The New Johari Window

#14. Quadrant One: The New World of Interpersonal Relationships

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We are living in a postmodern world in which to survive we must be many people in many settings. It's not just that we are saturated with many images of self, as Kenneth Gergen suggests. We also act out many different roles and engage many different styles in a society that is: (1) heterogeneous (complex), (2) dynamic (turbulent) and (3) multi-tiered (complex and unpredictable). As in guiding a kayak down a white water stream, we are always (in our interpersonal relationships) shifting directions, rebalancing ourselves, and looking simultaneously at the challenges, barriers and opportunities that surround us and those that we anticipate "down-stream" (in the immediate future). We are not just situational leaders. We are also situational followers, situational friends, situational parents, situational (casual) acquaintances—and even situational lovers (one-night stands).

The Shifting Sense of Self

All of this means that we are likely to be seen in different ways by different people in different settings and even by the same people in different settings and at different times. This, in turn, means that the feedback we receive is likely to be contradictory or at least confusing on occasion. Given that we already have an opaque sense of what to anticipate in terms of how specific people see us, we are particularly attuned to certain types of feedback from these specific people and at certain times and places—but are truly blind to (and can not anticipate) feedback from other people, in other places and at other times.

In many ways, our sense of self hasn't changed much since Joe Luft first wrote about the Johari Window. After all, a foundational concept, such as "self," is forged in a specific society over

many centuries. It doesn't change overnight, nor is it strongly influenced by the ephemeral tides of new technology, life style changes or economic/political relocation. The extent to which we share this sense of "self" with other people, however, is subject to rather dramatic change, as are the ways in which we do this sharing. The New Johari Window has been drafted, in part, to take into account these shifts and to address the even deeper issue regarding how we come to our own personal understanding of self in the midst of a postmodern revolution.

In a postmodern world of complexity, unpredictability and turbulence, it is hard to establish a consistent public self. We are different people in different settings—this is the essence of the saturated, contextual self that I described earlier in this book. Furthermore, as Robert Bellah and his colleagues have suggests, we tend to retreat to specific "life-style enclaves" that enable us to display a more consistent self.[i] If these enclaves continue to play an important role in our society, then there are at least three important implications with regard to the first Quadrant: (1) Our Q1 is defined within a specific community, (2) Q1 is defined as different from the Q1 of other people (Erik Eriksen's "negative identity"). I am defined by my difference ("I am old." "I am Black." "I am a Goth."), rather than by my sameness. (3) When I leave my enclave to go to work or to meet with other family members, I feel "alienated" and inauthentic (my persona is more visible).

Time and Technology

In our postmodern world there seems to be less time for Quad One—or for any of the quadrants, for that matter (as I noted in Chapter Two). When we say there is less time for Quadrant One, there are actually four dimensions to consider and each of these dimensions relates directly to recent technological innovations. First, there is less time for other people and for displaying various aspects of our richly textured (perhaps saturated) self to different constituencies. We may have time for our immediate family and for the people with whom we work, but we typically don't have time for our neighbors or for people we meet casually on the street. While technology is supposed to save us time, it actually consumes time. We spend

three hours a day answering our e-mails and voice mails. We find little time for the face-to-face meetings with people that formerly occupied much of our workday. We no longer leave our work life behind us when we leave the office, but now bring it home with us via email and the Internet. If we have time for our family, it is often carved out of time devoted to our closest colleague—the desktop or laptop computer.

If we do affiliate with the people who live around us it is primarily because they share the same values and perspectives as we do—we live with these neighbors in the postmodern life style enclaves I described above. We are escaping from the multiple selves that occupy our Quad One and from the overwhelming challenges of a postmodern world. We settle into an enclave and align our personal identity with this focused enclave. Our identification with a specific enclave is further enhanced by the Internet revolution. We find our enclave on the Internet and may even create a virtual enclave that exists only in Internet space.

There is a second way in which we no longer have time for Quadrant One. We don't have time to reflect on who we are and what we want to be in our public self. We react to events (external locus of control) and fail to make deliberate choices about what we think of this event and about our relationship with other people who are also associated with this event (internal locus of control). The technologies of our times—especially the technological innovations in contemporary media—have encouraged this perspective and made it a pervasive zeitgeist —a shared perspective and set of assumptions regarding the absence of time and absence of choice about the use of time.

As a result of cable television, Internet searches and talk radio, we live in a world of instance news, condensed analyses, polemical journalism and sound bites. We learn in small units and spend little time reflecting on what we have learned and what biases come along with the bits of information we have acquired. We "know" that we are too busy and believe there is no alternative to being busy. We "know" that we are only getting a small part of the story, when we rely on single source newscasts and newspaper headlines, yet don't believe we can do

anything about this—given that we have "no time for careful review." Our first quadrant thus becomes a product primarily of external forces and becomes a cluster of multiphrenic sound bites.

The third way in which we experience "no time" concerns the complexity of contemporary relationships. Relationships are often not safe. We live in a litigious society. It is not safe to disclose or give feedback. We shouldn't touch another person who is not a close friend or family members. Even male therapists often do not risk doing therapy with female patients unless they can leave the therapy door open. One of my male colleagues will only do therapy with women when his wife is present in the office.

Similarly, teachers can't touch children in their classes, even if the touch is intended to encourage or comfort the child. Dating in organizations is dangerous, given that there may be a charge of sexual harassment. What do we say to other people about ourselves or about our feelings regarding them? We simply don't have time to figure out how to relate to many other people—hence we remain guarded and reduce the size of our Quad One. We distance ourselves from other people and find it safer to communicate by e-mail rather than in person. High tech has made it easier to hide behind the digital screen—high tech leads to no touch, with the assistance of our litigious society.

Finally, there is simply less time for everything. We must constantly be selective and must choose among several different prized activities. Time becomes a scarce commodity—and technological solutions are offered to maximize the use of this scarce commodity. Perhaps we have created the fiction of temporal scarcity precisely to sell the time saving technologies. We are taught how to "manage time" and purchase expensive "time-saving" machines (fast computers, robotic vacuum cleaners, trash compacters). We even expect technologies (such as palm pilots) to help us "find more time."

If time is a scarce commodity, then there will never be enough time for our selves. Roger

Rosenblatt noted prophetically in a *Time* magazine essay more than a decade ago that: "the appointment we are most likely to break is the appointment we have made with ourselves."[ii] Thus, Quad One shrinks in size. Furthermore, there is no time for feedback and no time for disclosure. Hence the Quad Two and Quad Three material is less likely to move into Quad One. We have lost the Sunday afternoon visits to neighbors and have lost the gift of pleasant and entertaining conversations. We have become passive recipients of these conversations (via talk radio) and are now voyeurs of other people's activities (via "reality" television).

Perhaps most importantly, as I mentioned in Chapter Two, there is no time for the unknown – for accessing the mysteries of Quad Four. Thus, Quad One loses yet another source of new information and perspective about self. This lack of time for Quad Four might even reside at the heart of "extreme sports." Maybe this is the way in which we rapidly access certain aspects of Quad Four (such as fear) without taking up "a lot of time." However, it is one thing to be confronted with new experiences (such as in extreme sports and "ropes programs"). It is another thing to reflect on these experiences and learn something about our self from this experience.

"Ropes programs" are often all about the experience (being conducted by sports-inclined personnel) and not about what this experience conveys to our selves about our selves. If the experience is designed to help us face our selves, it is often exclusively about confronting our fears. At its best, a ropes program is about how collaboration with other people can help us face these fears. This is fine. But what about other aspects of our unknown self: our creative self, our intuitive self, our undeveloped interpersonal self, our shadow? Other workshop designs help with this, ranging from continuing education programs in the expressive arts to intensive journaling workshops (often in the Jungian mode).[iii] But is this enough and do many people set aside precious time for these Quad Four-oriented activities?

[i] Bellah, Robert and Others. *Habits of the Heart*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985
[ii] Rosenblatt, Roger "Where is Our Dover Beach?" *Time,* 1985, January 14, pp. 80-81.
[iii] For example, the journal workshops of Ira Progoff, *At a Journal Workshop*. New York: Tarcher, 1992.