very powerful, though overly generalized, formula for effective human interaction. I propose that an *appreciative perspective* should under-gird any attempt to understand and hopefully improve interpersonal relationships. I believe that this appreciative approach holds the key to effective relationships; thus, the New Johari Window is devoted to the description of this approach and to the identification of strategies needed to engage in appreciative relationships. What is the nature of such a perspective? In essence, *an appreciative perspective concerns a willingness to engage in dialogue with another person from an assumption of mutual respect and mutual search for discovery of distinctive competencies and strengths*. This simple statement might at first seem to be rather naive and idealistic. As we trace out its implications, however, a series of profound insights and realistic strategies emerge.

Understanding Another Person

The term appreciation itself has several different meanings that tend to build on one another. Fundamentally, however, appreciation refers to a clearer understanding of another person's perspective: we come to appreciate the point of view being offered by another person or the situation in which this person finds herself. This appreciation, in turn, comes not from some detached observation, but rather from direct engagement. One gains knowledge from an appreciative perspective by "identifying with the observed."

Compassion rather than objectivity is critical. One cares about that being studied and about those people one is assisting. Neutrality is inappropriate in such a setting, though compassion

implies neither a loss of discipline nor a loss of boundaries between one's own problems and perspectives and those of the other person. Appreciation, in other words, is about fuller understanding, not merger, with another person's problems or identity.

Valuing Another Person

Appreciation also refers to an increase in worth or value. A painting or stock portfolio appreciates in value. Van Gogh looked at a vase of sunflowers and in appreciating (painting) these flowers, he increased their value for everyone. Van Gogh similarly appreciated and brought new value to his friends through his friendship: "Van Gogh did not merely articulate admiration for his friend: He created new values and new ways of seeing the world through the very act of valuing."ⁱⁱ

Peter Vaill recounts a scene from the movie *Lawrence of Arabia* in which Lawrence tells a British Colonel that his job at the Arab camp was to "appreciate the situation." By "appreciating the situation," Lawrence assessed and helped add credibility to the Arab cause, much as a knowledgeable jeweler or art appraiser can increase the value of a diamond or painting through nothing more than thoughtful appraisal. Lawrence's appreciation of the Arab situation, in turn, helped to produce a new level of courage and ambition on the part of the Arab communities with which Lawrence was associated. At the interpersonal level, this valuing of another person often requires *selective engagement*. We understand and value particular people and choose to spend time, disclose important information about ourselves, and readily receive feedback from these few people. As I suggested in a previous essay, with regard to the selective self, this type of engagement may be particularly important in the harried, turbulent, saturating world of 21st Century postmodernism.

Recognizing the Contributions of Another Person

From yet another perspective, the process of appreciation concerns our recognition of the contributions that have been made by another person: "I appreciate the efforts you have made in getting this project started." "I appreciate your willingness to take a risk in telling me what

you really think about this proposal.” Sometimes this sense of appreciation is reflected in the special recognition we give people for a particularly successful project or in the bouquet of flowers we leave with our secretary on National Secretary’s Day. This form of appreciation, however, typically leads only to praise addiction and the tendency to keep people who report to us permanently in an indispensable and, therefore (ironically) one-down position.ⁱⁱⁱ

Appreciation can be exhibited in a more constructive manner through the daily interaction between an executive and his associates. It involves mutual respect and interaction. More specifically, appreciation is evident in attitudes regarding the nature and purpose of work. If the executive “sees work as the means whereby a person creates oneself (that is, one’s identity and personality) and creates community (that is, social relations), then the accountability structure becomes one of nurturing and mentoring.”^{iv}

These are the three most common uses of the term *appreciation*. We appreciate other people through attempting to understand them, through valuing them and through being thoughtful and considerate in acknowledging their contributions to the organization. The term appreciation is now being used in two additional ways that are distinctive, yet closely related to the first three.

Establishing a Positive Image of the Future

First, appreciation refers to the establishment of a positive image of the future within a relationship or organization. We grow to appreciate a relationship by investing it with optimism. We invest it with a sense of hope about its own future and the valuable role potentially it plays in our lives, our community or even our society. “Affirmation of the positive future is the single most important act that a system can engage in if its real aim is to bring to fruition a new and better future.”^v We are effective in relationships, therefore, if we are “not only concerned with what is but also with what might be” in the relationship and in the role that this relationship might play elsewhere in our world.

We come to appreciate our own role and that of other people with regard to the contributions we make jointly in helping our world realize important images, purposes and values. An appreciative relationship is always *leaning into the future*. While we appreciate that which has been successful in the past, we don't dwell with nostalgia on the past, but instead continually trace out the implications of acquired wisdom and past successes regarding our shared vision of the future.

Recognizing Distinctive Strengths and Competencies

Appreciation in a relationship also refers to recognition of the distinct strengths and potentials of those who are engaged in the relationship – including ourselves. An appreciative relationship is forged when an emphasis is placed on the realization of inherent potential and the uncovering of latent strengths rather than on the identification of weaknesses or deficits. People “do not need to be fixed. They need constant reaffirmation.”^{vi}

Even in a context of competition, appreciation transforms envy into learning and personal achievement into a sense of overall purpose and value. The remarkable essayist, Roger Rosenblatt, reveals just such a process in candidly describing his sense of competition with other writers. He suggests that the sense of admiration for the work of other writers plays a critical role in his own life:^{vii}

Part of the satisfaction in becoming an admirer of the competition is that it allows you to wonder how someone else did something well, so that you might imitate it – steal it, to be blunt. But the best part is that it shows you that there are things you will never learn to do, skills and tricks that are out of your range, an entire imagination that is out of your range. The news may be disappointing on a personal level, but in terms of the cosmos, it is strangely gratifying. One sits among the works of one's contemporaries as in a planetarium, head all the way back, eyes gazing up at heavenly matter that is all the more beautiful for being unreachable. Am I growing up?

Paradoxically, at the point when someone is fully appreciated and reaffirmed they tend to live up to their newly acclaimed talents and drive—just as they will live-down to their depreciated sense of self if constantly criticized and undervalued. Carl Rogers suggested many years ago that people are least likely to change if they are being asked to change and are most likely to change when they have received positive regard--what I would identify as appreciation.

There are essentially two ways in which we come to appreciate our own distinctive strengths: through self-perception and through the perceptions of other people. As you may have already noted, these are also the primary ingredients of the Johari Window. Our self-perceptions of strength are based on the processes of reflection upon our own impact on the world in which we live and work, and comparisons we draw with other people who are also having an impact on this world. The perceptions of other people are made known to us through direct or indirect feedback. In some cases we know of our strengths. In other cases we do not. Similarly, in some cases other people know of our distinctive strengths. In other cases they do not.

Given this scheme, there are four possibilities, which we can diagram as a four pane Window of Strength (a variant on the Johari Window). First, some of our strengths can be known to ourselves and by other people. These are *public strengths*. Second, we might personally be aware of other strengths that we possess; however, other people might not be aware of these strengths. These are our *protected strengths*. We may be aware of them, but they are rarely of much value to us, given that others never see them being used. The third possibility is one in which we are not fully aware of a distinctive strength we possess, whereas other people are aware. These are *opaque strengths*. These strengths are also of little value to us until we have become fully acquainted with them. Finally, there are strengths we possess that have never been acknowledged by anyone—including ourselves. These are *potential strengths*. They represent the edge of growth and development.

The Window of Strength

	Known to Other People	Unknown to Other People
Known to Myself	Public Strengths	Protected Strengths
Unknown to Myself	Opaque Strengths	Potential Strengths

The process of active appreciation expands the size of the public window by providing an opportunity through feedback for each of us to learn more about our observed strengths. It also provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the nature of our strengths. The protected window becomes smaller in an appreciative relationship. We begin to feel more comfortable in sharing personal insights about distinctive strengths. We have less need to protect, because there is more trust in the relationship. The opaque window also shrinks with appreciation. Our friends and co-workers have access to clearer information regarding our distinctive strengths and feel comfortable in providing us with this information.

Finally, with both the protected and opaque windows shrinking in size, the potential window grows smaller and potential strengths are recognized for the first time by ourselves and the people with whom we interact. Appreciative processes include group dynamics workshops, life and career planning programs, and executive coaching. These processes relate directly to the parallel process of public expansion and provide resources and processes for a postmodernist to reflect on her own strengths and receive feedback from other people regarding the strengths they appreciate in the postmodernist's daily performance.

Looking Ahead

With these challenges of the postmodern condition brought to the fore, we are ready to explore in more detail the dynamics associated with each of the four quadrants of the Johari Window. I will begin this exploration by turning first in the next few essays to Quadrant One – the one that we present openly (and bravely) to the complex, unpredictable and turbulent world of the 21st Century.

ⁱ Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. New York: Scribner, 1958, p. 5.

ⁱⁱ Srivastva, S., Cooperrider, D., & Associates, *Appreciative management and leadership*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 1990, pp. xxx.

ⁱⁱⁱ Kanter, Rosabeth. *Men and Women of the Corporation*. New York: Basic Books, 1977.

^{iv} Cummings, L. L. and Anton, Ronald, J. “The Logical and Appreciative Dimensions of Accountability in Srivastva, S., Cooperrider, D., & Associates, *Appreciative management and leadership*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 1990, p. 259.

^v Cooperrider, David L. “Positive Images, Positive Action: The Affirmative Basis of Organizing,” in Srivastva, S., Cooperrider, D., & Associates, *Appreciative management and leadership*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 1990, p. 119.

^{vi} Cooperrider, David L. “Positive Images, Positive Action: The Affirmative Basis of Organizing,” in Srivastva, S., Cooperrider, D., & Associates, *Appreciative management and leadership*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 1990, p. 120.

^{vii} Rosenblatt, Robert, “The Admiration of Others,” *Modern Maturity*, January/February 1997, pp. 22-23.